Women’ in Indian Art

M.N. Rajesh and Rekha Pande

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(B) Description of Module

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Women in Indian art and miniature paintings in Pre Modern India

M.N. Rajesh and Rekha Pande

Introduction:

Art history has now been accepted as a major branch of knowledge supplementing various other kinds of History. Art as a manifestation of human thought and spirit has valuables implications for a historian to conduct a thorough investigation into the intricacies of the past. A different perspective of women's history is gaining currency in which the art forms like paintings are being used as tools of historical Investigation. Feminism in the arts grew out of the contemporary women's movement. In the 1970's feminist historians and critics began to question the assumptions, which lay behind the masculine claim for universal values of history of heroic art and which has so systematically excluded women's productions and representations from its mainstream and so powerfully transformed the women's image into position of consumption. 'Malestream' is a term frequently used in feminist critiques. The resulting re-examination of women's lives in art proceeded amidst debates about the relationship between gender/culture and creativity (Chadwick 1990: p. 8 ). The development of theories about the way meanings is produced, semiology in particular and the expanded Marxist concepts of ideology, led feminists to a more complex appraisal of what came to be called, representations. No longer could images be treated as discrete reflections - good, bad, false, truthful - of real women. The use of the term representation and later significance marked the importance of the process by which meanings are produced. The social manufacture of meaning occurs through both technical devices and codes and conventions generally referred to as the rhetoric of the image. For anyone to understand the image s/he must carry a whole baggage of social knowledge, assumptions and values. Therefore notions of the image whose meanings derive from the conscious intentions of their makers gave way to the understanding of the social and ideological networks within which meanings are socially produced and secured. After almost two decades of Feminist writings about women in art, there remains relatively a small body of work in history of women and art.
There are very few works, which identify women as subject of representation not as an object of representation.

**Study of Art in 19th century:**

In the 19th century, one of the important developments in Indian history is the displacement of indigenous knowledge by the colonial knowledge and in the case of India a lot of work has already been done on these lines with regard to the history and political economy. However, with regard to Art and architecture, there still seems to be many areas that are in the process of being worked out. One of the main problem is the collapse of the indigenous categories and a traditional methods of reading art and architecture and replacing the same with European models which has done much injustice and also distorted many meanings. When we talk about European categories, we mean the ideas of the Victorian age that led to an emphasis on morality and characterised Indian art as degenerate and lacking in morality. The terms, idolatry, demonolatry and associated terms became much prevalent along with adjectives like unrefined, crude, scantily clad et cetera. (Burgess 1901: 104)

With the rise of the National School that coincided with the Indian national movement a method of studying Indian art by moving away from the Victorian prejudices had begun. While this was at one level a corrective measure intending to right the wrongs done by the Britishers, it ultimately lead to another set of assumptions replacing the Victorian assumptions and also borrowing from the Victorian ideas at the same time (Thakurta 2005:43).

**Art following Colonial Archaeology:**

With nearly examples of Indian architecture and art, the previous framework of explanation that was in tune with the colonial archaeology followed and what was represented was the measurement of the statues and the different structures. There was a stress on the quantitative aspects and absolutely no regard to any description of style and evolution of the different aspects of style. It led to a very dry and monotonous writing which is evident in the work of the colonial writers like Havell and Burgess. The early Indian writers also follow this framework but traced the origins of our two ancient India and give them a divine origin. To search for the origins of art
and architecture in India, the materials used were the texts and thus the Vegas and the other early Indian Sanskrit texts form the basis for the identification and description of art which was formed Thakurta 2005:50).

A new turn was introduced in the 1930s and 40s by writers like Basham and another writer, the famous Ananda Coomaraswamy whose celebrated work Indian and Indonesian art, followed by a writer like Gopinath Rau whose work on iconography is referred even today unseated writers like Percy Brown. Basham described Indian art as emanating from religious motivation and also to serve religious ends. In all this enterprise, the gender question was only marginally represented and the 1960s saw the predominance of Marxist historians who try to emphasise art with the social and political context of that particular period. The Hindu temple and the icons were taken to reflect the feudal values. (Coomaraswamy : 1918 reprint 2005) Another strain was evident in the writings of art historians like Stella Kramrisch, who famous work the Hindu temple has remained as a seminal work and also her lesser-known work, Indian sculpture is also another important landmark in this field (Kramrisch : 1976). It is only with the rise of postcolonial studies that writers like Partha Mitter, who celebrated work much maligned monsters, has rehabilitated Indian art rescuing it from the colonial categories that inform the study of Indian art and architecture (Mitter : 1992). Gender also thus became an important category of analysis to understand Indian art and works like slaves of the Lord, and Barbara Stoler Miller’s, the powers of art, have led to a fundamental re-orientation of the discipline. (Miller : 1992)

