

CHAPTER-IV  
Ornament as Rhetoric of Regional Aesthetics:  
**Andhra Pradesh Art, 80s and 90s.**



CHAPTER-IV

## Ornament as Rhetoric of Regional Aesthetics: **Andhra Pradesh Art, 80s and 90s.**

The regional focus that had begun from about the mid 70's in the modern art of Andhra Pradesh got further intensified in the 80s and 90s.<sup>1</sup> An aesthetic that emerged from the mainstream has a distinct bent toward the 'ornamentation' and 'decoration'. The representations or signifiers of this mainstream art are: 'woman' images, which are often embellished with adornments; floral and other patterns to depict clothing; animal motifs and background landscapes, which are decorative.

The word representation conveys that it is a cultural construct that shapes and is conditioned by 'social and historical cognitive modes'.<sup>2</sup> For at the very beginning of women's movement, the critique of representations of women in art was taken up.<sup>3</sup> According to Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, this critique is:

[b]ased upon the recognition that representation is a crucial area for women's oppression and liberation.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, my aim in the first section of this chapter is to critique the representations of images of women in the mainstream regional aesthetics that contributes in organizing the visual field: in the construction of notions of 'femininity' in the present context of globalization. Here, these representations, which house such a profusion of ornamentation, particularly with relation to 'woman' images, are taken up for analysis. As a first step, the socio-economic factors contributing to the formation of such aesthetics are analyzed.

1 In other regions, such as, Madras, this project turned to a new phase of internationalism. See, 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.

2. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p. 116.

3. See Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, Routledge, London and New York, 1988. Griselda Pollock and Rosika Parker, *Framing Feminism: Art and Women's Movement, 1970-1985*, Pandora Press, London, 1987.

4. Ibid.

Women occupied dominant position as subject matter, particularly in the main stream art through the body of a woman. This rhetoric of self-representation was made possible in the 1980s and 90s. Representation of the 'feminine' marks the art practice of male artists in a different guise wherein the body of a woman is linked to profusion of ornamentation. In this equation one can stand for the other as a male appropriation of 'femininity'. However, women artists by and large disrupted this equation. In their resistance, I locate critical regionalism. Also, according to Jacqueline Rose, the very next step of feminist efforts, following the critique, has been the 'focus on women writers as counter history to dominant literary paradigms and preferences'.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, as a logical second step, the focus on women artists and their works attempts to open up regional aesthetics and bring out sexual inequalities with in the dominant mode. But, the move of this logical 'assertion' is politically complex. It runs the risk of: co-opting the work of women into the mainstream; the frequent conservative content in women's works consequent to internalization of patriarchal norm. Therefore, a mere celebration of women as artists is not the preoccupation here.

The idea is to bring out an affirmation, as Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan frames it:

.... as a political project that considers 'a difference of political voice' to be at stake leads to the idea of 'female aesthetic'. This aesthetic can take the form either of the 'assertion of a liberal conception of self-hood', or of the 'undoing, disintegration or negation of sexual and linguistic identity as such'.<sup>6</sup>

In the second section I attempt to trace the possibility of such a 'female aesthetic' via the representations in the works of women artists.

## Mainstream Aesthetics

### The Socio-Political Economic Context: Global and the Local

For the factors that contributed toward and gave currency to the rise of the mainstream aesthetics we also need to look into the larger socio-political and economic contexts.

5. Ibid, p.119

6. Ibid, p.118

Changes in the central economic policies affect its peripheries. In the early 80's, following Indira Gandhi's return to power, a liberalization manifesto was introduced. This globalizing impulse ushered in a free market economy.

The 80s in the field of art (in New Delhi and Bombay, and in Andhra Pradesh) saw a return to figuration (Place for People show). These varied developments were definitely interlinked; as Ashish Rajadhyaksha rightly pointed out that "the Place for People" argument around figuration made sense mainly in its opposition to the claimed internationalism of formalist abstraction. And it was precisely this brand of a soft internationalism dominated by western economies that stood poised for take off with the entry of 'free-market' economic comodification to India.<sup>7</sup> The consequence of this liberalization was felt by the art world for the first time in 1982, when a festival of India was organized in major centers of the world, such as Paris, Moscow, and the U.S.A. These festivals were aimed at creating markets for 'Indian' goods on an international platform and to encourage tourism. Even as the festivals effectively boosted the 'hegemonic frontier of national culture,' for the artists who had negotiated their Indianness during the indegenist phase of the 70's via the local/ region, these developments proposed a further consolidation of regional focus.

In Andhra Pradesh, incidentally, this was the time when a regional political party, Telugu Desam<sup>8</sup> came to power. For the artist community, N.T.Ramarao's rule brought about a serious loss by ordering the closure of the Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Academy in 1985. A report presented to him on the working of the APLKA by V.R. Narla<sup>9</sup> highlighted the corrupt practices of a few senior officials and their preference to promote artists of the Telangana region. These were the causes for the closure of the Academy. For women artists particularly, that end of the APLKA sent a note of despair, as until now they were at least free to exhibit their works in open competitions, and also found patronage from it to a certain extent. The Academy's loss was a gain to the newly founded Telugu University.<sup>10</sup>

7. Aashish Rajadhyaksha, *The Last Decade, Contemporary Art in Baroda*, Ed. Gulam Sheikh, Tulika publication, New Delhi, 1997

8. N.T.Rama Rao founded Telugu Desam party in 1982 and eventually in 1984 the party was voted to power.

9. Narla Venkateshwara Rao (1908-1985) is a telugu language writer, journalist and politician. He was a Rajya Sabha member twice. He wrote a sakatam in Telugu along with several other books. He wrote the report on the workings of the APLKA after thorough scrutiny into the internal affairs of the academy.

10. Following the closure of the academy most of its funds were diverted to Telugu University, which was founded in the year 1985.

Many organizations that were aided by funds from the academy, particularly the HAS, were also affected. Although there were other international cultural centers, their contribution towards patronage was not much until recent times. However, lack of strong state patronage gave way to private galleries, which sprouted in the early 1990s and some even got well established. This was possible due to the new economic policy that was carried forward in the Rajiv Gandhi era, which set a platform for internal finance capital via acculturation.<sup>11</sup>

As an effect of this the prices of contemporary art works surged, though this boom itself did not last long. The 'figurative' trend was resurrected on a national level and the regional focus endured in Andhra Pradesh following these developments.

