

CHAPTER-III
Women Artists In Hyderabad:
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The decades of sixties opened up new avenues of patronage to the artists with the establishment of various cultural organizations particularly the Hyderabad Art Society (henceforth H.A.S) and Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academy (henceforth A.P.L.K.A).

A survey through the catalogues of annual art exhibitions held by these organizations¹ throughout the 60's would reveal that women artists have helped shape the movement of modernism during this time² through, not only active participation but also by winning awards for their creativity.

Yet, by the mid 70's when the L.K.A decided to publish monographs on 'eminent' artists the list was exclusively of male artists.³ Why did the authorities of the academy exclude women artists? This is perhaps a simple question but the answers to it have to be sought in the complexities of power relations and the consequent sexual difference within these organizations that attempt to obliterate women's histories 'so as to reinforce the modernist / sexist notions of male "artists" and their "eminence".

In order to effectively critique such structures and re-situate women artists within modernism, there is a need to re-contextualize and re-read the difference in the ways this modernism affects male and women artists through the patronage of the academy and other allied organizations.

1. HAS used to conduct annual art and craft exhibition, even now it continues to do so, in January every year along with the All India Industrial Exhibition Society. In this exhibition artists from all over India participated. The APLKA also conducted such annual events. The selection of art works and awarding the prizes was done by a selection and judging committee.
2. See exhibition catalogues of these organizations of the 60s in this regard.
3. P.T.Reddy, Vidya Bhushan, K.Seshagiri Rao, V.Madusudhan Rao, Said-bin Mohammed, Osman Siddiqui, A.Paidiraju, C.S.N. Patnaik, SuryaPrakash, Laxma Goud and D.Doraiswamy.)

The Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academy and other organizations:

The sixties witnessed a remarkable ascent in the art and cultural centers in Hyderabad. It began in 1961, with the establishment of A.P.L.K.A. This was followed by the German cultural center called the Max Mullar Bhavan in 1964. The earlier established organizations were the American cultural center and HAS.⁴ Of all these centers the most important to the artists of Andhra Pradesh were those that offered regional patronage during this decade. The A.P.L.K.A and H.A.S provided such a scope to the artists. H.A.S's prominence had dwindled by the late 50's; however, A.P.L.K.A supported it by diverting some funds⁵. By this act, although, the society survived, the academy became more powerful and authoritative.

The Lalit Kala Academy (National Academy of Plastic Arts) was established through government resolution in 1953 to conduct activities and cater to the needs of the sphere of visual and plastic arts. The aims and objectives of the academy were similar to the one of Sahitya Academy (Academy of letters and literature) in that it included promoting and encouraging studies, research and training in painting, sculpture, Architecture and applied arts; extending support to art institutions and associations.

But, all these aims gradually boiled down to two main spheres (1) publications (2)exhibitions. In this regard Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan writes, "The academy has published a series of valuable monographs on ancient Indian art. In the field of contemporary art it has published monographs on many individual painters and sculptors" and adds "that the second major programme, that of exhibitions, includes retrospective exhibitions of individual painters, foreign exhibitions etc."⁶

The regional center was an extension of the central Lalit Kala Academy and followed its policies and guidelines rather scrupulously.

The publication of monographs was a significant project taken up by the A.P.L.K.A in its efforts to uplift, develop and support the cause of art, artists and their histories. This responsibility

4 The United States Information Services (USIS) was the American Cultural Center, established in 1950. This was closed some time in the 1970s. The H.A.S was established in 1941.

5. In the Hyderabad art Society's 21st All India Art Exhibition catalogue of the year 1962, the then convener, Masood Ahmed, has written about the grants received from and support extended by APLKA.

6. Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, "Some Aspects of Cultural Policies in India: Studies and Documents", web source url: <http://www.unesdoc.unesco.org/>

of selecting artists for this purpose of the A.P.L.K.A was assigned to its key office bearers.⁷ Narotham Reddy as a president, was more nominal, perhaps, due to the fact that he was not a trained artist.⁸ P.T.Reddy, who had in the late 30's studied at J.J. School of art Bombay, made a comeback as an artist during late 50's.⁹ He, by virtue of his understanding on art and also as a secretary held more decision-making and financial powers. In a way all the rest of the members reported to and functioned under the secretary A.P.L.K.A.

The secretary of APLKA also held key position in the Hyderabad Art Society.¹⁰ The power and influence wielded by this position was therefore quite immense. The remarkable career growth of few artists, by way of purchase of works, conferring awards and the publishing of monographs, during this period particularly points at biases and relations within such power structure at the Academy.¹¹ Among the fourteen artists about whom these monographs were published ten were members of the academy. They were from the executive board and the finance committee, which were replete with male members.¹² The rest of them had established personal contacts with the secretary. Osman Siddiqui was included so as to feature at least one sculptor. And of these artists Laxma Goud and Surya Prakash had begun their careers only in the mid 1960s. While women who had been active and well known in the field for over fifteen to twenty years and more were simply ignored.¹³ Even as some women artists (i.e.,) D.Satyavani and B.Krishnamma were considered for a while but since they were from Andhra region the thought was dismissed.¹⁴ One more notable aspect is that most of the members were from the Telangana region barring just a couple of them from Andhra region. From the above mentioned observations it can be inferred that the male guardians of the academy not only held biased view based on gender but also based on the region. The sub-regional agitations of Telangana and Andhra in late 1960s and early 1970s, perhaps, contributed to the rise in such feelings.¹⁵

7 Narottam Reddy as president, P.T.Reddy as secretary held the authorizing and decision making capacities respectively.

8 Narottam Reddy was vice-chancellor of Osmania University

9. P.T.Reddy studied at the JJ school of art in Bombay during late 30's and in 1941 formed the first progressive artists group there. He also participated in the Quit India movement following which he returned to Hyderabad. But, did not resume painting until 1957 due to discouragement faced in Hyderabad.

10 P.T.Reddy also held various positions including that of vice-president and president.

11. Artists like Srihari Bholekar, Narendra Rai, etc.

12 Namely: P.T.Reddy , Madhusudan Rao , Vidya Bhusan , P.Gourishankar , Sayeed –Bin-Mohammed , D.Doraiswamy , K.Rajaiah, C.S.N.Patnaik, A.Paidiraju , P.R.Raju , K.Seshagiri Rao .