**Nationalist Historians:**

Indian art was studied by the nationalist historians as a product of glorification of ancient India and thus saw the early examples from the ancient period being studied. Most of the earliest icons and architectural structures of ancient period were Buddhist and we have for example the sculptures of the Mauryan period. However, the archaeological excavations in the 1920s pushed Indian history further back and the discovery of the industrial civilisation was highlighted with a period assigned to two and half thousand years before Christ and thus it predated the Vedic
 civilisation. In the Indus Valley civilisation, we have found few examples of art and the most famous of these are the bearded man Harappan statues of animals and the meditating man now identified as a proto-Shiva. In addition to this there is also a female figurine now known as the harappan dancing girl. It is an image of a slender girl with a lot of ornamentation in the form of bangles and beads and necklaces over the upper part of the body. Bead was one of the most important commodities manufactured in the Indus and is also traded to the neighbouring regions of Afghanistan, Iran and the ancient near East including Mesopotamia. One of the issues connected with the origin of the Indus civilisation is the theory of the Mesopotamian origin advanced by Wheeler and later by Ratnagar. It is this tempting to associate the dancing girl with the influence from the ancient near East where the worship of Godesses like Ishtar was widely popular. Though this is not being accepted in stream art history and history circles. In addition we also find a large number of toys and animals and also representations of human figures and figurines on seals. We are unable to decipher the seals as the language is still eluded any translation. From the proper historic period, when remote early historic period, we only find little depictions of goddesses in the Sanskrit literature of the early and later Vedic periods and also in the period of the Upanishads. There are references to goddesses like usha the goddess of dawn. We still have to wait for some more centuries to look at these gods and goddesses in anthropomorphic form.Fire was the dominant form of worship and fire altars were constructed for use during a certain ritual period and later dismantled after the sacrifices were done by the Brahmans. In the six century BC, there was a sudden spurt of cities in India and this period is known as the second urbanisation in India after the rise of a decline of the Indus Valley civilisation that was known as the first urbanisation. It was during this second urbanisation that we have the emergence of strong political entities like kingdoms and Republican states with strong kings who also acted as patrons of art and architecture. (Singh : 2008: 174).

If we look for Women in Indian art we can find this in different places such as

- Royal art,
- Yakshi images,
- Paintings,
- Temple art and
- Miniature paintings
Royal Art:

The early art that is seen during this period is predominantly royal art and some of the important themes are associated with Buddhism. Even till this time, the idea of representing the divinity in anthropomorphic form was absent in Buddhism, though the Indian artist had attained sufficient grip in the depiction of the human form. The earliest images of women in India (excluding those of the Indus valley civilization) are a set of Mauryan period figurines (Dhavalikar, 1999: 178-9). These figures are not the first art objects to represent the feminine. Leaving aside the figures of the Harappan civilization which appear to be stylistically and culturally unconnected with anything in the historic period, there are terracotta images, believed to represent fertility or mother goddess figures. These are not images, they are symbols. They do not pretend to represent the physical impression of the female form. The basic garment of the Indian women of Mathura in the Kusana era was a sort of Sari which usually hung from the waist down. Many women also wore a long shawl of scarf over both shoulders. Around the hips was a broad and elaborate girdle with beadwork and decorative clasp in front. The breasts were usually uncovered (there is some controversy as to whether this was the actual practice, or merely an artistic convention)” (Salamon, 1989:40).

The art of this period displays two types of influences, one emanating from the folk traditions and another emanating from the Royal Court and it is also now surmised that there was influence of Iran on the Mauryan court art as seen in the columns and pillars. It was also during the Mauryan period that the practice of Buddhism gained much headway. After the passing away of the Buddha, known as the Maha Pari Nirvana, the remains of the Buddha were encased in a dome after cremation and this was known as the stupa. One of the function of the stupa was the reliquary function and another function was the votive function where the faithful gathered and circumambulator the votive stupa in a clockwise fashion. While the Buddha was not worshipped in anthropomorphic form and represented only by a throne which was empty, footprints or a parasol, the other personalities both human and mythical associated with the life of the Buddha were represented in human form. One of the important representation that recurs again and again is the birth of the Buddha and Queen Mayadevi, the mother of the Buddha is shown in the garden with sal trees and a six tusked white elephant miraculously enters her side. Later she reaches out for a branch and the the Buddha is born. The scene is replicated again and again in the major
traditions of India, Sanchi, Barhut and Mathura which are the early arts traditions of India. In all these representations we find along with the Buddha, who is represented in the form of an aniconic image, a host of people from both the royalty and the laity. Such scenes are also common in Amaravati in southern India. While the focus of the earlier historians is largely on patronage patterns, we can make a small departure and look at the role of women. It is paradoxical that women are seen in sizeable representation as royal women along with their attendants in different dresses and regalia along with the attendants were represented differently showing forms of subordination.