### The Construction of the 'Feminine':

Many an artist who occupies significant positions in the mainstream has resolved their identity quest via regional concerns.<sup>12</sup> The questions, such as identity and integrity, often hinge on, as Foucault says 'the truth of our being'. At the same instance, we know from literature on the subject that such identities, as Jeffrey Weeks points out, are:

.... historically and culturally specific, that they are selected from a host of possible social identities, that they are not necessary attributes of particular sexual drives or desires, and that they are not essential- that is naturally pre-given – aspects of our personality.<sup>13</sup>

This explanation leads us to the paradox inherent in the question of sexual identity. In an essay, "Globalization, Sexuality and the Visual Field", Mary E. John brings out a discussion on questions of sexuality, which she says invariably revolves around

11. Opcit no:4

12. They are Laxma Goud, Vaikuntam, D.L.N. Reddy, later, C.Jagdish, Ravinder Reddy and a host of others and women artists like Kavitha Deuskar and Anjani Reddy.

13. Jeffrey Weeks, 'Questions of Identity', *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, Tavistock Publications, London, New York, 1987. p.31

heterosexuality.<sup>14</sup> She takes up the field of visual representation from media as a site for investigating its significance, with relation to questions of sexuality in the context of globalization. She writes thus:

In its simplest formulation, the difference between the sexes has been associated with visual processes- to be sexualized as a 'woman' is to be objectified as an image to be looked at, while the power of 'man' is in his gaze, the pleasure and anxiety generated by the desire of looking. The media's new found power plays a disproportionate role in organizing our visual field, and, in the present context, is itself one of the hallmarks of globalization.<sup>15</sup>

The following is an analysis of contemporary mainstream art in Andhra Pradesh, as a visual field that foregrounds sexuality via female images. If we acknowledge that femaleness is constructed and that the terms of this can be sought in dominant ideological modes (patriarchy and capitalism); that what is at stake is 'the investment of desire and the politics of control that representation both signifies and serves',<sup>16</sup> then the project of the feminist critic ought to be:

... 'the critique of male discourse' born of a 'radical distrust of representation which allies itself with a semiotic critique of the sign'. What is required here is an alertness to the political process by which such representations becomes naturalized and ultimately coercive in structuring women's self-representation.<sup>17</sup>

This analysis attempts an ideological critique mounted against the construction of a 'regional womanhood' in Andhra Pradesh during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These representations serve the construction of this regional flavor of womanhood which is a product of a desired and asserted, however, not actual, cultural continuity.<sup>18</sup> These visual processes inform and perpetuate gender- power relations.

14. Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds., *A Question of Silence: Sexual Economies of Modern India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1998, p. 388.

15. Ibid, p. 372.

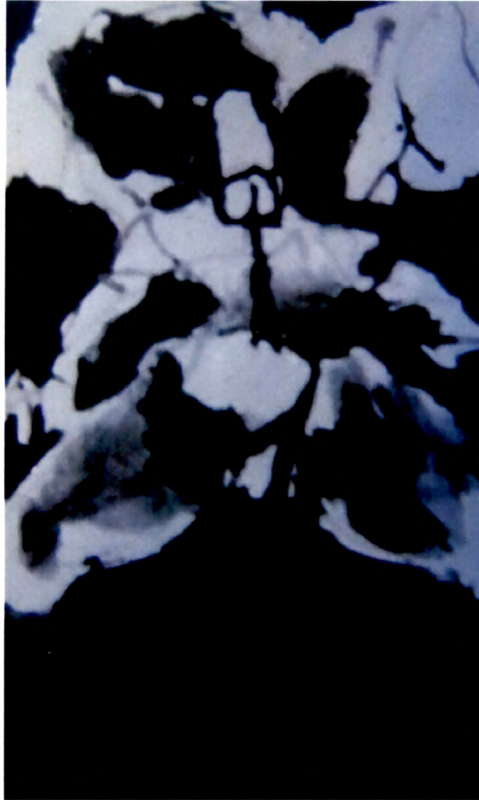
16. Op cit no: 2, p.129

17. Ibid.

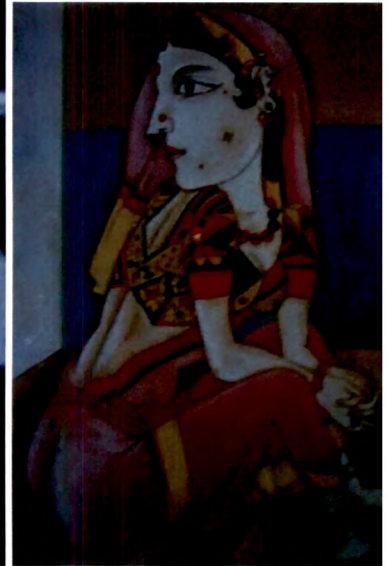
18 Ibid.



067a. Laxma Goud, Untitled, 1971, approx. 28x38 cm, etching aqua tint.



067b-vaikuntam, Untitled, ca 1975, approx. 28x38 cm, pen and ink in paper.



068. Laxma Goud, Untitled, 1995, approx. 30x25 cm, watercolour on paper.

### Regional as Exotic: Aesthetics of Power through Female Images of Male Artists

Male artists like Laxma Goud, Vaikuntam and Ravinder Reddy are particularly known for their female images. These artists and many others have explored and explicitly expressed their erotic fantasies in their works from about early 70's and through out 80's and in the 90's as well, for instance, (*Illus.067a, b*).

Laxma Goud, during the 80s, following Picasso and K.G. Subramanyan, constructed female images as objects of viewing pleasure. For instance, this work (*Illus.068*) is of a seated woman whose neck is turned 360 degrees to her back. The torso shows the front and back at once. And this 'woman' does not know or takes care to not know about the viewer's gaze. This display of sexuality, especially of women's bodies or body parts, promotes the desirability of female body as a particular commodity in the wake of global consumerism.

Vaikuntam's work is reckoned through his voluptuous Telangana women, a single term that explains the sexual appeal of a woman to a man, who desires large breasts and

069. Vaikuntam, Untitled, ca.1985, approx. 43x34 cm, acrylic on paper.

heavy hips. (*Illus.069*) Here, woman is seen more as a sexual object. Almost in all of Vaikuntam's recent or old works women have a very remote gaze. These women threaten by this flowy and uncontrolled sexuality and therefore are all the more desirable.

This combination of desire and fear through female images is also seen early in the oeuvre of Ravinder Reddy. The phallic and organic or erotic motifs abound in his works of the 80s. By the 90s he began focusing on 'woman' images. This is one such image, which is emblematic of his desire to express through sexually charged female forms (*Illus.070*). The term 'erotic' is not used here in its simplistic universal sense but as a culture-specific category that is ideological in nature.

The erotica in modern art, both in the West and here, is more often than not about 'power and supremacy of men over women'.<sup>19</sup>

One more predominant concern of the contemporary mainstream artists is the flair for prettiness and decoration of female images in their works. Are these artists not bringing out conflicting tendencies within their sexual identities?