13 Satyavani, B.Krishnamma, Vijayalakshmi, Freney Behemanshah, Kamala Mittal etc.

14. Revealed in conversation with B.A.Reddy, an artist who also worked for the APLKA during this time and later worked for HAS.

15. The 1969 Telengana agitation was for a separate Telengana State, which was marked by violence and the "go back to Andhra" call. It had caused apprehensions in the Andhras.

The second important aspect in the policy of the academy was of exhibitions and events. The absence of women artists in any written accounts (monographs, articles etc., in the catalogues) of A.P.L.K.A or H.A.S etc., partially succeed in suppressing women's histories within modern art of Andhra Pradesh. However, the visuals / art works in the catalogues and in the collection of these organizations are the vital evidences that help re-read and write modernisms into art history.

Then in this section I would attempt to trace the development of art during 1960s and 1970s through their artworks in the collections of A.P.L.K.A and H.A.S.¹⁶

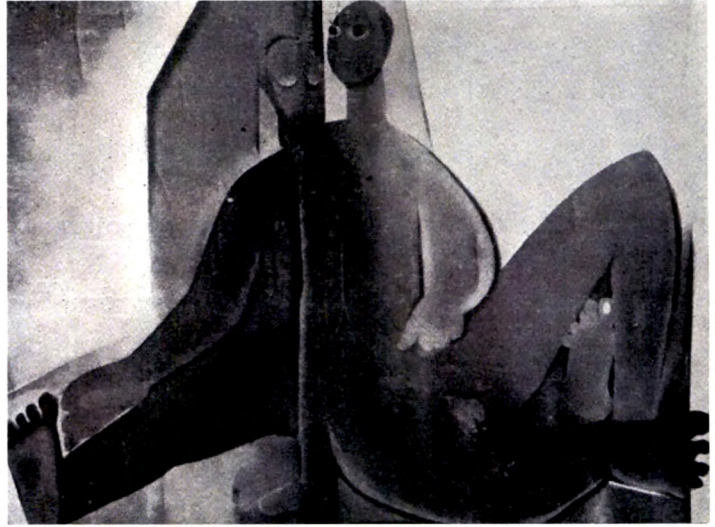
In the early 60's while artists elsewhere in India had begun a search for a national identity; regionally there was a combination of tendencies in that internationalism in a variety of figurative styles, which eventually tended towards abstraction; a figurative trajectory, which looked toward native inspiration. By the mid 70's the latter, i.e., regional focus would replace the internationalism. This range can be seen in the works of women artists. Yet, women artists find themselves in a shifting relationship to social formulations of patronage and the male stream / mainstream art.

In 1957 quite a few women artists completed studies in fine arts from the then Government College of Fine Arts and Architecture – Urmila Shaw, Siddiqua Bilgrami, Fatima Ahmed and Dasrath Kumari Mathur. Although, some of them had begun their professional practice in early 50s, i.e., Urmila Shaw and Dasharth kumari Mathur, a little later in the early 60s, more women entered the field. Among them were Usha Shankar and Farukh Rifaquat. These artists preferred the diverse possibilities of internationalism.

While, Laxma Goud, still groping with subject less paintings of Klee like landscapes and Surya Prakash following his training under Ram Kumar embarked upon abstraction, Urmila Shaw was rather firm with figuration and her works seem to be more autobiographical.

16. The A.P.L.K.A purchased the works of artists who held one-woman-shows and also those works which have been awarded in the group events such as the annual exhibitions, so also did the H.A.S. Following the closure of the Academy its collection of art works has been taken over by P.S.T.U which was founded by N.T.Rama Rao, the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

047. Urmila Shaw, *The Two*, 1959-'60, approx. 130x60 cm. oil on canvas.



Both Urmila Shaw and Usha Shankar were students of Vidya Bhusan. Between 1959 and 1961 Urmila taught art in Punjab. She held solo presentations and also exhibited her works in the group events during the decade. In the group shows Laxma Goud, Surya Prakash, Gowrisankar, Devraj etc., participated along with her. Urmila worked in a figurative mode often experimenting with different varieties of form. From early to mid 60s she was inclined toward formal exploration. Now let us look at one of her work of this period titled, "*The two*" (*Illus.047*) the human figures are seated and seem to be "cut outs" resembling synthetic cubist works of Picasso and Matisse via the playful arrangement of design like forms.

By mid 60's Urmila began to assimilate the stylistics of Byzantine art¹⁷ and that of the early 20th century French artist, Georges Rouault.¹⁸ In Urmila's work "*The flower*," (*Illus.048*) in the collection of H.A.S, is exemplary of this style. The crowned figure holds a flower and is set against a fortress. An emphatic combination of the traditional *Padmapani* and Christ is, perhaps, brought out in this work.¹⁹ The selection of the theme



