

Annexure-i

Conclusion



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My initial objective was to focus on woman artists of Andhra Pradesh and their art practice following the formation of this state after Independence. Modern art historiography has been partial to male artists and their contribution. It has also concentrated more on the national modern that emerged around metropolitan cities like Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta. This led me to understand gender as an entity that imbricates with other coordinates of power relationships like that of region, religion, class and caste. It was through the dynamics of the regional modern that one could dismantle a unitary understanding of modernism in India.

Art historical discourse inclined toward varied regional developments of modernism can be witnessed in recent times in India.¹ However, these writings do not bring out the regional with relation to issues of gender. I believe that unless we address the gender component in our reading of the politics of canonization of modernism in India, its centers and peripheries would only shift in relation to one another but would not be adequately interrogated.

The term regional not only relates to the 'periphery' in the binary opposition (center-periphery), but also links with women artists as a subaltern or marginalized group. Hence, my regional focus may be considered as a liberating concept and should not be taken for a territorial chauvinism. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to provide a case study or a model of the regional modern.

Regional aesthetics along the lines of modernism was formulated when artists negotiated an identity quest in the state of Andhra Pradesh. However, a distinct regional flavour can also be discerned in the articulation of the nationalist concerns in the art of

1. See, Dr. Shivaji K. Panikkar, "Reading the Regional Through Internationalism and Nativism: a case of Madras (1950's to 70's)", in Shivaji K. Panikkar, Deeptha Achar and Parul Dave Mukherji, eds., *Towards New Art History, Studies in Indian Art*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2003, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, ed., *Contemporary Art in Baroda*, Tulika publication, New Delhi, 1997, Ashrafi. S. Bhagat (Unpublished) *A Critical Study of Modernity in the Art of South India, with Special Reference to the Madras Art School, 1960s and 70s*, doctoral thesis submitted to M.S. University, Baroda, 2004.

early 20th century Andhra artists. Therefore, even as the regional modern created its own space during nationalism, its identity was subsumed within the nation. Where as, after Independence, the regional modern assumes a dialectical relationship with the national modern and at times also challenges its hegemony.² However, understanding of regional modern does not preclude its affiliation to internationalism. Nevertheless, the compulsions to draw from and adopt internationalist styles can be region specific.

Following the negotiations with nationalism and internationalism, what emerged triumphant was indigenism through which artists attempted to explore their own traditional past.

In this background the definition of identity that is regional can be understood as the native consciousness among the artists, which prompted them to hinge on indigenous sources of inspiration in their art practice. In this regard, we can discern an emergence of a different mode of aesthetics that has resonance with the regional experiences of reality in terms of social, political and economic conditions etc. I have made an attempt to unravel two distinct strands of what I consider as the regional aesthetics.

The first mode allies with the mainstream definition of aesthetics, which is underpinned by patriarchal assumptions about beauty centering on a particular use of the female body. More than alluding to the national modern, this variety once again interpolates the colonizers' mode of representing the exotic native, which makes it retrograde and problematic from a feminist perspective.

The second mode that I term as the critical regional aesthetics, offers a different take on representation of the feminine body and makes a room for the autobiographical to enter into the works. The female form, a familiar trope acquires a new materiality and corporeality in which ornamentation of the first mode is resisted as inimical to the project of articulating subjectivity of the artist. Although these two modes do not map onto any pre-given biological difference between male and women artists, but by and large the male artists privilege the former, while women artists espouse the latter.

2. An agitation for a separate state of Andhra Pradesh in postcolonial times is a testimony to this fact.

Even if this explication may be read as essentialist from a post-structuralist perspective that underplays sexual difference between men and women, I find that sexual difference cannot be undermined and in my study of regional aesthetics, it in fact offers itself as a better explanatory model.

The critical regional, predominantly a potential domain occupied by women artists, has to be understood in relation to the center or mainstream aesthetics. Since this critical mode gets envisaged as related with marginality, it is not surprising that my primary focus falls on women artists. However, as marginality itself is a relational terrain, wherein gender is not seen in isolation to other coordinates of power, such as, class, caste and religion.

One of the central thematic underpinning the selection of the artists and interpretation of their works is how the personal and the political constitute one another. Despite the emphasis on autobiography in the range of subject matter in women artists' works, I have placed it within the inter-space between the public and the private.

The subject choice of writing on women artists has also emerged due to such an interface. This area can be mapped via my personal dimension that corresponds with the home, family, regional and gender identity etc. and my engagement with feminist political discourse, which began in the late 1990s.³ For it was this time when I came across western feminist researches that provided valuable discussions on women artists' relationship to art history and modernism.⁴ Understanding of this relation was vital for me to explore such dynamics in the context of modern Indian art and to take up a similar project at a local level as well.