070-Ravinder Reddy, *Woman*1995, 1995-96, painted polyester resin

19. Carol Duncan, "The Aesthetics of Power in Modern Erotic Art", *Heresies* no. 1, January 1977.

072a. Vaikuntam, *Lacchi*,  
ca.1985, 60x75 cm,  
charcoal on paper.



071. Laxma Goud, *Untitled*, 1971, approx. 34x22 cm, etching aqua tint.



From about late 70s and early 80s, Laxma Goud and Vaikuntam began to embellish their works (*Illus.071-72a*). A whole range of the decorative are worked out through the ornaments for female protagonists, usually set in a rural /native background, the design and pattern on the textiles that the women wear in the work, the flat bright colors. Among other artists who became known for this kind of sensibility is C. Jagadish (*Illus.072b*). He also shared an interest in the erotic mode (*Illus.072c*).



072b. C Jagadish, *Three Society Women*, 1997,  
approx. 150x90x30 cm, paper mache.

The emergence of this kind of aesthetics makes sense when seen in relation to the new liberalization and the boom in the art market. But,

072c. C Jagadish, *Dorothy, Andrea, Flirt, Flora*, 1997,  
60x30x30 cm, paper mache.



073. K Rajaiah, *Defeat of Rama*, ca.1955, approx. 48x32 cm, watercolour on paper.

at the same time through such images of 'women' these artists work very much like ethnographers and project an anthropological gaze.

However, this decorative flourish in the modern art of Andhra Pradesh originated in the late 40s with artists like Rajaiah (from Telangana), Paidiraju (Andhra), P. Vijayalakshmi, P.L.N. Murthy etc., (*Illus.073-74*). These artists portrayed mythical or pastoral themes related to village life, taking cues from the folk decorative tradition following Jamini Roy. This influence reached Paidiraju, Vijayalakshmi and P.L.N Murthy via the Madras art school.

The decorative tendencies once again emerged when the inadequacies of Nehruvian mixed economy were felt in the 80s. Therefore, as has been observed in other cultural fields, such as film and literature, this was, as Susie Tharu and Lalita. K have said:

...the village as Indian reality ideology of the forties is reincarnated with a new twist as the village is rewritten, this time into a multinational world economy.<sup>20</sup>

Through this pre-occupation with beautification not only female sexuality is controlled and made available but also 'femininity' is encoded as physical charm'.<sup>21</sup>

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

21. Op cit no: 14



074. A Paidiraju, *Pula Mala*, ca. 1960, approx. 135x105 cm, oil on canvas.

## Stereotypical Femininity: Links to the Traditions of Decoration

The mainstream art in Andhra Pradesh of 80s and 90s should be seen in the context of late modernist or, perhaps, postmodernist capitalist order where the commodities artists put up on sale in the world market are these decorative pictures, mainly, of “womanhood” that contribute toward construction of notions of womanhood via the politics of regional identities. But, what sorts of identities are these that came to determine an aesthetic of a region? When we attempt at describing the art of mainstream artists,<sup>22</sup> words that almost spontaneously occur are ‘lyrically fine,’ ‘delicate,’ ‘refined,’ and ‘decorative’. These are words which are usually employed derogatorily by modernist art criticism to describe women’s art products as of essential feminine sensibility.<sup>23</sup> How are we supposed to comprehend such an appropriation of these patriarchal definitions of the essential/ stereotypical femininity by the mainstream artists? For the Andhra Pradesh artists, though, this description only connects them to the ‘traditions’ that were required to adapt to their modernity. In the process the various categories of craft, that is the folk, decorative, primitive etc., were appropriated to expand art.

In other words these artists took over the function of the traditional artisan/ craftsman or the *shilpin*. However, the term according to the Sanskrit- English dictionary would mean ‘artificer, artisan, craftsman, artist’, and the word *shilpa* indicates art or craft.<sup>24</sup> These definitions were also derived from textual references, such as the *Silpasatras*. In the *Aitereya Brahmana* *silpa* is referred to as an intellectual endeavor. The scope of inclusion of decorative tradition within this category seems to be debatable. Further, women’s art is considered ‘feminine’ due to little or no intellectual content in it and it is often described as decorative. However, the terms that refer more aptly to this is found in the 41st *adhyaya* of *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, for instance, *bhusana*. Here, it is described as one among the four essential elements of painting.<sup>25</sup> The main interpretations of *bhusana*, according to Priyabala Shah, are 1) decoration, 2) contextually the method and act of painting it self as decoration, and 3) ornamentation to include ornaments for figures or in the areas of the painting.<sup>26</sup>

22. Op cit no: 7

23. Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Pandora Press, 1981, p 160-171.

24. Deepta Achar and Nadeem Omar Tarar, Unpublished, ‘Instituting National Self-Identity? Crafting Art Education in the National School of Art, Lahore and Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda.’

25. The other three are *rekha*, *varana*, and *vera*, which are line, brushwork and colors respectively.

26. Priyabala Shah, Ed, *Vishnudharmottara-Purana*. Vol. 1. Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1958.

In the same chapter, the second verse indicates and informs about taste -aesthetic and other varieties. According to this “the aesthete or *sahridaya* looks for skilled craftsmanship, while women have a taste for the ornament and ordinary folks prefer vivid colour”.<sup>27</sup> Hence, even in the context of Indian art and craft traditions the association of ‘woman’ with ‘ornament’ and its relation to ‘decoration’ can be witnessed. Mainstream modernism in Andhra Pradesh celebrates representing woman images, in particular, in varied decorative styles. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan has rightly pointed out about the importance of the image for feminism, thus:

...The image, whose particular force feminism has always recognized, leads outside the literary and educational institutional, passing this time into the general reaches of public ‘fantasy life’.<sup>28</sup>

The images of ‘women’ that are displayed in galleries, museums, and private homes of collectors and are referred to by aspiring artists in the art institutions in Andhra Pradesh also move through these locations to the public domain, thereby reaching the imagination, unrestricted by the realities of their lives. It is through the images of these imagined women that the mainstream foregrounds its regional identities.

In such a situation feminist interventions become crucial to negotiate the condition of women. Let us now examine the representations that women make in order to comprehend their identities as artists and as women.

Women artists of Andhra Pradesh who practiced in the 80s and 90s foreground regional self-identities through their works, which conform to, challenge or disrupt the notions of femininity put forth by the dominant discourse. The reading of resistance in the works of women artists with in this aesthetics is seen as the critical regional.

The purpose of reading women's art is not to essentialise a female, feminine or even feminist essence, but the attempt is to find the relationship between women artists and their interventions in the mainstream art and ideology.

27. Ibid.

28. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, p 119.