048. Urmila Shaw, *The Flower* 1964, approx. 90x60 cm. egg tempera.

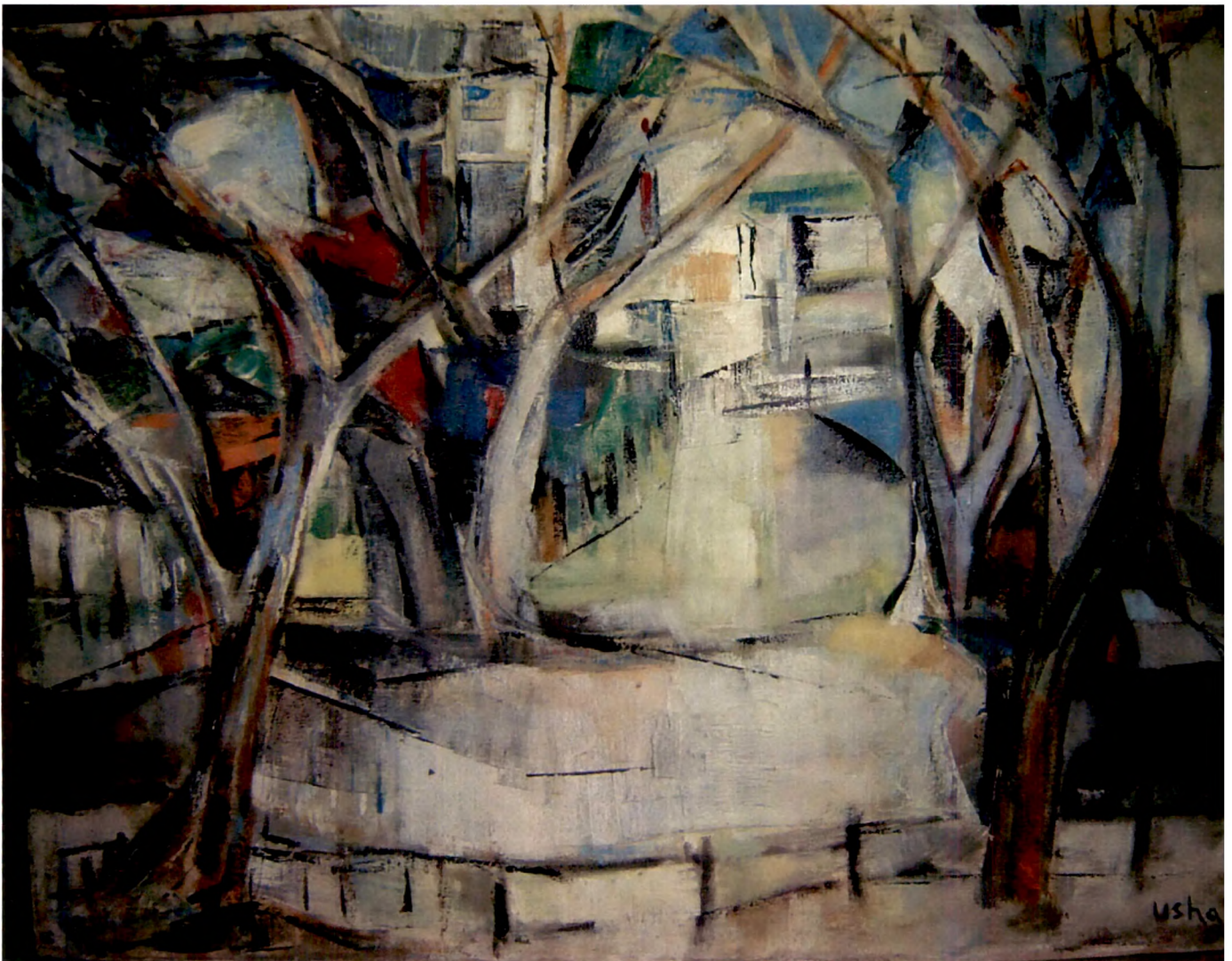
17. Urmila Shaw had specialized in mosaic murals from erstwhile Yugoslavia, where she had the opportunity to see Byzantine art examples.
18. In this regard it is relevant to note that artist Badri Narayan, born in Hyderabad and settled in Bombay, also worked in a similar manner following Souza, participated in H.A.S exhibitions.
19. Urmila worked on the Ajanta mural copying project assigned by Govt. of India to Vidya Bhusan; She is a Christian.

is gender sensitive. The female “self” in a way identifies with the flower and is held in the hands of a spiritual figure and is also protected by the fortress behind. The large, open eyes also return the viewer’s gaze.

Urmila was a well informed and a self-conscious artist who was aware of the trends happening around her.

Usha Shankar (1929 -1998) specialized in portraiture during her college studies. She chose to work in an egg – tempera medium. Usha concentrated on genre themes

049. Usha Shankar, Untitled, ca.1962, 82x66 cm, oil on canvas. Collection: P.S.T.University





050. Dasrath Mathur, *Still Life*, ca.1965, 70x80 cm, oil on canvas.



051. Dasrath Mathur, *Painting No: 1*, ca. 1966, 75x90 cm, oil on canvas.

like academic landscapes, still life and portraiture. Her works reflect her keen interest in thorough studies. She also developed very subtle colour sensibility. Usha Shankar's inspiration for landscape is via the postimpressionism in that Cezanne's principle of reduction of natural elements into basic and simplified forms can be traced in her works. This is one such landscape (*Illus.049*)

Another interesting earlier work in the H.A.S collection is a still life, which also won an award in the year 1960. The selection and judging committee of the society- that already was supported by the academy and very much familiar with its policies- comprised usually of male artists with at least one or two from outside the state and at least one local male artist.

Between 1959 and 1965 works of women artists, which received awards were more often than not such works as still lives and 'landscapes'. Artists who worked in similar genres did the selection and judging then²⁰.

Dasrath Kumari Mathur (b.1935) presented works in-group events and solo shows during early to late 60s. Like most of her artist friends she too painted landscapes and still lives. Her still lives of this period were semi-realistic. In one of the works in the collection of the academy (*Illus.050*) it is combined with the design aesthetics of post-impressionism. Dasrath wanted to make a mark as a painter in a quite different manner. This is expressed in her drawing technique, for instance, in this landscape (*Illus.051*) (A.P.L.K.A) she applies

20. This included N.S.Bendre, K.K.Hebbar and Vidya Bhusan, P.T.Reddy etc., see exhibition catalogues.



052. Fatima Ahmed, *Still Life*, 1962, approx. 130x60 cm, oil on canvas.

the paint on the canvas and then by erasing through a pencil she inscribes the drawing. The erasure or absence in this way gets a visible presence.

Fathima Ahmed presented her works at the United States Information Services.²¹ She was the first woman artist from Hyderabad to have had a solo show in 1962. Fatima's works of this period were genre paintings like landscapes; still lifes (*Illus.052*) etc., several such works by different artists were brought by the academy. Fatima during this time began to experiment with different media and varied modern western styles like Cubism, Fauvism etc., She was awarded a grant by the academy to stay and practice in Bombay for about six months.²²

All these artists were then working in internationalist figurative mode. However, by mid 60's there was a shift in the dominant trend, it so happened that, in the annual show of the H.A.S, artist/teacher K.G. Subramanyan²³ and E.Schletsinger,²⁴ were invited for selection and judging. Subramanyan had explored figurative folk

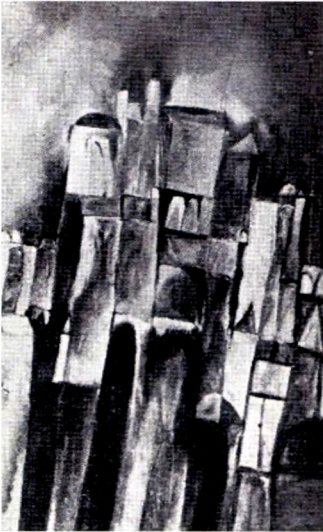
21. Opcit no:4

22. She later decided to live in Bombay.

23. Subrahmanyam is an artist/teacher/writer. He studied arts at Shantiniketan and later joined MSU, Baroda as faculty.

24. Schletsinger was one of the war émigré who came to India in the early 1940s. He was one among those who influenced Progressive Artists Group of Bombay.