Yakshi Images:

Yakshi is a female earth spirit, accepted as a symbol of fertility by the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain faiths. She is usually portrayed as a wide-hipped, voluptuous woman, who can cause a tree to bear fruit simply by touching it with her foot. The yakshi's three-bend pose (tribanga), bending at her neck, waist, and hips, is a stance that suggests a sensuous liveliness and maternal energy. This representation also shows the figure adorned with jewelry and the suggestion of a transparent skirt, revealing an abundantly endowed female body that symbolizes the fertility of the earth. Sculptures of yakshi are often seen in elaborate architectural motifs on the façades of temples and stupas. The most celebrated pieces of art in ancient India is the Didarganj yakshi who is represented along with a fly whisk called as chauri. Her hair is well done with decoration on the hair and ornaments on the hair and the neck. The upper part of the body is not covered and is well developed along with ample flesh that gives a sense of voluptuousness indicating that she has sexual energy and is an object of sexuality. The development of imagery also proceeds along these lines with examples from Amaravati showing the prosperity of the common man and woman as depicted in the good folk motifs. In Barhut and Sanchi along with Mathura we come across large number of women from the labouring classes. They are dressed in smaller tunics and also wear turbans and unlike the semidivine beings, these women are keen and slender. (Singh : 2008: 449-453).
Paintings:

Another great age of painting begins in the aftermath of the Gupta period with Ajanta paintings that are done on a hill in the caves. The caves – the excavation, sculpturing and painting – were completed in two phases: the first during 2nd-1st centuries BCE, belonging to the Hinayana period and the next during a period of two and a half centuries starting from the 4th century CE, when it was the Mahayana phase. Here one can see the progress from the early phase of cave paintings in the pre-Christian era, reaching classical perfection, to the movement into mannerism and then to baroque ornamentation and, finally, the lapse into artistic decline before the caves were ultimately abandoned by the 6th century CE. The subjects of the pictures are chosen mostly from the Jataka stories, Buddhist mythological tales of the previous lives of the Buddha. Episodes from the life of the Buddha form the next important theme in Ajanta. Some of these are mostly self-contained, whereas some are narrative, moving from scene to scene. A few of the solo-pictures do not seem to have any religious import. The paintings in the last category are decorative in character. Floral decorations, geometrical designs, birds, animals, mythical nymphs and monsters fill up every square inch of available space on the ceilings, pillars, etc. The ceilings contain paintings, mostly of secular and decorative themes. Under the technique of Indian mural painting, which was followed with little change in all later examples of mural decoration in Asia, murals were painted on an almost dry wall, called fresco. The artists of Ajanta used a wide variety of pigments. Most of them were minerals available locally as residual products of volcanic rock. Only lapis lazuli, used for blue, was imported. (Spink : 2005) Most of the paintings are made of mineral and vegetable dyes in Ajanta and the subject matter of representation follows the same pattern with the Buddha and the bodhisattvas and the kings and queens merchants and common people. The women are shown here mainly as Queens accompanied by Kings or as part of certain group. In this situation many of them are unrestrained and also shown in well-dressed vestments. We also find evidences of women drinking and one of the painting shows the king being served by a foreigner, most probably a person from Persia looking at his dress. Following dance traditions, the paintings cover a range of postures, from frontal to strict profile, which have been identified with distinct terminology used for each posture. From the beginning of the Mahayana phase, in Ajanta one cannot find a single scene in which
the poses of characters are monotonous. This is particularly so with the depiction of women shown in congregation. One can notice restricted body positions, tending to monotony, in the pre-Christian Hinayana paintings. The whole range of women characters – ladies of court and their maids, common women in their household chores, and dancers – can be seen in Ajanta. (Spink:1987:38-44)