075. Kavitha Deuskar, Untitled, approx. 90x75 cm, egg tempera on canvas.



076. Kavitha Deuskar, *Women-II*, ca.1999, 55x75 cm, colour pencil on paper.

### The Critical Regional: Representations of Women Artists

One among the leading contemporary artists of Andhra Pradesh is Kavitha Deuskar. She has been engaged in portraying people of the immediately local environment. The discourse of the critics align her works along the dominant trend of the 'decorative'.<sup>29</sup> But they fail to observe the marked difference in the work, which make them expressions of her femininity.

In the late 70s and early 80s a shift occurred in Kavitha's oeuvre as she resolved her identity, in that her quest began to focus on Hyderabad people. In the post-independence phase Hyderabad, the capital city, found that its growing urbanization along with the

29. Atiya Amjad, exhibition catalogue of Kavitha Deuskar's works.



077. Kavitha Deuskar, *Lady With Pot*,  
ca.1999, 55x75 cm, charcoal drawing on paper.



078. Kavitha Deuskar, *Women with Water Melon*,  
1999, 90x75 cm, colour pencil on paper.

shifts in political situations has relegated this culture to the fringes of the present westernized metropolitan culture.

In this untitled work (*Illus.075*) Kavitha depicts two Muslim women. One is shown holding the causer and the other clad in 'burqa' holds a cup, perhaps, filled with the 'irani chaī'. They stand against a void and empty space, which is a recurring feature in her works. The context in which to situate these women, *nawabi* Hyderabad, is now lost in history. When compared to the works of her contemporary male counterparts here painting delineates very simple, ordinary, middle or lower class people with minimal ornaments. For instance, her works of mid 90's (*Illus.076-78*) and Laxma Goud's and Vaikuntam's works of the same



079. Laxma Goud, Untitled, 1999, approx. 40x25 cm, pencil and watercolour on paper.



080. Laxma Goud, Untitled, 1999, 25x40 cm, water colour on paper.

period (*Illus.079-80*), (*misimi magazine*) (*Illus.081-82*) Rambha, Urvashi, Menaka, and Vaidehi, respectively. And the difference with respect to ornamentation and pretty picture-making becomes clearly visible.

However, in certain specific media she makes utmost use of her design sensibility. In this regard the glass painting technique as it was done traditionally is experimented with in a set of works. Here Kavitha's works are definitely ornate, yet, it does not seem to be an extravagance because these are the representations of deities in their iconic forms; it is through such adornment that one praises the awesome powers of the gods and goddesses. Further, in some of the murals that she executed during the 80s Kavitha translates her concepts into abstract decorative motifs. In this work (JNTU) the idea of knowledge acquired by different sort of pupils with varied levels of maturity is the subject. This is represented as semicircular form, three-fourth circle and the complete circle. The ocean of knowledge is shown at the bottom. This site-specific work is a mural at the JNJU Fine Arts College where she taught until 2004.



081. Vaikuntam, *Rambha, Urwasi, Menaka*, 1995-96, 77x64 cm, acrylic on paper



082. Vaikuntam, *Vaidehi*, ca.1985, approx. 65x50 cm, acrylic on paper.

The arrangement of geometric decorative forms requires a calculated mathematical approach. It further demands the power of reasoning and therefore, is an intellectual activity. Such an activity does not conform to the traditional definition of the feminine either from Indian or modern western sources. Kavitha has worked in several media such as murals, painting and sculpture, craft, functional objects etc. and has experimented, defying and challenging the notions of creativity as a male prerogative. Yet, women in patriarchies are vulnerable and often tend to internalize the ideas of a dominant system. In this connection let us consider the works of another equally well-known artist, Anjani Reddy. Her native place is the Telangana region. She also represents imagery that invokes the regional flavor in her works.

During 90s she worked on a series of paintings called '*Dwellings*'. In this set of works (*Illus.083*) she draws upon her childhood memory of her ancestral home. This palatial 'bungalow' points to the affluent life that Anjani enjoyed. Even the women she paints belong to the upper classes and caste, like her.



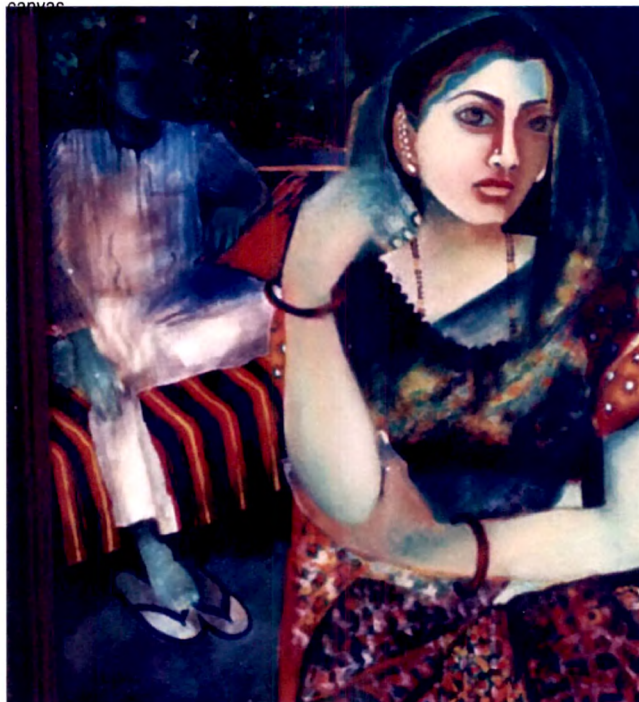
083. Anjani Reddy, *Dwelling Series*, 1998, 75x125 cm, oil on



084. Anjani Reddy, Untitled, 1999, 60x60 cm, oil on canvas.

The women are depicted as brooding (*Illus.084*), silent and enigmatic as they hark back to the patriarchal concept of a woman. These women also enact the rituals that are designed to subordinate women, for instance, 'The Bride Making Ceremony' (*Illus.040*) in which Anjani also paints a little girl, who would grow up to be another bride like the one beside her. Yet, this image of the bride also comes with the dilemma and fear of the unexplored and in the experience of female sexuality on the one hand and an impending uncertain future on the other. Another work, which appears to be sequel of this, is 'man and his new bride' (*Illus.085*). Even as the title is described in terms of the man, he, in this painting, is shown in the background. This seated man's particular posture is a gesture that marks the superiority and authority over the woman. However, the woman is