053. P.V.JanakiRam, *Head of Christ*, 1964, approx. 60x 45x 10 cm, bronze relief.



054. LaxmaGoud, Untitled, 1964-65, approx. 30x45 cm, lithograph.



054a. Suryaprakash, *Painting no-1*, 1964, approx. 120x 90 cm, oil on canvas.

decorative traditions in his murals of early 60s and later, however, around mid 60s his painting experiments bordered on the internationalist abstraction. Then, it is not just a coincidence that Madras school artists, who were working in the former idiom and local artists, who took up the latter mode, (*Illus.053-54, 54a*) were given awards.²⁵ This Internationalist abstraction displaced and pushed to margins many women moving toward artistic maturity in figurative styles.

However, some women artists who were inclined much earlier, between late 50s and mid 60s, towards an abstract way of expression found it difficult to cope with the then dominant figurative mode.

In this regard, Siddiqua Bilgrami had a keen interest for abstraction. She had been to Italy on a fellowship where she worked at in the studio of a contemporary Italian abstractionist and held discussions with Venturi, a historian.²⁶ She also presented her works in an exhibition at Rome. This trip strengthened her interest for abstract mode of expression further. She was the earliest woman artist from Andhra Pradesh who had

25. Laxma Goud ,Surya Prakash and Gouri Shankar whose works were completely abstract to semi-abstract were awarded.

26. As told by Siddiqua.



055. Siddiqua Bilgrami, *As Hazardous as to Climb a Creeper*, 1963, approx. 55x75 cm, oil on canvas. Collection: Syed Ali, Mississauga, Canada.



056. Farrukh Rifaquat, *Painting No3*, 1965-66, approx. 120x60 cm, oil on canvas.

moved to abstraction and by the same token was also a loner who had chosen to be different. But, due to this, her work survived only on the fringes of the dominant figurative trends of Internationalism. In this regard her situation can be compared to that of Nasreen Mohammadi, an artist whose works were recognised very recently and written by Geeta Kapur. However, for Siddiqua writings-review of exhibition²⁷-did not contribute toward recognition of her talent, instead they had a negative impact upon her career.

Some of her reactions to this in amicable ambience is perhaps best reflected in a work (*Illus.055*) which is aptly titled as “*As Hazardous as to Climb a Creeper*” the resultant side effect to the person who climbs or to the creeper is portrayed in such swift and swirling marks so as to bring out confusion clearly.

By this time around, certain other women artists also began to adapt to the new trend of abstraction. In another work she brings out the crisis faced by her life and the nation in 1965, the war, this referred to the India-Pak war of the same year and to the turn that her life was to take after marriage to a Pakistani army official which was decided at the same time.

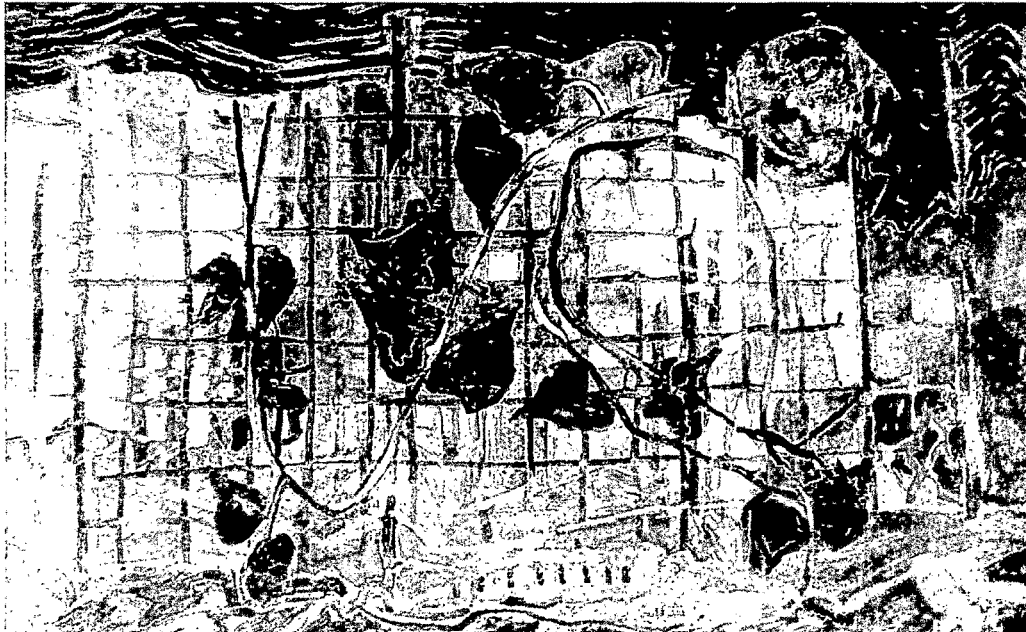
27. Jagdish Mittal, exhibition review, L.K.C No.3, New Delhi, 1963, p 37.

Among other artists who took up abstraction at this time were Usha Shankar and Farukh Rifaquat. Certain artists who did not have any formal training in an art school such as Malathi Varadarajan also worked in abstraction.

