

CHAPTER-II
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In the art historical writings on Andhra Pradesh, there are barely a few instances where women artists have been mentioned;¹ these writings only reinforce the megalomaniac aura around the male artist in the modern art of Andhra Pradesh. The enquiry here would not be to create a parallel image of women artists as rebel, as genius or as extraordinary, to be found in masculinist art historical writings, but it would be to locate women's art practice and trace a social history of their lives and career.

Therefore, in this chapter my main concern is to analyse the factors common to the conditions of being a woman artist in a patriarchal society, via social institutions of marriage and family, and the distinctions in their lives and careers produced by religion, class and caste.

However, if we genuinely approach the condition of being a woman artist, the best answer would probably be the same as the girls of New York City² summarised it when they said:

The advantages of being a woman artist are- working without the pressure of success, being assured that whatever kind of art that you make, it will be named feminine....Knowing that your career might pick-up after you are eighty.³

1. See, Sudha Reddy, *Art in Andhra – A Historical Perspective – 1900-90*, Hyderabad, 1999, and V.S. Sarma, "Andhra Art", *Second World Telugu Conference*, APLKA Publication, 1981.
2. Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary art: The revolutionary power of women's laughter*, Routledge, London & New York, 1996, pp: 4
3. Ibid.

Women Artists of Andhra Pradesh-1920s to 50s

One such artist of Andhra Pradesh, who had been long forgotten and was rediscovered when small blurbs appeared in local newspapers about the artist's ill health. This happened in 1992 when she was eighty plus. This artist, Damerla Satyavani, was from Rajahmundry, East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. She was married at the age of 10 in 1918 to an artist Damerla Rama Rao (*Illus.019a*). Satyavani was good at drawing; further, her husband who studied art at the J.J. School of Arts Bombay trained her. Eventually she stood first in the national level Fine Arts examinations.

Satyavani lost her husband after three years of marriage, when she was just seventeen years old. She also lost her only son when he was just three (*Illus.019b*). Satyavani slowly but steadily grew resilient. She supported herself financially by teaching art at the government school at Rajahmundry. She had trained a number of youngsters who took up art examinations.



019a. Photograph of Damerla Rama Rao and Satya Vani, ca. 1918.



019b. Photograph of Damerla Satyavani and Son, ca. 1920.

Satyavani continued to sketch, draw and paint even after Damarla's death. Her sister-in-law Digumarti Bucchi Krishnamma, was an artist too.

Both of them painted subjects appropriate to nationalist fervour, as mentioned in chapter-I. But what was appreciated about the work was the genre that reflected various domestic activities. However, even as the women painted scenes from the household chores, they talked about their real life situations and about 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. Further, works like "*sitting on the bed*" or '*waiting at the door*' (Illus019c-20) are unlike the oft repeated

020. D. Satyavani, *Waiting at the Door*, ca.1930, 25x30 cm, watercolour on Paper. Collection: Damerla Rama Rao Memorial Art Gallery, Rajahmundry.



019c. D. Satyavani, *Sitting on the Bed*, ca.1925, 25x30 cm, watercolour on Paper. Collection: Damerla Rama Rao Memorial Art Gallery, Rajahmundry.





021. Varada Venkataratnam, *Twilight*, ca.1930, approx. 25x30 cm, watercolour on Paper. From Ghruhalakshmi.

mythical or fictional themes painted by male artists like “*vilasini*” or “*virahini*”, like in this work, which shows a woman waiting in the evening when it is twilight. ⁴ (*Illus.021*)

The matter of fact representations by women artists might be indicative of situations of loneliness. Particularly, in the case of Damerla Satyavani, whose child marriage left her a teenage widow. When I enquired about Satyavani’s education after marriage, her sister Rajamani said:

She continued to go to school even after her marriage at the age of ten.... One time while she was playing in the school, her *mangalsutra* slipped from her neck. Later after a thorough search she found it. She did not know what value was attached to it, but she was afraid of elders at home.⁵

While child marriages were a common feature during this time, it was also the time of social reformers who were active in Rajahmundry, as elsewhere, against child marriages and encouraged widow remarriage etc. Satyavani’s father was also one of the reformers. He encouraged women’s education and also re-marriage.

4. B R. Sudha Reddy, pp: 81.

5. Conversation with Rajamani, sister of Damerla Satyavani.

However, Satyavani did not marry again and managed to come out of these bereavements as she chose to engage herself with the project of practicing and teaching art. She conducted art classes at her residence for children and aspiring adults. For Satyavani, a better help came when a Government School principal happened to pass by and notice her work. She then invited Satyavani to teach art at the school.⁶ This picture, perhaps, is one of the autobiographical representations in which she portrays herself surrounded by children whom she seems to be teaching. (*Illus.022*). There was another profound reason that gave her the courage to move ahead: she and her husband had a common ambition of keeping the torch of Andhra Pradesh art burning. She continued to fulfil it in her capacity. In this regard, she saw to it that the works of some of the artists associated with the Andhra Society of Indian Arts were well preserved in the Damerla Rama Rao Memorial Art Gallery, Rajahmundry, even until her death.



022. D.Satyavani, Untitled, ca.1932, 30x48 cm, watercolour on paper.

Butchi Krishnamma was one of the daughters of Lakshmi Devi and Dr. Damerla Venkata Rama Rao.⁷ Her brother Damerla Rama Rao, became an artist of repute. Therefore, Krishnamma belonged to a family where the male members were well educated. She too expressed interest in studying art, and like most other upper-caste women of her times, could not go to an art school. However, her wish materialized after her brother returned, having completed the course at the J.J.School of Art, Bombay. He taught her

6. Ibid.

7. He was a physician. He belonged to a upper caste family.



023. B. Krishnamma, *Gopika*, 1932, 30x44 cm, watercolour on paper.

the tenets of nationalist art in the Andhra Society of Indian Arts. Krishnamma eventually became proficient in watercolour wash technique and painted mythological (*Illus.023*), historical and autobiographical themes.