However, the ways in which modernism affects women artists in India can be comprehended when we read it in the light of the spaces occupied by women in public and private spheres in a Third world country like ours. Therefore, feminist scholarship that may be relevant to the western context may not be applied to Indian context. Also western feminist view point on Indian or Third world situations is found unsuitable, inadequate and/or prone to essentialization. Hence, one cannot write 'for' another. It is in

3. During my studies in the dept. of art history and aesthetics, Baroda during late 1990s.

4. See, Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, Whitney Chadwick, *Women Art and Society*

this context that the concept of 'self-representation' emerged within Indian feminist discourse.⁵ In this regard, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan provides an extensive research in her work *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Colonialism and Post colonialism*, wherein she helps us know through the politics of representation and its implication on way the public and the private domains are distinguished in India so as to grasp the gender dynamics within our nation.

However, the most suitable slogan that explains the inter-space of the private and the public is of the 'personal as political'. This slogan, which was coined during women's movement, is relevant to feminist discourse in more ways than one. But, most importantly it can be affirmed when we understand how to make these demands for the right to have control over our lives within the context of struggle for control over the direction of society at large.⁶ In my endeavour to write on women artists via regional histories and modernisms I have tried to work out the equation (personal as political) for a similar effect. My education in painting and art history, followed by my work experience as a faculty in art history, at various art institutions, have helped me engage, more seriously, with this topic. However, the actual drive that paved way for a zealous effort came due to situations faced in the art institutions while teaching, wherein the curriculum and teaching methods only emphasized a male centric attitude and reinforced the stereotypical notions of 'art' and 'artist'.⁷ In this backdrop, I believe that on a personal level, in the process of writing on women artists, I have initiated a quest for my own identity.

To explain this point further, I cite an example, which is, poet Viswapriya Iyengar's response to Sheba Chachi's photographs.⁸ She, identifying closely with the artist's vision, wrote thus:

"It is a quest for identities for me as much as it is for the photographer".⁹

5. See, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes", *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Eds, Mohanty, Russo, Torres. Bloomington and Indianapolis: IndianaUP, 1991; Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*.

6. Griselda Pollock and Rosika Parker, *Framing Feminism: Art and Women's Movement, 1970-1985*, Pandora Press, London, 1987, p.46

7. The syllabi usually were typically modernist and masculinist reinforcing the greatness of the art of 'great masters' etc .

8. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London and NewYork, 1993, p 141-42

9. Ibid

The association of, and the alliance between, the subject, artist and critic that is put forward by such writings are pertinent to feminist discourse.

Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan states its importance in this way:

“The kind of alliance between subject, author and critic that is generated by these texts is, as I see it, a constitutive aspect of their relevance to the contemporary project of women’s self-representation”.¹⁰

It is through the process of the making of self-hood that a self- cognition takes shape, identity is established, and a politics is set to begin.¹¹ Therefore, in this research on “Figuring Regional Aesthetics: Women Artists via Regional Histories and Modernisms- 1950s-90s”, a nexus between the works of art, women artists and me (critic), I believe, has contributed to the discourse on ‘self-representation’ similar. In order to make this discourse possible and to make visible the histories of women artists, the basic premise with which I began was that their histories and voices exist.

Arduous research for the voices, archival and anthropological, of these artists was taken up as a following step. At this level processes like: retrieval of their histories from unpublished or oral accounts; translation of information from primary sources, such as, local journals, exhibition catalogues of organizations and collections; documentation of and critical re-evaluation of their works, have been carried out. In the west, although, feminism has moved beyond the stage of recovering forgotten archives of women artists, in India, this is an incomplete project.

I have chosen the 50s as a time that marks the beginning of a crystallization of regional struggles against the center. By focusing on women artists of Andhra Pradesh, I have, therefore, regarded them as doubly marginalized on account of their gender and regional location. The decade of 50s was also significant for the women of Andhra Pradesh in the sense that a greater number of them opted to become artists. This was, perhaps, a consequence of a fresh wave of consciousness among women, which was initiated by

10. Ibid, p. 142

11. Ibid, p.143

the Telangana People's Struggle, a revolution marked by struggle and collective action of women. Following this movement there was also a major political shift, in that the newly independent Indian government replaced the autocratic rule of the *Nizam*. These developments served as the right kind of backdrop for modernisms in Andhra Pradesh.¹²

Women artists have actively contributed to the development of modernism. In my research I have reclaimed not only the histories and modernisms of women artists from the 50s onwards but also of women from the early to mid 20th century. Even if the process of writing 'counter-history' of women and their struggles in feminism might yield itself to recovery or recuperation, it has to be risked as part of radical discourse.¹³

This endeavour, however, is fraught with dangers, particularly of falsification, romanticization or exaggeration of the critic, perhaps, due to negligible written accounts. The result of which would contribute to the (re) inferiorization of the subaltern.¹⁴ But, in accordance with Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan,¹⁵ I believe, that such a task is vital when we intend to make the subaltern 'voice' politically privileged. In order to avoid the pitfalls of this discourse, I have adopted a socio-political-historical analysis of art production, which is seen inscribed by the questions of class, caste, region and gender.

The social changes augured by the historical and political developments are seen as markers for a beginning of modernism in Andhra Pradesh. My concern here has been to highlight modernisms, which challenge the hegemonic aspects of monolithic modernism, so as to address gender as its constitutive component. Thereby, I have endeavored to foreground spaces of women artists whose presence in the art school during the decade opens the case of modern art of Andhra Pradesh for a re-assessment.