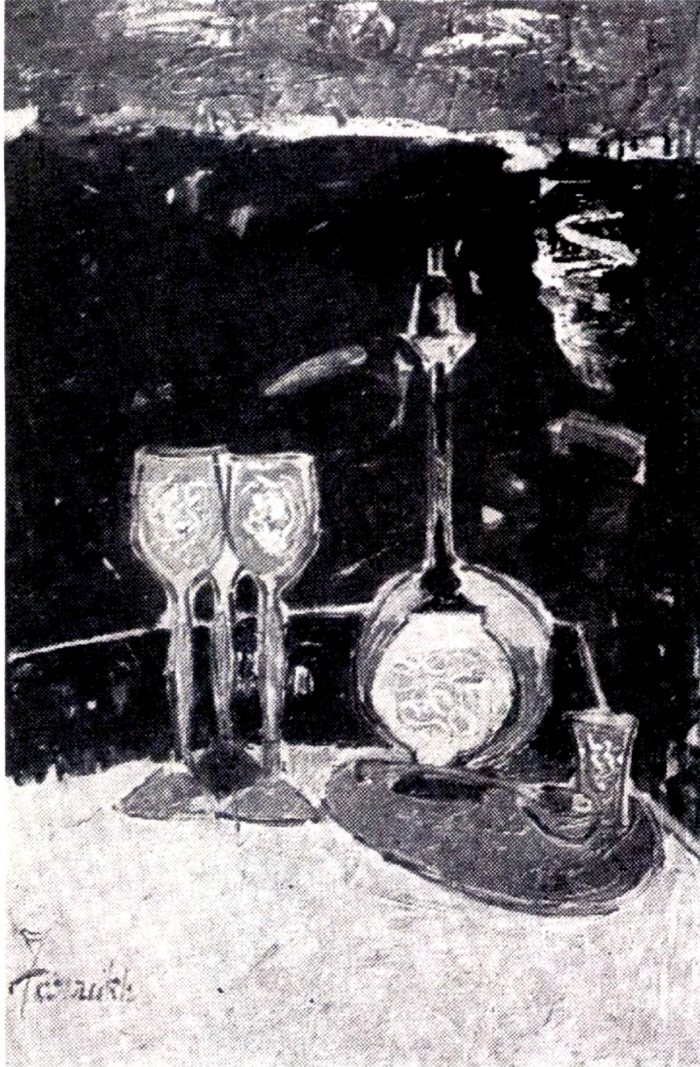
Farukh Rifaquat had been painting landscapes and still lives consistently till about 1966, later her work turned to abstraction. One of her very early abstract work called '*painting no 3*' (Illus.056) (H.A.S 1966) won a silver medal at the H.A.S annual exhibition. Farukh brings out a highly textured surface. The work is auto referential and therefore has an existence independent of any reference or representation.

Another work '*painting no.32*' (Illus.057) done in 1968 follows in the series, which is indicated by the numbering of works. However, compared to '*Painting no.3*', this work represents certain motifs like a creeper set perhaps against a glass, the reflection of the objects in this way produces certain abstract colour zones. Later, by late 60s and early 70s she took up nature-based abstraction.

Farukh liked to experiment with different unconventional media. For instance, she used felt sketch pens for landscapes and she printed on cloth etc. By about 1963 she began to work on cloth and explore printing possibilities of batik or the tie and die method.



057. Farrukh Rifaquat, *Painting No: 32*, ca. 1968, approx. 120x60 cm, oil on canvas.



058. Smt Farrukh Rifaquat, *Construction*, 1964, approx. 30x45 cm, batik print.

Her assays were successful in that she exhibited them and also won acclaim. Her batik still life called "*construction*" (Illus.058) shows her fascination for the objects that the artist sees around her, such as, the long necked wine bottles and thin stems of wine glasses etc. All batik works of Farukh are products of technical excellence. She has, in this way, combined her artistic acumen with the skill based technique or craft.

In the post- independence phase, art and craft have come together, in a sense that craft category is elaborated to become art. In this regard in Madras by the mid 60s, K.C.S.Panikkar spearheaded the project of making use of crafts for a living, by the artists.²⁸ This endeavor was aimed at introducing modern design to day-to-day artifacts or functional objects.

Later, in the year 1966 and 1967, in Andhra Pradesh, a major batik show was financed by the A.P.L.K.A. and Jagdish Mittal proposed this event. He had put up a batik unit where Laxma Goud, Surya

Prakash, Devraj, Gouri Shankar and Farukh used to learn and experiment .He took charge of the entire event.²⁹ Eventually, in the exhibition a fairly large section of works were of the male artists mentioned above along with meager three or four batiks of Farukh. In

28. During early 1960s, K.C.S.Panikkar envisioned an artists co-operative community where, as an alternative mode, arts and crafts could be practiced together. An artist handicrafts union was formed in 1964 and a batik expo was held. The idea of an artists commune materialized eventually by April 1966 when Chola Mandal artists village was formally established. 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.

29. From selecting the artists and their works to co-ordinating and taking care of sales etc.,

Farukh's case these works in no way represent the entire gamut of batiks that she had executed consistently from early 60s. This is just an instance of not only under representation of women's work in patriarchal culture but also of its tendency of selective accommodation of women and then the systematic negation and/or sidelining of their histories. By highlighting mere participation contributes to the detriment of many a woman artist by allotting to them a position both in and out of mainstream at once.

The Seventies:

The seventies have a special significance for women as it was the beginning of the women's movement in the west and in India of a second phase of women's movement³⁰ In Hyderabad the progressive organization of women, which became a major force, between 1973 and 1975, in curbing violence against women and their humiliation.³¹

Efforts of middle class feminist scholars from the cities in social sciences have addressed issues of women. In this regard Suzie Tharu and K. Lalita mention thus:

Issues related to family violence, the law, the household, health care, education, the media and women's work and working conditions and have set up ground breaking critique at every level.³²

Also in 1974, the Publication of "*Towards Equality: Report on the committee on the status of women in India*", ironically revealed a well documented account of the actual inequality in terms of women's access to development, education, health, economic and political status and the law.³³

In the field of visual arts the seventies saw a number of women artists emerging on national level. In Andhra Pradesh some women artists of the 50s and 60s continued to be active practitioners and a few more promising women entered the field. Among them were Malathi Varadarajan ,Kavitha Deuskar, S.Vani ,Anjani , Rekha Rao and Geetha Reddy.