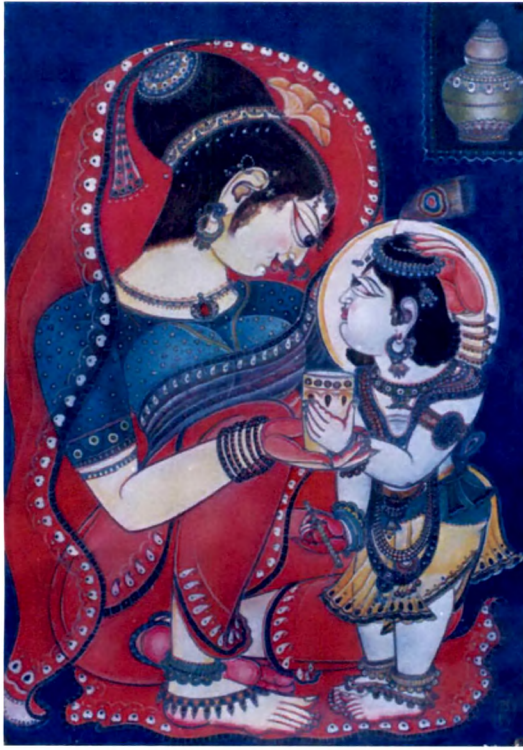
Krishnamma was also married off early and became a widow at a young age. Yet, she kept up her passion for painting and interest in social service. She was politically active during the nationalist movement in the then Andhra region which was under Madras presidency. In Madras, while she and her husband were teaching in a school for the dalits, Gandhi came for a visit. He requested the couple to continue their social service in the Kasturba Ashram at Sitanagar, Rajahmundry. So she returned to Rajahmundry and dedicated herself completely to the cause of the poor and the destitute until her death. Nationalistic ideals, creative activities and social service were a dynamic combination in

Krishnamma's life. Krishnamma, therefore, opened up spaces outside of the purely domestic realms during this phase.⁸

This new space that combined the domestic and the outside world is the one in which not only Krishnamma's, but also Satyavani's life and work can be contextualised.

We have another unrelenting artist, Vijayalakshmi, whose efforts have been ignored, though her brother and husband were well known in the art community. She was born in

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



024. Vijaya Lakshmi, *Yashoda Krishna*, ca.1965, approx. 40x 60 cm, watercolour on paper.



025. Vijaya Lakshmi, *Rama Sita*, ca.1965, approx. 40x 60 cm, watercolour on paper.

1928 in West Godavari, Andhra Pradesh. She, like Satyavani and Krishnamma, never studied art in an art school, despite the fact that both her brother (Mokkapati Krishnamurthy), and her husband (P.Lakshminarasimhamurthy), studied Fine Arts from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Madras.

Vijayalakshmi had shown interest in drawing and painting right from her childhood. So, why wasn't she sent to an art school? Her daughter who is an educationist says: 'Where and how could women go out to study art in those days'.⁹

Moreover, she was married at the age of 18, which is a prime time for academics. Thereafter the responsibility of a family followed. Vijayalakshmi eventually had five children. Despite all this, there were very few days in her life when she could not paint! For her, painting is an activity as sacred as worship. As the puja is performed everyday so is the ritual of painting. Vijayalakshmi painted mythological subjects, such as, '*Kaliya Daman*', '*Yashoda Krishna*' and '*Rama- Sita*' (Illus.024-25). She began every picture by painting the '*Ganesha*'. Every work of hers has, in addition to her initials, a pair of footprints of her god.

9. As narrated by Vishupriya, daughter of Vijayalakshmi.

Vijayalakshmi's sisters, Sitadevi and Swarajyalakshmi were also artists but they could not continue to paint after marriage. Perhaps, Vijayalakshmi was fortunate to have married an artist, who could understand her creative urge. She says, "Yes, my husband encouraged me, but his friends and many others within the art community disapproved of my passion for painting". In this regard she recalls that a family friend advised Lakshminarasimhamurthy not to allow her to paint. Not just this, many a time when she wished to exhibit along with her husband, 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.¹⁰ She faced this challenge with the confidence that was consequent to her abilities as an artist, which got further strengthened due to continual practice.

A few of the awards that she has received are displayed at her daughter's house, where she visits off and on after her husband's death.

However, Vijayalakshmi has retained the urge to paint and her ambition to be ever competent.

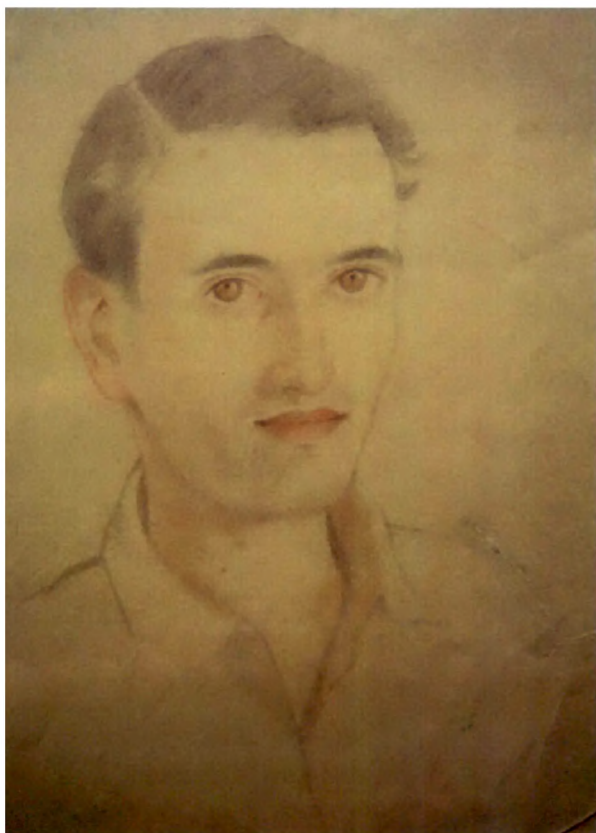
One common feature that connects all the artists mentioned so far is the fact that they did not study in Art Schools. Does this imply that women from upper/middle class and upper castes, like these artists, did not have access to education on par with men in the household? Perhaps yes.