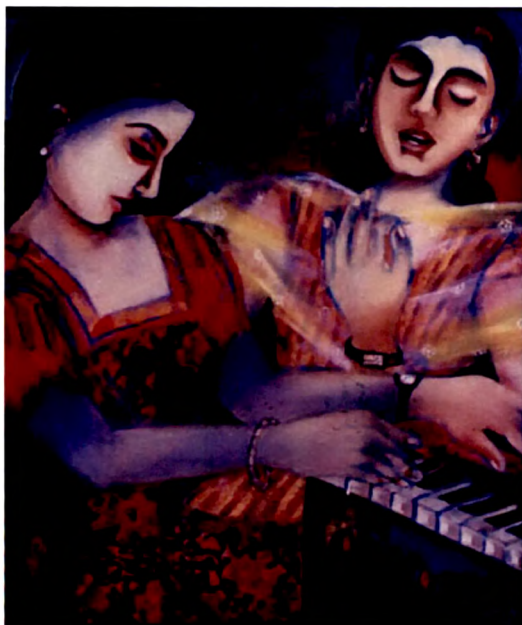
085. Anjani Reddy, *Man and the New Bride*, ca. 1998, 75x75 cm, oil on canvas



086. Anjani Reddy, Untitled.1, 1999, 30x60 cm, acrylic and oil on canvas.

positioned in the foreground and she confronts the viewer. This woman image occupies more than half of the picture surface. As an identity is taken on, Anjani, through this image, also realizes its potential and thus, creates a space for herself within the system.

Her works also can be subsumed within the decorative or ornate category; yet, her interests are more towards the textural effects wherein she concentrates on the patterns on fabrics within the works (*Illus.086*). And these tend to attract the gaze of the viewer. However, certain positive traits of her female self are portrayed as she paints them engaged in activities like, music practice (*Illus.087*) and reading (*Illus.088a*) thereby, bringing to the fore the creative and active aspects of female self within.



087. Anjani Reddy, *Music Party*, 1999, 60x60 cm, oil on canvas.



088a. Anjani Reddy, *Reading*, 1999, 60x60 cm, acrylic and oil on canvas.



088b. Anjani Reddy, Untitled, 1999, 30x60 cm, acrylic and oil on canvas.

Anjani has also painted woman as they beautify themselves (*Illus.088b*) surrounded by clothing and ornaments. However, another woman artist Kusum Viswanath problematises the issue of 'beauty' in this series of color pencil works she questions the onslaught of the concept of 'beauty' that was brought to fore via the pageants from about mid 90s.<sup>30</sup> The decade of the 90s with its new economic order contributed to the growing cosmopolitanism, which in turn made available to the upper-caste women, a universal visibility and social mobility in major cities in India. This post-feminism<sup>31</sup> says K.Srilatha, 'assumes the liberation of all women'.<sup>32</sup> These feminist critics read texts for their 'hypothetical and marginal meanings'<sup>33</sup> as these would help in comprehending feminine subjectivity. Kusum illustrates her opinion and statements about this new cosmopolitan outlook.

In the first work (*Illus.089*) of this set of four works, the adolescent girl, who is from a middle class/ rural background,

30. K.Srilatha, "The Story of the Up-market Reader: Femina's New Woman and the Normative Feminist Subject", *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, New Delhi, April 1999.p p 67.

31. The term was first used in the 1980s to signify a backlash over the second wave of feminism(late 60s through 70s). It now denotes a wide range of theories, some of which argue that feminism is no longer relevant to today's society. One of the earliest uses of the term was in Susan Boltin's 1982 article "Voices of the Post-Feminist Generation," published in *New York Times Magazine*. This article was based on a number of interviews with women who largely agreed with the goals of feminism, but did not identify as feminists. The post-feminist texts which emerged in the 1980s and '90s portrayed as a monolithic entity, thereby allowing the author to criticize these generalizations Some claimed that feminism forced women to view themselves as victims, while others posited that women had grown disenchanted with feminism and now wished to return to domesticity. Others claimed that feminism had its merits, but must be extended to reflect the changing experiences and expectations of women.

32. Opcit no:19

33. Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory In Practice*, Methuen, London and New York, 1988.



089. Kusum Vishwanath, *Beauty Pageant Series*, 1997, 30x24 cm, colour pencil on paper.



090. Kusum Vishwanath, *Beauty Pageant Series*, 1997, 30x24 cm, colour pencil on paper.



091. Kusum Vishwanath, *Beauty Pageant Series*, 1997, 30x24 cm, colour pencil on paper.

wears an attire like a beauty queen, even as she, perhaps, daydreams. Kusum also portrays two boys, who are engaged in playing chess, a game that involves thinking and reasoning, as against the girl who is groomed to think in terms of her looks. This cuts across the gender differentiation/discrimination in such families. In the next work (*Illus.090*) the girl achieves what she had dreamt and becomes a 'beauty queen'; she now is part of an urban and an international milieu, where people watch her. She is unaware of the clown, who also peeps and ridicules the event and episodes, and appears as a recurrent motif like the acrobatic girl, who always performs somersault.

The following work shows (*Illus.091*) the beauty queen in her house, seated and looking quizzically at, perhaps, the husband, who turns his head in indifference. She even tries to unmask her made-up attitudes.

In the final work, (*Illus.092*) the 'beauty queen' seems to be awkwardly caught up amidst a male audience out on the ramp, as the younger generation looks on. The girl now realizes this, even as she tries to protect herself from becoming a sexual object of viewing pleasure, by her cross-legged stance.



092. Kusum Vishwanath, *Beauty Pageant Series*, 1997, 30x24 cm, colour pencil on paper.



093. Fawad Tamkanat, Untitled, 2007, 19x16.5 cm, acrylic on wood box.



094. Aelay Laxman, Untitled, 2007, 60x60 cm, acrylic on canvas.

Kusum, therefore, critiques the patriarchal system that defines the standards of 'beauty' and the position of women in whom these notions are induced and thrust upon. Even the style of her works departs from the variety that emerged in the ambience of S.N.School<sup>34</sup> where she studied<sup>35</sup> when Laxma Goud, D.L.N.Reddy were teaching. Fellow artists who studied along with her were Rajeshwar Rao, Srinivasa Chari, Fawad Tamkanat, Sajid-Bin-Amar, and Laxmi Reddy.



095. Chippa Sudhakar, Untitled, ca. 1995, approx. 45x30 cm, stencil print.

Fawad Tamanat (*Illus.093*), Laxman Aelay (*Illus.094*), C.Sudhakar (*Illus.095*) and many other artists continue the decorative aesthetics crystallized by Laxma Goud's local stylistic influence, which drew from Picasso's erotic art. Rajeshwar Rao and Sajid Bin Amar drew more from K.G.Subramanyan's styles via Laxma Goud's. In these stylistic trajectories the erotic and the decorative form a combination like their male senior contemporaries.

34. Sarojini Naidu School of Fine Arts, Performing Arts and Communication, Hyderabad Central University.

35. Kusum joined S.N.School in 1989 to study MA in Painting. It is interesting and ironical to note that she and her daughter finished studies almost together.