30. The first was during 1920s and 1930s

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

32. Ibid, p.101

33. Ibid



059. Malathi Varadarajan, *Chairoscuro*, 1975, approx. 90x135 cm, oil on canvas.



060. Malathi Varadarajan, *Flemings*, 1977, approx. 120x90 cm, oil on canvas.

However, contrary to the expectations that the women's liberation movements, feminist consciousness and efforts create, the seventies were not promising for women artists of Andhra Pradesh.

Let us examine the status of women in the field of art during 70s in terms of patronage from the APLKA and HAS.

The A.P.L.K.A., provided opportunities also to artists who were not formally educated in fine arts. One such artist was Malathi Varadarajan.³⁴ She took up creative activity much late in her life. She chose to work in the internationalist abstraction during the 70s. Her abstraction was more a product of simplification and reduction of motifs chosen. This work called '*Chiaroscuro*' (*Illus.059*) is quite literal at first glance but the contours of the dark area bring to mind certain animal forms, perhaps, a deer. In the manner of Kandinsky's '*fish form*', which acknowledges the separateness of the fish and its form in painting. So is this work of Malathi, which exists almost as an independent reality of the deer.

Another similar work is the '*Flamingo's*', (*Illus.060*) which brings out the abstract quality of the effect brought by looking at a flock of flamingos from close quarters. The

34. She learnt various techniques of painting from Subash Babu, an artist.

interjecting swift lines are drawn over the painted surface, thereby bringing out a linear pattern closer to the Madras variety of abstraction of this period.

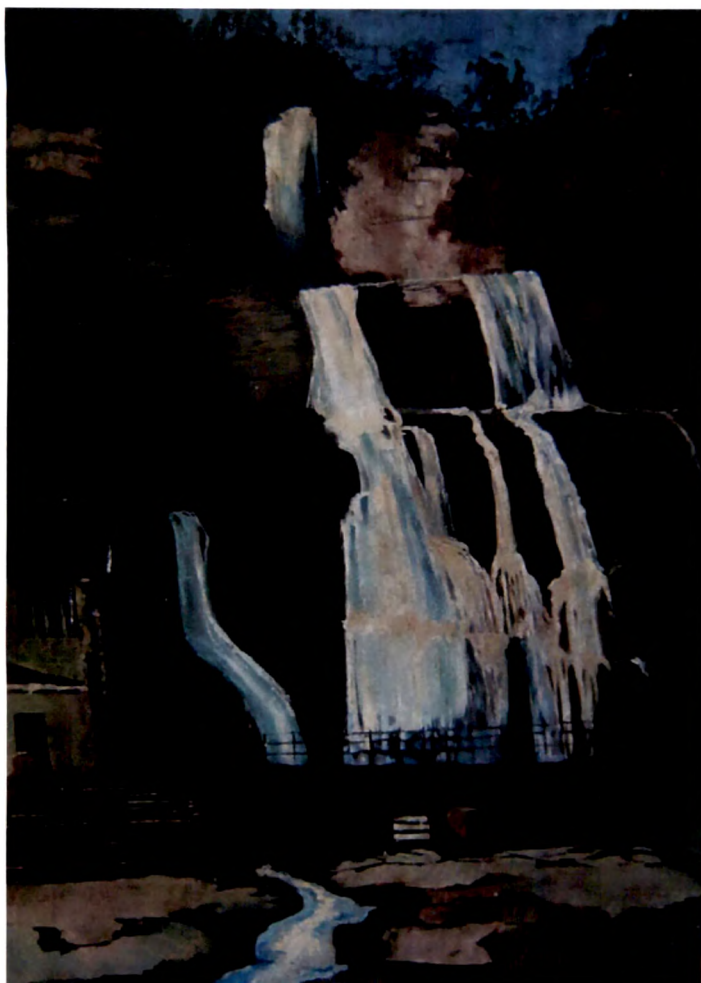
Malathi's work was well in tune with the variety of abstraction that continued in Hyderabad in the 70's. She was active and enthusiastic about her art. She had an unrelenting urge to paint, due to which she continued to paint till the end of her life. However, for Malathi, a woman who did not have a formal education, particularly in the postcolonial times, appreciation and acceptance from the artist/critic circle was difficult. While for the 'master' artists lack of formal training was not a barrier. On the contrary this could be used for their advantage to argue in favor of their struggle, for instance, in the case of artists like M.F. Hussain or Badri Narayan or local artists like Doraiswamy etc. In this connection it would be worthy to note that, among the artists whose monographs have been published by the APLKA is Doraiswamy. There is no parallel to this instance in the case of women artists of Andhra Pradesh.

Although, Malathi did not have art school training, her work can be compared to that of her art school trained fellow artists, such as, Vidya Bhusan , Gouri Shankar, Surya Prakash, P.A. Katti, Vaikuntam, P.T.Reddy, Devraj, Anjani Reddy, who were also working in semi-abstract to abstract mode in the decade of 70's.

Another artist who emerged in this milieu of abstraction is Anjani Reddy. She completed her studies from the fine arts college in 1975. Inspired by teachers like Vidya Bhusan and other artists working in abstraction, her paintings of these formative years of her career were abstract, although, Anjani did not particularly wish to do away with figurative references. In this work "*Fire by Moon Light*", (Illus.061) which is in the collection of H.A.S, the title adds to the kind of romantic expression of a nature-based abstraction.

061. Kum.Anjani Reddy, *Fire by Moon Light*,
1976, approx. 120x 100 cm, oil on canvas.





062. S.Vani Devi, *Water Falls*, 1980, 124x94 cm, oil on canvas.

Similar was the abstraction of S. Vani Devi, she too completed her studies in fine arts from the local college. She was fascinated by the possibilities of developing this to landscapes. This work is a remarkable example of such an endeavor (*Illus.062*) (A.P.L.K.A coll). The cascade and the adjacent rocks, foliage is all treated as broad, bold bands of subtle colours, which blend harmoniously.