However, by the 1940s women not only opted for art education but also joined the Art School, particularly, in Hyderabad, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh.

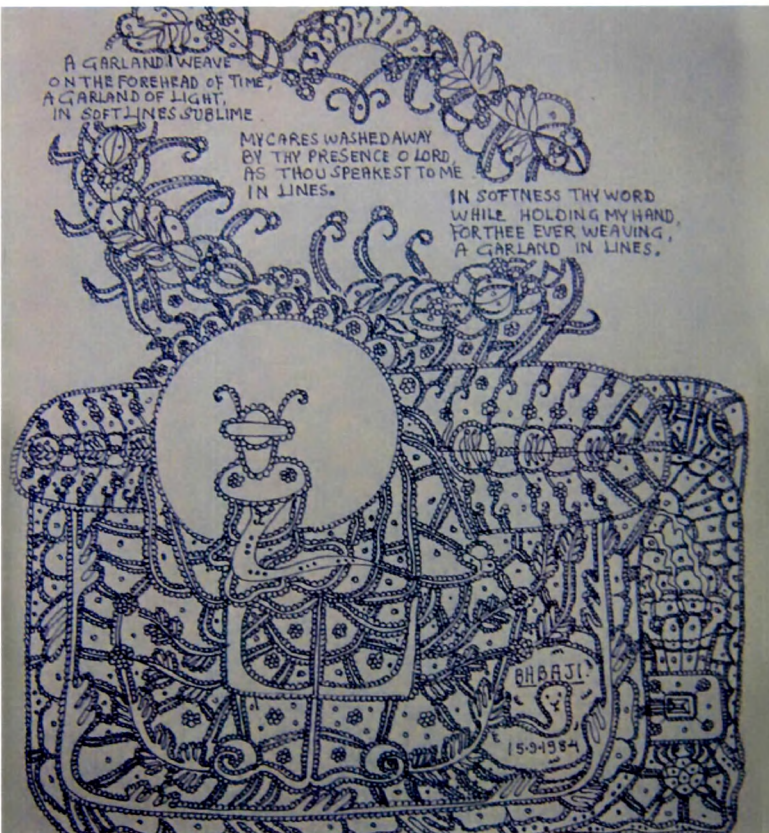
One such artist is Freny Behemenshah. Freny was born in the then princely state of Hyderabad. She was keenly interested in painting since her childhood. Her grandfather Viccaji, a Parsi banker from Iran, was invited by the Nizam to assume charge as finance minister.¹¹ Freny grew up in luxury. However, her mother died when she was still a child, and so her father had to re-marry. Freny was ill treated by her stepmother. Despite the familial disturbances, she went on to study Fine Arts way back in 1945. Upon completing her studies she got married to a suitable Parsi, whom she had known for a while (*Illus.026*).

10. 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.

11. As told by Freny Behemenshah.



026. Freny Behemenshah, Portrait, ca.1949, 30x44 cm, color pencil on paper. Collection: the artist, Hyderabad.



027. Freny Behemenshah, Untitled, 1984, 23x29 cm, pen and ink on paper. Collection: the artist, Hyderabad.

However, soon after this she became aware that her husband was not interested in earning a living. This prompted her to take up a job at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Freny maintains a very calm and quiet demeanour. This is a result of nurture in an upper class Parsi family. Freny attempts to set aside the conflicts at home and at the workplace, by painting.

Freny began to explore her own spiritual leanings. As a matter of fact, for her painting and drawing became a means of worship, like for Vijayalakshmi. For instance, in this work (*Illus.027*), Freny expresses through a poetic verse in praise of her god and worships through an elaborate and intricate garland of lines. The design element in her works draw from sources like the Parsi and Hyderabad embroidery traditions.

Freny's spirituality is very secular in character in that she not only invokes the Parsi concept of fire god through references to light, but also portrays Hindu gods and goddesses

OM ANGELS AND BIRDS DESCEND
TO BE BLESSED BY HIM IN OM SWEET OM SWEET

OM
KUMARA
GURUDEVA.

BASE OF OM
SWEET LIGHT

KING OF LIGHTED
BEADS & BUBBLES
OF OM SWEET OM.

OM BUBBLES
OF LIGHT

OM.
FLOWER
OF LIGHT.

OM JASMINE
PRAYING TO
HIM IN OM

IT IS A
BLISSFUL
DAY FOR
ONE AND
ALL WHO
SEE HIM

AND TO
THOSE
WHO
PRAY
HIM
IN OM
OM
OM
OM

HIS OM WONDER
BIRD OF LIGHT
AT HIS LOTUSFEET

12.3.1995

MAHA SWETA

Another artist who has expressed herself through women protagonists is Kamala Mittal.

Kamala was born in Muzzafamagar, Uttar Pradesh but settled down in A.P. since 1953. She completed the Fine Arts diploma course from *Kalabhavana Shantiniketan* in 1950. She was a year junior to Jagadish Mittal while at college, and married him in 1951.

In her paintings and prints, Kamala chooses themes that portray women in various active roles through their domestic labour, creative pursuits etc., particularly in works like *‘Two Sisters’*, *“Mat Weavers”*, *‘Quilt Makers’* and *“music party”* etc. She also painted landscapes and historical themes for instance

12. The fire ordeal that Sita had to undergo as a test to prove her chastity and loyalty toward Rama.

'ChandBibi fighting against the Mughal army'. Through the works that portray mat weavers and quilt makers she has positively foregrounded women's collective and creative efforts, particularly seen in rural India. In her works she has attempted to create harmonious compositions with minimal means. This woodcut (*Illus.029b*) is an example of such a composition.

Kamala was an active member of the Hyderabad Art Society. She won awards at the Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academy. Kamala continued to be actively engaged in painting till the mid 60's. By this time Jagdish Mittal had already stopped painting. Both of them took on the activities of their private art museum as a full-time job. Kamala could not give enough time to painting, and moreover, her serious involvement in documentation and photography prompted her to quit painting altogether. Kamala and Jagdish chose to stay in Hyderabad in the early 1950's and have settled in the place since then.