**Temple Art:**

Another great age begins in the early mediaeval period from around the fifth century A.D. with the rise of the Hindu temple and they are spread across large parts of northern India and data into southern India and the South spawning three major traditions in the history of Indian architecture namely, the Nagara or the northern style with domes looking inside like the petals of the onion. The Southern style of architecture is pyramidal in shape and called the Dravida, while there is another style of architecture which is a mixture and said to be the vesara in in the Deccan. We now find a large number of images of goddesses, gods and many other minor deities in the temple complexes. The rise of the temple was also because of the spread of the institution of land grants and the temple acted as a major institution for a agrarian expansion. It also was an institution for redistribution of the economic surplus and also a means of political integration. Primarily a religious institution, the temple synthesised many different forms of worship through a process known as syncretism where many gods and goddesses were identified with the main deities. In this connection we see the predominance of the shaiva, vaishnava and the shaka traditions. There are three processes associated with the expansion of temples and this is known as the major process of agrarian expansion: irrigation is a technological component whereby artificial waterways were created to irrigate land, transforming the forest into settled agricultural land. The second process followed from this and it led to the conversion of the tribal people into peasants in a caste hierarchy. In the third process the peasants now had numerous gods and therefore their gods were identified with the major Puranas and the traditions flowing from these texts. Thus, we therefore have a large number of deities in the early mediaeval period. One of the examples is of Vishnu who is given 10,000 names meaning, it explains the process by which 10,000 deities were identified as Vishnu through the process of syncretism. Thus, we have a large number of attributes for different gods and goddesses. (Chattopadhyaya:1996:12-44)
Most of the deities were sculpted according to set parameters as prescribed in the silpa texts where the exact measurements and methods of representation were described. For gods and goddesses, we have the nine spans of measurement, eight spans for semidivine beings and seven or less for humans and other lesser deities like tutelary deities. There are two forms of representation largely seen with regard to the feminine. In most of the mainstream temples, the female deity was always shown as the consort of the Lord and was seated by the side of the Lord. Parvati, Lakshmi and other deities like Sita were all shown in this way. All deities also had a pose (asana) and a (vehicle) which is usually an animal and certain arms and accoutrements. The goddesses did not have any animals as vehicles. For example we see that a peacock is associated with Subrahmanya, or Kartikeya the son of Shiva and so on. While Vishnu is shown with a wheel known as the Sudarshana chakra in his hand, we see Saraswati having a musical instrument known as the Veena. The interesting case of Lakshmi who is popularly represented in eight incarnations each bestowing a different boon to the devotee reveals the iconography. Dhana Lakshmi is shown as bestowing gold coins from her hand. In contrast to the consorts of the deities in the Shaiva and the Vaishnava temples, we see in the Sakta temples terrifying goddesses like Durga and Kali were represented alone and do not need a male consort. Further, they are also shown with weapons like the Trident which is a very famous weapon associated with Shiva is also associated with Durga and she also has a tiger as her mount. This is in contrast to the demure deities were domesticated like Lakshmi and Parvati. Kali is one of the most popular deities in eastern India and she’s shown scantily clad and holding a big Sword in one hand and a necklace of human heads or in many cases a single head in one hand usually in the left-hand. Blood is associated with her and she is shown independently.

In the imagery of deities, the progress in the depiction of the form increases over the period and in the earlier period dating to the seventh and eighth century A.D., we have the elephanta caves in Maharashtra and also the famous Ellora temple near the Ajanta Caves. This was one of the early stages of rock architecture wherein the artist did not achieve a high level of mastery over the stone and thus we have large size of the human bodies and also the bodies of the gods and goddesses. With the development of the Hindu temple and its elaboration, the iconographic program became more complex. It was also made much more complex by the impact of the
bhakti movement which was the religious movement that incorporated aspects of social protest also.

In the regular iconographic program of the temple, the main deity is located in the sanctum sanctorum of the garbagriha and it is usually Shiva or Vishnu in their different incarnations with the consorts. This spread of different incarnations or avatars was one of the devices used to accommodate the regional and folk traditions read the pan Indian or the Sanskriti tradition and the state by students of history as the great and Little traditions. The local gods and goddesses are identified with a Puranic deities like Shiva and Vishnu. The names of the deities are also changed and Shiva is known as Mallikarjuna in the temple at Srisailam along with the tribal goddess who is identified as Parvathi. This particular process also involved the process of associating it with that particular place and is known as localisation of action. Thus, Kashi one of the most sacred places in the Hindu cosmology was replicated both in the north and in the south by giving different names as Uttarkashi and Tenkasi with Shiva in both the places in different incarnations.