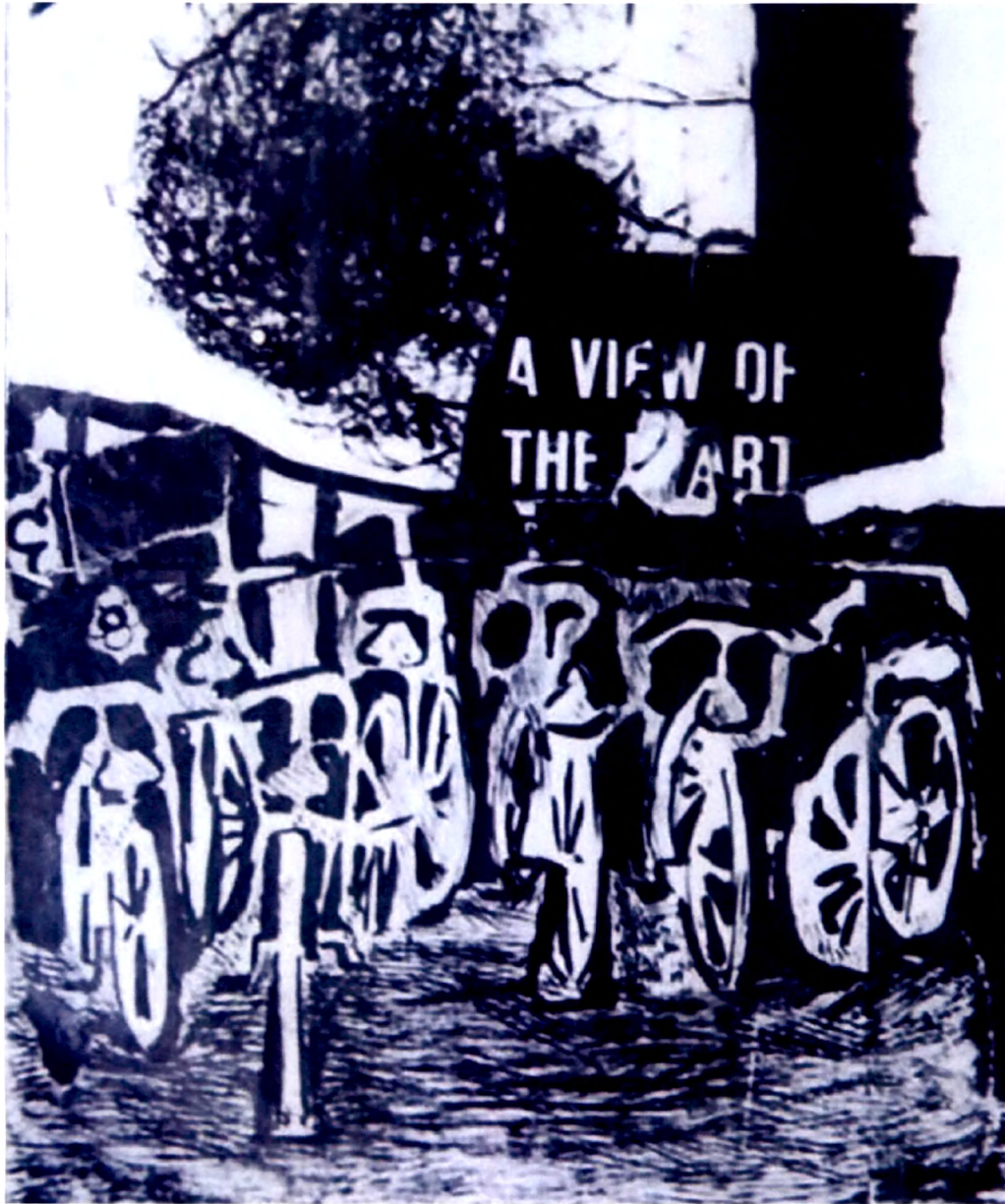
Later, during 80s she also made self-portraits as part of narratives of her childhood stories. But, most of all she is known for her landscapes.

The A.P.L.K.A from mid 60s onwards provided scholarships for students to pursue higher studies in fine arts outside the state. Utilizing this grant many artists went to different directions. Many artists chose to go to Baroda to study under the guidance of K.G.Subramanyan, and a few others went to Delhi to study under the guidance of Ramkumar.³⁵

Kavitha Deuskar got the opportunity by 1966 to study at M.S.University, Baroda. She chose to train in mural studies. Kavitha recalls with pride that she was the first woman student to have taken up murals. This is what she mentions when asked about the reaction of students and staff at the faculty upon her enrollment into mural studies: "They would ask as to why a frail woman like me chose to study murals. For they believed that it suited only men with muscles and it was not meant for women."³⁶ Eventually, with her efforts, Kavitha, not only proved them wrong but also perhaps surprised them.

35. Ramkumar was known for his Parisian variety of internationalism

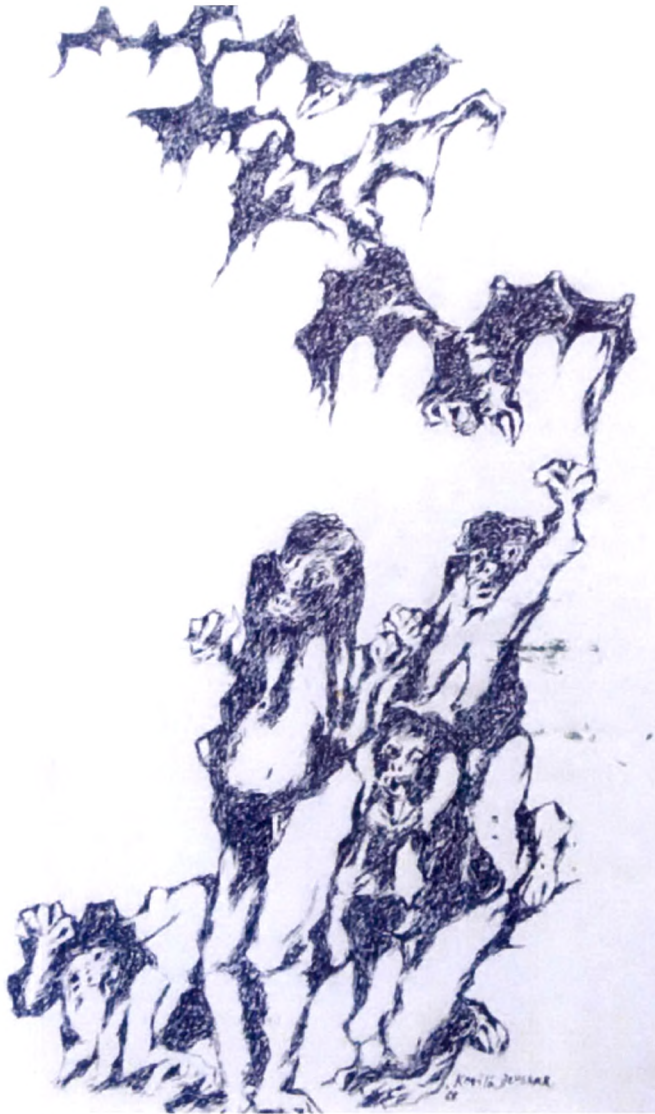
36. Revealed during a discussion with Kavitha.