Among the women artists who began their studies in Fine Arts at about this time were Fatima Ahmed, Siddiqua Bilgrami, and Zehra Rehmatullah, who were Muslims and were friends.

For an average middle class Muslim woman, it would have been difficult to express her desire in the first place; to exercise her choice to pursue a career would have been next to impossible. Even now, in the 21st century, girls and women of Muslim middle class and lower middle class families do not have equal access and opportunities to education.¹³ But all these women were from aristocratic *Nawabi* families. The privilege of being born into such families were many, in the sense that women of such



029b. Kamala Mittal, *Nav Badhu*, 1951, approx. 25x30 cm, woodcut.

13. Having been born and brought up in Hyderabad, I have come across several such Muslim women. And I could also recall the examples of some of my own classmates. Also see, Margrit Pernau, "Female Voices: Women Writers in Hyderabad at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century", *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, Hyderabad, 2000, P 40

a background enjoyed a much liberal atmosphere at home and therefore were also encouraged to study or pursue their interests. But we must also look into other factors—such as marriage—for more information on the privilege or otherwise in their lives.

Siddiqua belonged to a family that migrated generations ago from a place called Bilgram in Uttar Pradesh (hence the name Bilgrami). The Bilgramis were not only rich *nawabs* but were also active in the political scene of the then Hyderabad. Unlike some landlord *nawabi* families that were decadent, the Bilgramis were forward-looking and valued education. In this regard both men and women in the household were encouraged to study. It is worth noting that Siddiqua's grandaunt, Teyyaba Begum, was the first Muslim Indian woman who became a graduate. Siddiqua too was well educated. She was sent to one of the best schools in Hyderabad, the Mehbubia Girls' School. Art and its appreciation were also part of the curriculum. This early basic training in art helped her in securing admission straightaway into the second year of the five-year diploma course in the local college during the mid 1950's. Siddiqua recalls that she and her friends, Fatima Ahmed and Zehra Rehmatullah who had studied together even at school, "were rebellious" in the college in the sense that "we opposed the curriculum, which was based on academic realism and hence on copying from plaster casts of Greek statues".¹⁴ Although, they were good at such academic studies, all of them wished to be more creative in their approach.

Siddiqua held several shows of her works in Rome and these were well received and visited by many an artist.¹⁵ Upon her return from Italy to Hyderabad in 1960 following her further studies, she travelled to different art centres like Bombay, Delhi etc. and held shows of her paintings. For about two years Siddiqua worked at the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi. During this time she met several artists and documented their works.¹⁶ In 1965, Siddiqua was married to a Pakistani army official. In Pakistan, Siddiqua continued her creative career not only as a practising professional artist but also worked as a jewellery designer (*Illus.030-31*).¹⁷ She has been recognised and written about in a recently published book called *50 years of Pakistani art*.¹⁸ Siddiqua's earlier abstraction was emotional and

14. The artist narrated this.

15. Her exhibitions were visited by many contemporary Italian artists and Indian artists, like M.F.Hussain, who is personally known to Siddiqua and has also been to number of her shows even in Pakistan.

16. Siddiqua Bilgrami worked at the Lalit Kala Academy as a Technical Assistant

17. She worked for a semi-govt. concern called Gem Stone Corp. of Pakistan for about seven years.

18. Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity : Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*, 1998.



030. Siddiqua Bilgrami, photographic sample of jewellery design, ca1980.

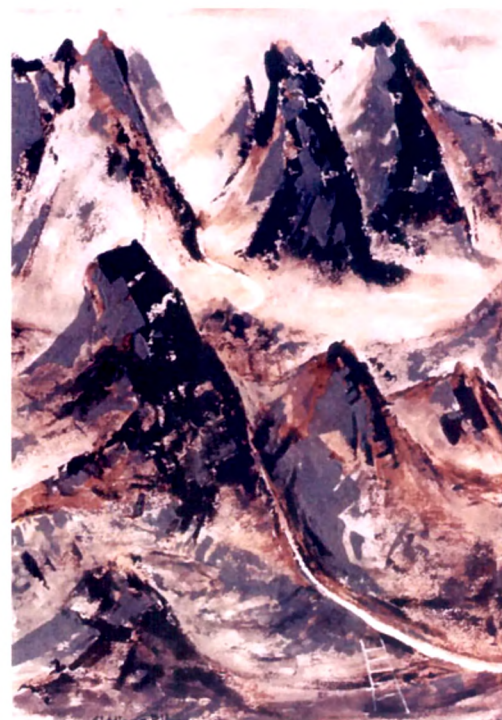


031. Siddiqua Bilgrami, photographic sample of jewellery design, ca1980

expressive and she says “non- decorative”, while after her stint in jewellery design her paintings tended to be slightly decorative, though still abstract (*Illus.032*). Siddiqua left for Canada a few years ago and at present lives and works there.

If Siddiqua visited several places with her family, her friend Fatima Ahmed has travelled even more throughout her solitary life. Fatima too was born into a rich *nawabi* family in Hyderabad. Right from her childhood days she had shown interest in creative activities like painting and writing. Yet, there was neither encouragement nor appreciation for her work. This did not deter

032. Siddiqua Bilgrami, *Barren Landscape with Moon and Ladder*, ca.1980, approx. 60x90 cm, acrylic on paper.



her from pursuing her interests, for she enrolled herself in the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Hyderabad, much against her father's wish. Fatima not only resisted her father but also held very unconventional ideas about life and living. She decided that she would not get married, for she believed that marriage would take her away from her creative career and would make her concentrate more on trivial mundane activities. But was surviving as an artist in the context of 60's a better option? To this Fatima says: "I knew that life was tough anyway, so I thought, let me have it my way at least".¹⁹