Kusum's style is also an amalgam of influence, in that she drew from Gauguin via Vidya Bhushan, her former teacher, and Picasso via the S.N.School.

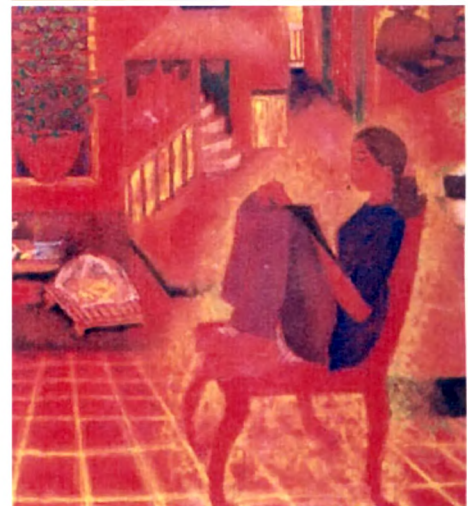
Kusum's works get isolated and removed from the aesthetics propagated by the S.N. School, as hers was an expression related to her persona, which could not identify with the erotic and decorative tendencies.

Laxmi Reddy,<sup>36</sup> is the daughter of P.T.Reddy, who has held several important posts in the APLKA and HAS. Laxmi Reddy also differed in her affiliation from the dominant mode by attempting to find design possibilities. Her works are at times pure formal explorations wherein achieving a balanced composition by arranging the visual elements seem to be the objective.

In this variety of paintings the themes include still lives, interiors etc. This still life (*Illus.096*) is an ode to color like Matisse's 'Green line / portrait of Madame Matisse' the experiment with complementary colors is worked out in a methodical way in order to bring out the delicate and subtle relationships between various shapes. However, it looks as if she executed it with frivolous ease.

However, another branch of her works opens up other facets alongside the design sensibilities. For instance, this painting (*Illus.097*) is titled 'Balanced Care' and represents a young woman who is reading a book, and at a distance, indicated by the lines on the floor, there is a baby sleeping covered by a mosquito net. Laxmi Reddy brings out through this painting the woman who knows how to balance her different roles of a modern professional, reflected in her attire and the gesture of reading, and a 'traditional' home maker, with a confidence that makes it seem like a playful activity. It is this renewed strength that spreads awe around her feminine self.

096. Laxmi Reddy, *Blue Still Life*, 1999, 60x70 cm, oil on canvas.



097. Lakshmi Reddy, *Balanced Care*, 1999, 83x76 cm, oil on canvas.

36. Laxmi Reddy is P.T.Reddy and Yashoda Reddy's adopted daughter.



098-Chippa Sudhakar, Untitled, 2007, 60x60 cm, mixed media on wood.



099. B Srinivas Reddy, *Population*, ca.1999, approx. 60x45x25 cm, wood.

Issues related to feminine identity are the focal points in Padma Reddy's works as well. Upon completing her formal education in Fine Arts, Padma Reddy went on to study further at MSU Baroda, where she took up printmaking. Prior to this she already had a head start in her career as an artist.

Her early work had stylistic affinities to that of her father's. Yet, thematically they were more or less autobiographical. Padma has experimented with different media; however, printmaking remains her favorite medium ever since her training at Baroda (print making studio was established in Andhra Pradesh by APLKA). Sudhakar and Srinivas Reddy also studied there around the same time i.e., late 80s. Both of them abide by dominant decorative norms of Andhra Pradesh art (*Illus.098-99*). Padma Reddy's works in no way relate themselves to these norms. Instead her works relate to her personal identity, based on a self-conscious approach to position herself not only as a woman artist, but also as a feminist artist. In this regard Padma in her works images discourse, not just words but meaningful sentences, statements, speech as the site of subjective and ideological activity. For instance, this print (*Illus. 100*) has an imprint of speech, where a first person voice says '*I shall take the virginity, test how about you?*'

How does one understand this? What kind of knowledge do we require? Questions like these are imperative to comprehend feminist interventions in art practice, because, they foreground different realities by negating the predominant knowledges and ideologies, which are normalized as commonsensical views about art, artist, women and society.<sup>37</sup>

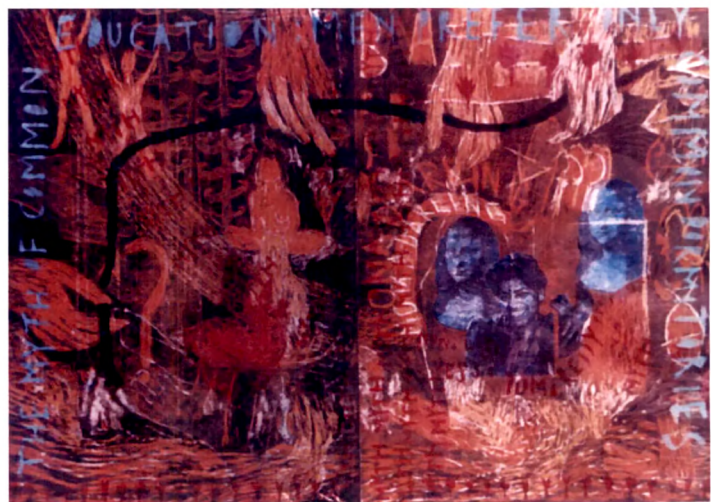
Padma's work problematises the issues of 'virginity' and its association with her sexuality and personal life experience. However, it also addresses the larger matrix of women's sexual oppression and harassment. The question that she poses challenges this particular dominance and its inherent incapability to effectively answer against itself.

The works that followed are '*The Myth of Common Education: Men Prefer Common Dormitories*' (Illus. 101), apart from the training at Baroda, she already had a master's degree in history, culture and archeology. In this print, Padma wishes to expose the myth of common education, which is gender neutral or provides a common platform of understanding. Even as she stresses upon the sexual difference within such a system, she lays bare the



100. Padma Reddy, *I Shall Take the Virginity Test. How about You?*, 1999, 72x90 cm, print from board and stencil.

101. Padma Reddy, *Men Prefer Common Dormitories: The Myth of Common Education*, 2000, approx. 65x80 cm, print from board and stencil.



37. Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, Routledge, London and New York, 1988. p183).