063. Kavitha Deuskar, *The View of Art*, 1968, approx. 6x10 ft, Mural.

Among the murals that she had executed in Baroda one major work was near the cycle stand. (*Illus.063*) Kavitha did very many studies for this work. Following a nod of approval from the teacher K.G.Subramanyan, she successfully completed the site-specific mural with a slogan "*The view of art*" written on it. However, this is also to be treated as a visual as it gels with the composition.

However, even a fairly recent book such as "*Contemporary Art in Baroda*" edited by a well known artist/teacher Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, does not do enough justice with relation to recording histories of women. For instance, Kavitha Deuskar does not find a space in the book, where as, her contemporaries Laxma Goud, D. Devraj, D.L.N.Reddy are all given a big coverage. As a matter of fact Devraj and Kavitha had studied at the same time (i.e.,) between 1966-1968.



064. Kavitha Deuskar, *Doom Series*, 1968, approx. 30x25 cm, pen and ink on paper.

On her return from Baroda and later during the 80s she executed very many murals in and outside Hyderabad. Kavitha's visual language, following her studies at Baroda in early 70s, was closer to that of Laxma Goud and Devraj of that time. In this regard all three of them had adapted the surrealist principle.³⁷

After Baroda returned Laxma Goud had begun using surrealist- expressionist imagery by this time, so also did Devraj. Kavitha's usage of this idiom was very different from that of her fellow men.

For instance, this work (*Illus.064*) is the beginning of a long series called 'doom' (A.P.L.K.A catalogue) Kavitha portrays an owl, for Hindus particularly, this bird is an ill omen and harbinger of doom. For Kavitha, this particular phase in life was a difficult

one with bereavements in the family and an uncertain future. One night, in this dark phase of her life she had a bad dream of an owl. She took this as a subject in her works as she had a vivid memory of it and in fact could not dispense with it. This attitude of tapping the unconscious through dream imagery definitely corresponds to surrealism but is far from being erotic like that of Laxma Goud. It might have a tinge of horror even as the images tend to haunt.

37. They had seen Jeeram Patel, who was part of group 1890, working in surrealist manner.

065. Kavitha Deuskar, *Doom Series*, 1968, approx. 35x 30 cm, pen and ink on paper.

For instance, this work which seems like a combination of the nightmarish quality of some of Goya's engravings and the horror quality of some post war (WWI) expressionist works (fig with bats) with imagery like castles and caves, which are empty and inapproachable. (*Illus.065*)

The resurrection of figuration in modern Indian art occurred between mid to late 70s. The search for new ways of representation to define ones national identity became a serious engagement with many a artist throughout India during this time, even as most of them wished to move away from the western cultural imperialism of internationalism. Andhra Pradesh was no exception.³⁸ In this context, Kavitha had a strong figurative style through which she incorporated local elements in the early 70s. She soon began to assimilate the proceedings of the indigenist argument (*Illus.066*). She then turned toward the environment in which she grew, the people she identified with and their life style – the Hyderabadis.

But what did Hyderabad give her? Did her status improve during the decade of women's liberation movements?

38. Laxma Goud, P.T.Reddy, D.L.N.Reddy etc.,



066. Kavitha Deuskar, *Untitled*, ca. 1985, approx. 55x75 cm, colour pencil on paper.

Here is what an art critic writes about her work:

Kavitha works on a strong drawing base, and it seems she has to work through long hot Indian summers to free her figures from the powerful influence of Laxma Goud, one of the finest graphic artists in the country. In her hands the slightly elongated heads and necklines and the taut torsos, so characteristic of Laxma Goud become rather stilted and wooden³⁹

The comment makes Kavitha (read woman) merely skill full and her works lacking originality, while Laxma Goud (read male) is not only powerful due to his artistic greatness but is also inimitable even as she attempts. Such remarks about women's art and its comparison with the works of male artists is neither new nor it is exclusively the attitude of Indian art critics. Feminist re-reading of art history has brought out very many evidences to show as to how the expectations about gender affect the ways we literally see works of art.⁴⁰ However, Kavitha reacted sharply to this comment by defending her stance that the proximity of styles of her work and that of Laxma Goud's was due to commonality by way of art education in Hyderabad and Baroda which is the only fact that connects their stylistic affinities. Kavitha like other women artists, slowly but surely became aware and conscious of the operations of gender discrimination within the social structure and the artistic practices, through incidents like this and more that contributed to this effect. These not only happened in the art circle but also within the art institute.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Kavitha, has only moved forward in her art practice without letting these hindrances effect her.

39. Santo Dutta, *A Coat Of Many Colours*, New Delhi, 1993

40. Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997, p 16, 22.

41. Kavitha lost an opportunity to go abroad on a fellowship as the college authorities(male) refused to sanction leave. Also her personal ties, that of the family and marriage were incompatible.

During the 70s there were also other women who completed studies from the local art college, such as, Geeta Reddy and Tahera and many more like them, who wished to pursue a career as artists, but, could not do much due to familial and societal barriers that came their way. We shall examine some of these factors in the next chapter.

Though, women of the 60s and 70s help shaping the development of modern art their stature as women artists within a patriarchal system that pervaded their social, personal life was unequal to men artists. This inequality in professional field is well reflected in the patronage extended by the H.A.S or A.P.L.K.A or other organizations.

However, the extent to which women artists of these decades could subvert these situations and utilize the structure to their use can only be witnessed via their active engagement in their profession, to which the male guardians had to bow down and grant awards. These blurbs of their achievements are the only source of tracing parallel modernisms within modern art of Andhra Pradesh which otherwise pushes them to the margins or tries to obliterate their histories.