To sustain herself financially she could not rely solely on selling her works. Further, she received no support from her family. Therefore, she took up a job.²⁰ But she realised that the job was "too frustrating" to continue and so she returned to painting after a brief gap.²¹ After this one success led to another.²² Her first show in Bombay in 1963 was a successful one. She then decided to live in Bombay. Although she participated in all major group events and also held one-person shows for the next fifteen years, Fatima says that this was a period "when there was a general mood of restlessness".²³ Fatima's painting during this period was more sculptural in rendering. The figures, usually only one, were set against very dark background and lines of strong light defined the bodily contours. The negation of the body by hiding it away in the dark somehow brought it back into the fore. The friction between the figure and the ground also co-relates to the tension between the artist's family background and her life style.²⁴ A sea change in her life happened when she visited Bhagwan Rajneesh's ashram at Pune, and eventually took *sanyas* in 1981.²⁵ Why was this necessary to someone who has remained a spinster? Or did she till then hope to get married someday? To this she says "yes, I had a desire at times, but never found the 'Mr.Right'. However, what did it mean to take *sanyas*? How is the concept different from the '*vanaprasthana*' of Vedic Hinduism or that of an ascetic? To put it in simple terms, the traditional *sanyasi* abandoned/ left the household responsibility at a certain age, or maybe at a stage where there was not much to take care of.

19. Fatima Ahmed narrated this.

20. She could not rely on her family, as the once *nawabi* status was on the wane due to lack of proper management at home. She took up a job in the state secretariat as a clerk.

21. In 1962 she held an exhibition of her works and with this she got the credit of being the first lady artist to have had a solo presentation. The event was sponsored by U.S.I.S, or the United States Information Services and was a success, as many VIP's, such as, ministers etc. visited.

22. Fatima was awarded a grant to stay and practice art in Bombay for a period of six months from the A.P.L.K.A. In Bombay she met several prominent personalities in the field of art.

23. Op cit no: 19

24. Fatima did not want to marry and she does not like taking care of children. She likes traveling and has traveled to various countries including London, France and China.

25. As she was then working for a newspaper, she was asked to write an article on the Osho Ashram, which is why she visited the place.

An ascetic left the household in search of God. This meant that their sexual lives also ceased. However, the concept of taking *sanyas* at the Osho Ashram is very different from this. Here it is more a *tantric sanyas*²⁶ where the surrender of one's personal ego is initiated by the body, by sexual activity. Bodily desires are not suppressed but are indulged in. "The more one indulges, the quicker one transcends and becomes spiritual" Fatima believes. The shift from a materialistic approach of the sculpture-like forms and harsh contours in an oil medium to a technique of floating colours, often transparent and with a permeating radiance around the central figure in watercolour was



033. Fatima Ahmed, untitled, ca.1990, oil on canvas.

an outcome of the altered philosophy and attitude in Fatima's life, it seems. Thus she takes a subversive stance that defies rigid patriarchal rules: of living as a married woman, of bearing children, taking care of the husband etc., by taking up *sanyas* at the Osho commune. She acknowledges her womanly sexual desires, overcomes her "restlessness" and then attempts to move beyond sensual pleasure. However, in a few works of her post- *sanyas* phase she has expressed her erotic desires through a misty, semi- abstract style. In this painting (*Illus.033*) she portrays an old Hyderabadi arched door, which alludes to a seemingly erect phallus.

It is also true that in most of her works, there is just a solitary figure of a woman with a veil running above and around the head and the painted image is enclosed in a frame, a painted one at that. Fatima perhaps finds it better to live in the symbolic matrix and subvert it from within by posing a dematerialised empty gaze that returns that of the viewer's. Fatima Ahmed at present lives and works in Pune.

26. In the tantric practices it is important to attain control over the seven *charkas* or the centers inside our body. Through this one can overcome one's ego and thereby understand one's 'self'.

Another artist who shared a *nawabi* family background with Fatima and Siddiqua is Farukh Rifaquat. She too was born in Hyderabad. After her diploma in Fine Arts from the local college she was married to a professor in Botany. Farukh was known for her drawings and landscapes. Throughout her stay in Hyderabad, up to 1990, she worked continually. She liked to experiment with different media, which at times were unconventional, such as felt sketch pens for landscapes and batik still lives (*illus.034*). Her assays in conventional media were also equally interesting (*illus.035*). Farukh was a good *sitarist* as well. Farukh had to leave for Pakistan after her husband passed away and stay with either of her daughters. She now lives in Canada.

Fatima, though she remained unmarried, could not avoid certain short-term gaps in her career, as she had to take up other odd jobs to support herself financially. And Siddiqua,

although she married and had children to raise, could get back to her creative work after small intervals.



034. Farukh Rifaquat, *Landscape*, ca. 1988, 30x25 cm, felt sketch pens on paper. Collection: Jagdish and Kamala Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad.

Artists like Dasrath Kumari Mathur and Urmila Shaw could not be very active in their careers after marriage. “Urmila Shaw was the best painter in our group”, says Fatima recalling her college days in Hyderabad.

Urmila was a Christian and belonged to a middle class family.

She had been active in the professional field right from her student days at the local college. She was appreciated for her work by almost everyone known to her, particularly Vidya Bhushan, her teacher. Like him she also went to the erstwhile Yugoslavia to learn

mural techniques. She and Usha Shankar worked on the Ajanta mural project, assigned to Vidya Bhushan by the Lalit Kala Academy. Urmila's family and that of Vidya Bhushan's were friends.

Urmila was in Hyderabad until the late 70s. She went to Bombay after marriage. Later she settled down in Pune and still lives there. She continued to paint for a long time following her marriage.

Urmila and Usha were friends. Usha began to study Fine Arts after marriage. Her husband encouraged her in her creative pursuits.²⁷ She had a fascination to experiment with various media, such as, oils, acrylic and egg tempera.