The art school appointed a woman teacher during this time. Her life and works have remained on the fringes of the art school, which was dominated by men. The value assigned to the teachings of male teachers in some written accounts is far too much when compared to her's. In fact it is almost nil in value and survives only in oral accounts.

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

13. *Op cit* no:8

14. *Ibid*, p. 90

15. *Ibid*

These absences point out at the invisibility of the existing sexual inequalities within the art school, which is a site of modernist art education, production; dissemination of a regional aesthetic, also becomes a site for gender discrimination.

It also points at the difference in the ways that modernism affects male and women artists. However, locating women artists within the progressive socio-political context has helped me comprehend the emergence of women's modernism. In this regard it is worthy to note that women from middle class Muslim families(Zainab Razvi), Parsi minority community(Freny Behemenshah) opted to become artists and remained active. 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,¹⁶ it is difficult to imagine women, from such families, to be in pursuit of their interests in fine arts by studying at the art school. These women, perhaps, open up spaces of resistance within such a society. However, simultaneously and in conjunction with women's cultural practice the efforts of women's organizations and the Telangana revolution created a conducive platform for modernism proper.

In the context of formation of art schools, I have not only given the account of the art school in Hyderabad, but also of art institutions / schools of the Andhra region under the erstwhile Madras Presidency. In the process, women artists whose histories and contributions to the field of art were long forgotten have been reclaimed; their creativity is remembered, appraised and documented. Artists like, Damerla Satyavani, B.Krishnamma, Pushkaramba, and Kakakshamma, through their works, help us comprehend the regional aesthetics that began simultaneously with national concerns.

As a following step to this reclamation and as a strategy of such a discourse, I have attempted to trace the sexual inequities brought about by the gender-power relations within the social institutions of marriage and family, and within professional spheres such as educational institutions, organizations offering patronage etc.

16. Suzie Tharu, K.Lalitha, Vasantha Kannabiran We Were Making History, Zed Books, London, 1986.

However, the 1960s opened up a new opportunity for further education following the establishment of Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academy, which provided scholarships for aspirants. Its significance was also due to the patronage it extended for artists.

Women artists also won opportunities in terms of scholarship for further studies, exhibition and sale of their works, both within and outside Andhra Pradesh. But, when in mid 70s the Academy took up the project of publishing the monographs on 'eminent' artists, none of the woman artists were benefited. The 70s, although, was a watershed for feminism in the west and in India, hardly contributed to the cause of women artists with relation to affects of patronage coincides with the publishing of the *"Towards Equality: Report on the committee on the status of women in India"*, which ironically highlighted the inequities of women in the spheres of education, health care, etc.¹⁷

Simply foregrounding the operation of sexual difference within various social spheres is not adequate for a feminist project such as this. Feminist efforts at critiquing male discourse that perpetuates the existing stereotypes and sexual difference had to be taken up.

Contemporary Andhra Pradesh art tends toward the decorative and ornamental flourishes. In this regard I have brought out a critique of the male discourse in the context of contemporary Andhra Pradesh art via the representations of 'woman' images. This critique recognizes the political process by which representations becomes naturalized and as a result are coercive in structuring women's self-representation.¹⁸

'Woman images' put forth by the first mode of regional aesthetics mentioned earlier art re-circulates a fictional category of 'woman'. Often these representations portray rural, regional 'woman' as adorned with jewelry and as an object for viewing pleasure.

These are the regional imagined 'women'. Through such images of 'women' these artists work very much like ethnographers and project an anthropological gaze similar to that of the colonizers who derived pleasure by viewing exotic women.

17. Suzie Tharu and K.Lalitha, eds, *Women Writing in India*, vol.I, Delhi, Oxford University press, 1991.

18. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, p.129

For this critique, therefore, it also becomes necessary to comprehend the lived realities of womanhood by studying women's self-representation through their works.

The focus on women's art in feminist criticism is a politically crucial and complex move. It might run the risk of not only co-option of women's art within the mainstream, but also of the frequent reactionary content in women's art, which is a result of an internalization of patriarchal norms. My project here has been not just a valorization of women as artists but it has also considered a 'difference of political voice' to be at stake, which takes us to the idea of a 'female aesthetic'.¹⁹

It can only be understood in relational terms along side the patriarchal discourse, which is the reason why I have attempted to avoid singular focus on women artists.

Critical regional aesthetics either foregrounds a liberal conception of self-hood, or negates sexual or linguistic identities, of women artists. Therefore, through this aesthetics the dominant aesthetic paradigms are questioned and/or reworked or consumed and at times negated by women artists, even as they put forth femininities through specific religious/caste/class/regional affiliations.

This thesis, I believe, has filled up a major lacuna in women's cultural practices in the process of critiquing the politics of canon formation, which was in the interest of male artists. Further, this work contributes to the on going process of documentation and archival research on modern Andhra Pradesh art, which will enable, strengthen academic excellence and encourage researchers to widen the scope of study on regional aesthetics. Also, through this thesis one could be lead to re-think the politics of canonization, a facile incorporation of these women artists into the mainstream and to devalourize uncritical celebration of the regional modern in the name of authenticity.

19. Ibid, p. 118