102. Padma Reddy, *Untitled*, 1997, 75x60 cm, oil on canvas.

attitudes of men towards women, also linking it to the academic discipline of art education. 'Monalisa', with her enigmatic aura, is exemplary of woman as a sign of masculine creativity. Her own photograph juxtaposes this. Padma is aware of the ways in which traditional art historical discourse works against a woman artist and more often than not, even ridicules her by the making her a mere image.<sup>38</sup>

Padma, as an artist, does not wish to join the bandwagon of artists who claim heavily on their creative originality and

authority. Instead, she prefers to portray the ordinary in that her works are characterized by writings, as if from her personal diary. In this untitled painting (*Illus. 102*) Padma, effectively represents the interface between word and image and also between the work of art and the spectator. The work actively engages the viewer in a dialogue wherein the latter is invited to think and pored upon the ideas conveyed in this double-edged method. The work relates to the power politics that operate in the patriarchal society, wherein she is supposed to be present within it and surrender to it. However, this submission should not be taken for granted, as it might just be a strategy for subversion, for she might resurrect and became resilient from her crucified condition to fight back once again.

Yet, for some women the realization of their position might produce complex psychological situations in which they get caught.

Nandini Goud, like Padma Reddy, studied art in Baroda. She too began her career in the early 90s. Her paintings and prints point to the personal identity. This print seems

38. Like in the case of : Angelica Koffman and Mary Moser, in the context of Western art; in Andhra Pradesh, D.S.Vani, Kavitha Deuskar etc.

103. Nandini Goud, Untitled, 2000, 25x25 cm, linocut.  
 104. Nandini Goud, *Linocut-2*, 2000, 25x25 cm, linocut.  
 105. LaxmaGoud, Untitled, 1971, approx. 28x38 cm, etching.

to be one of her self-representations (*Illus.103*). A strong self-identity was necessary for her to come out of the shadow of her domineering father/artist, Laxma Goud. The confrontation of this dominance that was omnipresent is portrayed in this linocut (*Illus.104*). In this work the child looks on outside the frame, which is set in a housescape. In the midst of this otherwise calm environment a goat finds its way to disrupt the composition.

This goat, a black one at that, looms large in the middle ground. Quite close and over the head of the girl, the goat has a special significance in the works of her father, which eventually transformed into his alter ego (*Illus.105*). This animal, which represents the law of the father for Nandini, appears to be protective but actually is possessive in its attitude towards the girl. Thereby, her presence remains contained in an atmosphere that is not conducive for her growth. Nandini then remains a child, a little girl in most of her works. To portray woman as child corresponds to the traditional definitions of the 'femininity'. However, the figure, proposes an androgyny, which is a composite of the feminine, and the masculine or a bisexual, such a subject exists in the realm of the Imaginary. Here the gender identity is not yet fixed. This phase is prior to its positioning in the patriarchal culture as





106. Nandini Goud, Untitled, 1998-2000, 178x206 cm, oil on canvas.

masculine or feminine subject.<sup>39</sup> In this painting, (*Illus. 106*) Nandini portrays such a subject. Here, tens and thousands of objects surround the main figure. Yet, one can hope to find certain scattered meanings by wading through them.

A tiny figure sleeps on a bed in the upper left register; a toy clown sits right above the head of the girl. Other paraphernalia include a storybook toy, slippers, paints, brush, flower vase and other objects found in an upper middle class household.

Nandini's self exists in this messy situation created by an unmanageable and incompatible private and professional spheres. Yet, she has the power to endure, remain calm and therefore, appears in relief to the chaotic background. Although, this is more or less a literal representation, her works of late tend to be metaphorical in that she paints still lives of vegetables and other

39. Opcit no:26.

107. Nandini Goud, *Linocut-1*, 2000, 25x25 cm, linocut

objects. The object choices have now become more feminine, for instance, this work (*Illus. 107*) is an arrangement of bowls and bottles. While the large bowl, a grail symbolic of the feminine with its lid firmly placed, is shown in the foreground and occupies three-fourth space, however it remains in the dark, while the bottles (linked to the male phallus) that surround in the back ground are highlighted, much similar to her position as an artist who has had to confront the malevolent forces of the symbolic order at home and outside.



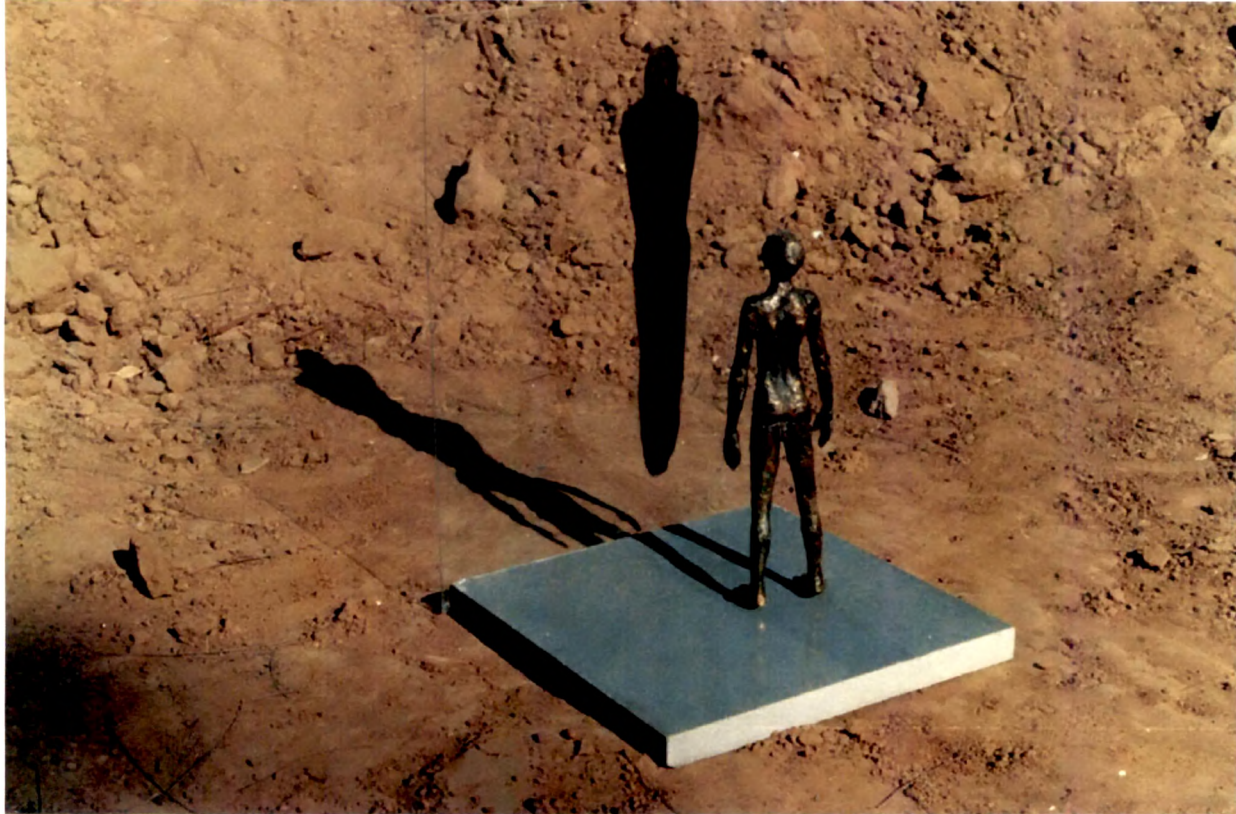
Another artist who had to strive hard against patriarchal dictums is Shanti Swaroopini. She also studied sculpture in Baroda following her graduation in painting from Andhra University, Vizag, which is also her native place.