Usha's father, Bhansidhar Vidyalankar, was a professor in Hindi and was well known. Her mother Lalitha was a talented woman. They settled in Hyderabad and so, Usha was born and brought up here. Her parents opposed Usha's marriage to Shankar, since it was an inter-caste affair. Shankar was a Brahmin, while Usha was not. However, her in-laws did not object to their marriage and also had regards for Usha.²⁸



035. Farukh Rifaquat, *Secretariat*, ca. 1965, 60x60 cm, oil on canvas.

Her husband admired the way she painted landscapes. Usha's landscapes were simplifications of natural surroundings. Usha's active participation in art exhibitions won her many awards. Usha left for Aurangabad in the late 1970s and there she had her own gallery at the ITDC (Indian tourism Development Corporation) hotel.

27. Raghu, her son, who lives in Hyderabad, mentioned about his father and about his mother's interest in painting.

28. As told by Lalitha, her sister-in-law's sister.

She was back in Hyderabad for a brief period during 80s and in that decade she left for the US. By this time her health was giving way. She eventually gave up painting due to ill health. She passed away in the 90s.

Dasrath Mathur was also a prolific painter like Urmila. She was from an upper caste/class family. She was interested in painting landscapes and still lives. Some of her works are in the collection of Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academy and the Hyderabad Art Society. She left for London some time in the 80s and there is no news about her artistic activity since then.

Dearth of information brings in gaps in comprehending women's art. These gaps also become important in the careers of certain artists, in the sense that there are instances of women artists who have returned to creative work following long gaps.

Women artists from the 1960s to the 1990s:

This particular section is not rigidly chronological, especially due to the gaps in the careers of artists like Kusum Viswanath.

Kusum's parents are from Andhra Pradesh but she was born and brought up in Digboi, Assam. It was only when she was 19 in 1967 that the family moved to Hyderabad. She then joined the graduation course in Fine Arts at J.N.T.U College of Fine Arts. The following year Kusum was married and, due to this, had to discontinue her studies. Her husband's job took her to different destinations for short and long intervals spanning over a decade. Back in Hyderabad in 1980, when her children had grown to be a little independent, Kusum resumed her BFA course and this time on request could join in the second year. In the end she won a gold medal.

And her work was worth it. She learnt the egg-tempera technique from Vidya Bhushan, a teacher who strived a lot for the benefit of the students. Her experiments with the simultaneous usage of wash and impasto techniques have yielded good results. She then taught painting at the college for the next one year. Then again after a break of four years she proceeded to pursue and complete the master's programme in painting from the newly established Sarojini Naidu School of Performing Arts, Fine Arts & Communication, Hyderabad Central University, in 1989. It is interesting and ironic to note



036-Kusum Viswanath

that she and her daughter finished studies almost together. Kusum's perseverance ultimately paid after very many transitions.

While in everything else she gave priority to her family and put her own desires at bay, her works point to the contrary, i.e., to her world where the woman (self) is the protagonist. For instance, in this work (*Illus.036*) there is an adolescent looking girl occupying almost one-third of the picture space and as if coming out of the frame. The whole scene happens in an outside area, yet the strong dark toned man right at the back and the chaperoning tree behind make it impossible to open it up further. The girl / woman looks outwards for a moment, yet is unable to break free from the figures so closely attached.

The figuration and the style is a combination of the Gauguin plus Picasso-esque styles typical of S.N. School artists in Hyderabad, although each dealt with these influences



037. Kavitha Deuskar, Untitled, 1996, approx. 30x45cm, colour pencil.



038. Kavitha Deuskar, *Lady with Pot*, 1999, 60x75cm, charcoal on paper.

in different ways. Examples include Rajeshwar Rao, Srinivas Chari etc., who studied along with her under Laxma Goud and D.L.N. Reddy.

Kusum participated in many group shows in Hyderabad and at Pundole and Jehangir galleries in Bombay and was actively painting till 1996.²⁹

For some women artists, marriage seems to take away precious years of their lives; for some others, lack of support from husbands could be a loss on the emotional level, but may turn for the good otherwise.

Kavita Deuskar, a well-known artist on the local scene today, belongs to a Maharashtrian family of artists. However, she grew up in the then Hyderabad, which was replete with its *nawabi* culture. Her works retain precious memories of this past. (*Illus.037-38*)

29. Which she had to quit due to a severe skin allergy supposedly due to the powder colours. Now she seems to be recovering and has been working with other media.

Her grandfather, Radhakrishna Waman Deuskar, was invited by the Nizam to work as his court painter. Her father, Sukumar Deuskar, was also an artist and was extremely good at portraiture. He taught at the Government College of Arts and Crafts and went on to become the principal of the college.

However, Kavita lost her father quite early in life. After his death in 1952, her mother took up teaching to support the family.

Kavita graduated in Fine Arts in 1965. Then she moved to Baroda and specialised in murals and fresco painting under the guidance of Prof. K.G. Subramanyam.

Back home in Hyderabad by 1968, she began exhibiting her works and made several solo and group presentations. She is a junior contemporary of Laxma Goud, Surya Prakash, and Devraj. By the mid 70's there were "several distractions & disturbances" from inside the family that pressurised her to get married. In order to move away from these Kavita painted and also exhibited her works. These works of the early to mid 70's are stylistically a kin to Laxma's and Devraj's. She was part of the conversations and discussions on art that these and a few other artists held.

The show was a success in that she sold almost every work she exhibited; she then invested the money to go to Europe in 1979-80. Soon after she returned in 1981 she was married, but within a year or two it was heading towards a break-up. Their relationship was incompatible. She says, "I was expected to live like a typical 'housewife' who would clean the house, cook food, take care of the husband etc." Then she adds:

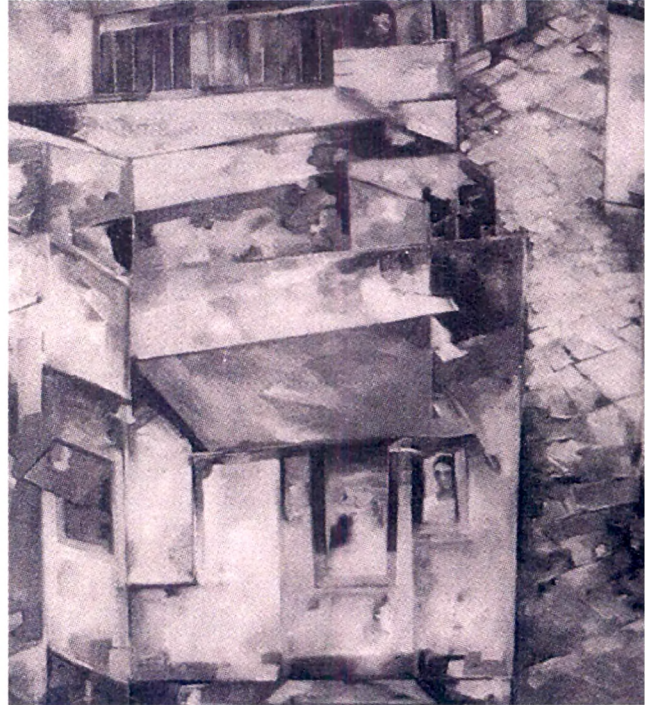
I could not tolerate and came out of this rut by breaking up the marriage.³⁰

A decision was made, but a phase of dejection and discouragement from members from inside the family and outside was in store.

30. Kavitha Deuskar in conversation with the writer.

One break led to another and she could not get back to work for nearly six years. In the meantime she had secured a job at the J.N.T.U. College of Fine Arts from where she recently retired as head of the painting department. What followed seems to be a slow and steady progress in her career. She continually exhibits her works in major galleries in India and abroad. As for loneliness, there is no room for that in her life. For she now keeps herself surrounded by her other passion: the animals. She takes care of at least 20 dogs, a few cats and mice.

Today she is among the best-known women artists of the state.



039. Anjani Reddy, *Dwelling*, 1994, 120x95 cm, oil on canvas.

Another artist who has also clinched a position in the mainstream is Anjani Reddy. She is also known as a competent contemporary woman artist. Anjani Reddy was born in a Telangana upper class peasant family. Reddys have been one of the major land-owning castes, mainly from the Telangana region, with agriculture as their chief occupation traditionally.³¹ As early as 1931 in the *Nizam* State these were about one-third among the Hindu population holding jobs in the upper bureaucracy.³² It is also relevant to note that nearly 50% of the present day women artists are Reddys. Anjani had a luxurious childhood and was also pampered, which allowed her to do whatever she wanted to. Eventually she chose to become an artist. She studied from J.N.T.U.C.F.A., and completed it by 1976. Although she has continued consistently her career took a significant turn only by 1991 when she began her solo presentations. By this time she also had a job at hand and her children had grown up.

31. Dr. A. Satyanarayana, *Land, Caste and Dominance in Telangana*, NMML, New Delhi.

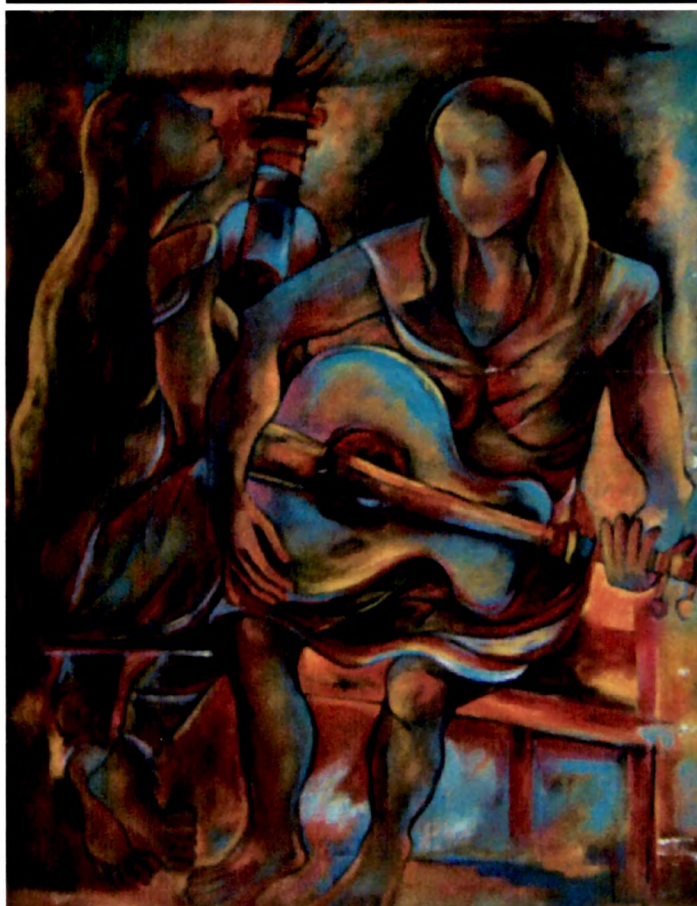
32. Ed. T.V. Satyamurthy, vol. 3, *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in contemporary India*, OUP, New Delhi, 2000 pp: 239.

040. Anjani Prabha Reddy-*Bride Making Ceremony*, ca.1995, 60x60cm, oil on canvas.

So what is it that she paints? Anjani usually works with oils or acrylic on canvas. She has earlier worked on landscapes; later, by the 90's she gave shape to the 'dwelling' (*Illus.039*) series followed by works related to certain rituals wherein 'woman' (*Illus.040*) is the focus. If one has to contextualise her work within a particular milieu, it would not be too easy. Nevertheless, the temptation towards decoration or ornamentation that can be noticed in many an artist of Hyderabad, is clearly visible in her works. Also a more or less literal figuration alludes to certain varieties of illustration popular in local magazines.

Women in her works generally are set in comfortable surroundings and seem to be brooding over something. Yet their richly beautified clothing invites us to gaze at the bodies that adorn them, indicating that the artist's notion of 'womanhood' is not very different from those defined by patriarchy.