Shanti negotiates her identity with specific attention to the body as the site of artistic investigation, conforming to the ethics of postmodernism.

In this regard she finds possibilities of representing the male nude. Expressing through the sexuality of the other has been a male prerogative, which is reflected in the tradition of female nudes throughout modern western and Indian art. In order to challenge this norm, a number of women artists took to representing male nudes in the wake of the feminist movement in the west.<sup>40</sup>

However, Shanti did not perhaps consciously attempt at foregrounding a feminist critique. Nevertheless, in her inadvertent and a hesitant move, she reverses the order of male creative power and the woman as its sign. Another reason for hinging on representation of male forms was to speak through the other. Masquerading endowed her to acquire an authorized channel of expression, while she remains invisible and protects her original feminine self from public gaze.

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



108. Shanti Swaroopini, *Mystery*, 1993, 22x12x10 cm, bronze –acrylic.

Shanti worked on the subject of male nudes in the decade of 90s. The images were small initially due to economic factors; later she made life size sculptures in bronze (*Illus.108-10*).



109. Shanti Swaroopini, *Untitled1*, 1993, approx. 20x12x5 cm, bronze.

110. Shanti Swaroopini, *Untitled-3*, 1993, approx. 20x12x5 cm, bronze and paper.

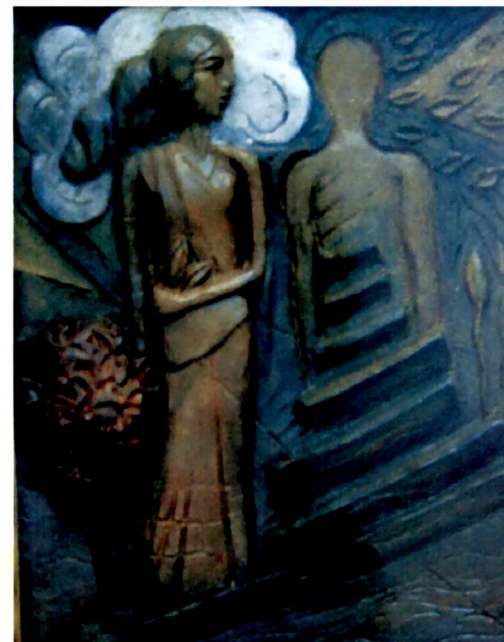
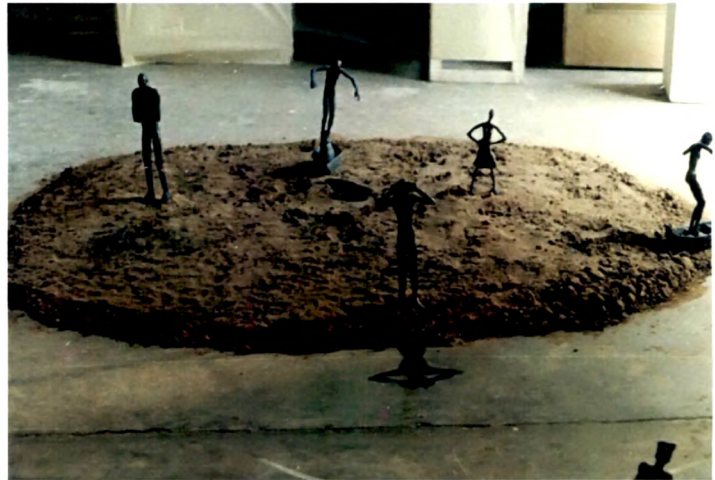


111. Shanti Swaroopini-Bronze- ca.1994, approx.18x60x66 cm, bronze  
 112. Shanti Swaroopini, *Where do the Boats Lead to*, 1993, 18x60x66 cm, bronze, stone etc.

However, these male forms, which were other than her own, (*Illus.111-12*) posed problems while expressing innate femininity and the experiences that she could only feel through her physical self. By about late 90s she realizes the potential of expressing via representation of female forms with which she can better address issues related to feminine identity.



Another sculptor who has been working consistently towards foregrounding the 'self' is Rohini Reddy.<sup>41</sup> She too studied sculpture at Baroda, in that she specialized in portraiture. However, she not only works in this genre but has also explored various sculptural media including terracotta, bronze, fiberglass and wood. During mid to late 90s she focuses on experiments in fiberglass. In this relief panel (*Illus.113*), Rohini represents a woman, who is poised on the left and is dressed in a sari, which is worn in the typical Gujarati style. The woman embarks into nature with the gift of creativity, the leaves. In this journey she is now at the foot of a stair way, beyond which appears only contours of a form. She has to face the challenges of life and career to reach her goal, a spiritual one at that, through an iconic figure. This form is shown to be neither masculine nor feminine in



41. Rohini Reddy is a native of Gujarat. Following her marriage to an Andhra Pradesh sculptor, Srinivas Reddy, she settled in Hyderabad in 1990s.

113. B Rohini Reddy, *Untitled*, 1999, approx. 45x54 cm, fiberglass relief.

particular. Her style gradually took a turn towards an iconic figuration. Exemplary in this regard are her works in fiberglass, such as, heads, seated figures, relief panels etc. This style takes as its reference the Indian sculptural traditions. In this aspect both Rohini and Srinivas Reddy had taken up such a style. These affinities are a common feature between artists working in close proximity. However, Rohini's works display a marked difference in terms of the subject matter or content. For through her sculptures Rohini attempts to comprehend her 'self'. This expedition is carried out, almost always,

through the image of a woman. Rohini's concerns are also formal in that she endeavors to construct complex compositions in different scales of works. She combines the decorative motifs within these compositions in a way that makes gel with dominant stylistics of Andhra Pradesh art (*Illus. 114*).



However, for Rohini, an acceptance of her work into the mainstream has been difficult. To whatever extent this has happened, it has been largely due to the two person shows that she has held of her works along with that of her husband's.

Therefore, women artists of the 80s and 90s have had a shifting relationship with the mainstream. The dominant aesthetic that comes to circulate and propagate notions of femininity are questioned, re-worked, consumed and at times negated by woman artists, even as they foreground varied femininities through specific religious / class / caste / regional affiliations.

114. B Rohini Reddy, *Untitled*, 2006, approx. 60x30x30 cm, fiberglass.