But, there are women artists who tend to question these definitions and assumptions. "*I shall take the virginity test how about you*"? is a graphic print by Padma Reddy, wherein she also uses script around the figures depicted in order to make her voice heard more effectively. Padma Reddy is the elder daughter of B.A. Reddy, an artist who was quite known locally for the social reality themes he painted during the early 70s. Padma's earlier works, e.g., (*Illus.041*), were



041. Padma Reddy, *In Aid Of Victims*, ca. 1985, 125x95 cm, oil on canvas. Collection: P.S.T.University

stylistically similar to that of her father's (*Illus.042*). Eventually she worked out methods to formulate her own ways in terms of imagery and style, which now reflected her training at Baroda and her contacts with the local artists of her age group, like Rajeswar Rao, Laxmana Murthy etc. Subsequent to her marriage to Rajeshwar Rao, the usual pattern occurred in her life as well, that is, lapses in art practice due to child- birth and care. All these, plus a regular job to attend at the Central School, leaves her almost no time for her own work, while Rajeshwar remains a freelance artist and holds shows regularly.

Rohini Reddy, originally a Gujarati, is married to Srinivas Reddy. Both do sculptures. Srinivas is a lecturer and Rohini stays at home and works. She usually works in fibre, clay and off late in bronze (*Illus.043*). Rohini's father is a sculptor too. On enquiring with the artists about problems of ego and ambition, the answer was in the affirmative; it followed that in order to keep the pace of life smooth someone has to compromise, and this 'someone' is usually the woman. Why is it that only the woman has to forego her ambitions?

Let us see what Geeta Kapur opines about artist couples:



042. B A Reddy, *Forge*, ca. 1980, approx. 120x 75 cm, oil on canvas.



043. Rohini Reddy, *untitled*, 2006, approx. 30x45x30, bronze.

Of course the woman artist may not be overtly ambitious and may not be in the forefront of conferences, institutions and critical debates. Many of them have to raise families, and so have to ration their time with regard to studio time.³³

This may well be true, but when we say “of course” about the attitude of women, it makes it seem like a ‘given natural condition’ rather than something that results from ‘nurture’.

One artist who has defied all such notions about women’s ambitions and roles is Shanti Swaroopini.

Shanti is a sculptor, who comes from a middle class, lower caste background. As a child, her father encouraged her in the matter of her studies. Later she chose to study BFA sculpture at Andhra University, Vizag. Further, she studied MFA sculpture at M.S.University during the early 90s. She worked at the Kanoria Art Centre, Ahmedabad from 92-94. She has been working at several prestigious national and international institutions since then.³⁴



044. Shanti Swaroopini, *Dialogue*, 1992, 12x10x9 cm, bronze.



045. Shanti Swaroopini, *Man In Circle-1*, 1993, 51x18x9cm, bronze.

During her graduation in Vizag, she saw and learnt from the works of Ravinder Reddy. However, her subject was different from his; she worked on male nudes and other small figural compositions (*Illus.044-45*). This, she says, ‘was due to the shortage of materials to work with’.

33. Mary E. John, “Globalization, Sexuality and the Visual Field: Issues and Non-Issues for Cultural critique”, Mary E John and Janaki Nair, eds, *A Question of Silence: The Sexual economies of Modern India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1998.

34. She was in love with another artist in Baroda, however, her father got her married off elsewhere.

While studying at Baroda she met Avijit Roy, also a sculptor. Later they got married. Shanti is dedicated to her profession. She has always wanted to be active as sculptor. Her husband also was professionally active. They were constantly working from different places. However, due to certain other incompatibilities they eventually separated. She now lives and works in Hyderabad.

There is ample evidence to show that an increasing number of women from the middle class, particularly from the professional groups, are either not getting married or are prepared to leave their husbands.³⁵ A case in point is the example of Shanti Swaroopini.

However, women who have been under the domineering influence of their fathers have more conflicts to resolve. Among such women artists are Laxmi Reddy and Nandini Goud. They are both daughters of well-known artists of Andhra Pradesh, namely P.T. Reddy and Laxma Goud respectively, who held powerful positions in the contemporary art field. P.T. Reddy was Secretary to Andhra Pradesh State Lalit Kala Academy until its closure in the mid 80's and Laxma Goud, of course, is still popular.

Laxmi Reddy is an adopted daughter of Yashoda and P.T.Reddy. Although theirs was an upper caste, they grew slowly from lower middle class to upper middle class. Laxmi, therefore, has seen the ups and downs of life.

She had a flair for art since childhood. She studied diploma in painting from J.N.T.University, 1987, and Masters from S.N.School of Fine Arts, Performing Arts, and Communication, Central University of Hyderabad, 1991. She has been teaching at the Department of Fashion Design of National Institute of Fashion Technology, Hyderabad. Her works reflect her sensitivity toward a design-oriented approach as well (*Illus.046*).

Nandini Goud took her bachelor's degree and masters degree in printmaking from M.S.University, Baroda, the institution where her father had earlier studied. Nandini is a very sensitive artist in that she responds to the environment around her and also to the situations in her life. In this sense her works become autobiographical.

35. Mary E. John, "Globalization, Sexuality and the Visual Field: Issues and Non-Issues for Cultural critique", Mary E John and Janaki Nair, eds, *A Question of Silence: The Sexual economies of Modern India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1998.

Nandini was married to a person whom she did not wish to marry.³⁶ She is living here with her parents, her son and daughter, while her husband has been away in America for a long time now and keeps visiting them. Though she wanted to be away from her father, she has no other place to go. She often portrays this chaos in her life in subtle ways.

It is true that both Laxmi and Nandini had to find ways to come out of the identities given to them by their respective fathers and create a place of their own as far as their art is concerned. But when we consider the opportunities available to some artists we need to rethink the factors that have paved the way.

The lives and careers of women artists of Andhra Pradesh of the early 20th century have been asymmetrically positioned in the context of access to opportunities of education, which are the effects of their class/ caste affiliations. Although class and caste continue to play a role in informing the lives and works of women artists of the later half of the century, women have actively exercised their choices in terms of education. They have been consciously and independently taking decisions regarding their lives and career, at times also crossing over familial and social barriers.



046. Laxmi Reddy, *Still Life*, 2006, 60x 90 cm, oil on canvas.

36. She was in love with another artist in Baroda, however, her father got her married off elsewhere.