It would also be prudent to take a small diversion to another most important and impact making sculptures of early mediaeval India, the khajuraho temples in central India. These temples have aroused great curiosity and also become highly contested on account of the nature of the erotic figures in this temple complex. There are around 32 temples are complex and a majority of them belong to the Hindu tradition while some of them belong to the Jain tradition. The major problem of contestation with regard to these temples is the representation of amorous couples in different states of sexual union known as mithuna. Some of them are couples while others are in pairs and in groups. Most of the parts of the body are shown with ample features. This has been taken as an example of sexual licentiousness in mediaeval India. An analysis of the sculptures all over early mediaeval India shows that most of the women did not wear any dress on the upper body and left it uncovered and they also had many other freedoms.

As mentioned the rise of the bhakti movement led to the popularisation of religion by adopting the local vernacular languages like Tamil Telugu Kannada Malayalam, Bengali, and different dialects of Hindi to express devotion directly to the deity without any mediation. Most of the
devotion was mainly in the form of an outpouring to the emotional sense. In this way also see the emergence of many saints and the rise of sacred geography is associated with the saintly figures. Some of the important saintly figures are Karaikal Ammaiyar, Akka Mahadevi and Meera. We know how many of their statues adorning the temples and this came about by the expansion of the iconographic program as part of the tutelary shrines in the temple which was not part of the original plan but had to be accommodated due to popular pressure and thus we have the temples to the women bhaktas and also the mother goddesses in many important temples all over India and over a period of time they also became part of the statute of sacred geography and thus the temple at Kashi, Brihadawira, etc all have now large shrines for various goddesses. Another aspect of this is the development of special patterns of worship on occasions of festivals. (Peterson :1991:103-110, 143-9) Meera is largely worshipped by singing bhajans which developed as a form of devotion popularised by Mira signifying her steadfast devotion to Krishna. Thus may arise always depicted in a white dress signifying that she's given up the pressures and is waiting for union with Krishna.

Sculptures and art in Medieval India:
Most of the sculptures by the 13th century in North India become less numerous with the advent of the Turkish rule and news temples and sculptures are being constructed only in places like Gujarat and Rajasthan. The iconographic program also becomes very enlarged with a number of demigods shown with a long-awaited features like a protruding tongue, elongated teeth and large eyes and ears. Both male and female, these deities are largely malevolent and sometimes also benevolent. There are also large number of intermediaries like the gatekeepers and also different women who are part of a retinue signifying the cruellest quality of that period. Sculptures are more numerous in southern and eastern India and are largely devoted to the deities of the Purana.

Metal sculptures also seem to be popular along with stone sculptures and the metal sculptures are taken in a procession along with the main deity and the consort by the side, once a year. In addition to the deities like Lakshmi Parvati, we also have many other local goddesses and one of the important developments from the period that included 17 centuries is the addition of more and more ornaments and paraphernalia to the deities. While granite was largely used in South India, black sandstone was used in eastern India and marble became more popular in northern
and western India. Metal was used only in some cases but is more popular in Kashmir where we also find large number of Tantric sculptures in many parts of eastern India. The Tantric sculptures also show many elements of sexual union. (Miller : 1992:79)

Developments in the plastic arts also went parallel to the development in painting and the various schools of painting in mediaeval India like Sittanavasal and Madurai and the Chola paintings in Tamil Nadu and the Lepakshi in Andhra continued to depict the human form. There was a clean deviation from the centre style as the forms became more bulky and rounded and the colours also became more earthy. There is also a focus on the local elements in the form of festivals, dress, processions and courtly procedures.

One of the important areas that has not been studied in mediaeval India is the Tibetan culture area of India that stretches along the western and eastern Himalayas and has preserved the Buddhist culture even after the disappearance of Buddhism in the 13th century India. Tabo and Alchi built during the 10th century are for the most important representations of this tradition. The latter is called as the advent of the Himalayas on account of a large number of paintings in the walls and these murals are very important as they show the Tara and other female deities. After two centuries many more monasteries are built in the western and eastern Himalayas in the Tibetan tradition but the major change that comes across is the replacement of the Indian tradition by the Central Asian traditions whereby blue colour and clouds in the paintings and the elongated cheekbones and the epicalantic fold become more pronounced. We also have large number of female deities who are the consorts of the bodhisattvas and also the reincarnations of many deities. The most important of them are Phalden Lhamo identified with Sri Devi and the deity Dorje Phagmo who is identified with the goddess Marici Vajravarahi. (Handa 2004:290-300)

A new development in India are seeing the 18th century with the rise of ivory carving and this is particularly in southern and northern India where many small figurines are made of ivory. Though this practice of carving in ivory was also present earlier, the 18th century witnessed the new spurt in this activity and we have here many representations of women in stylistic poses, seen as the concubines or the correlate of the other woman in literature. Kings and queens along
the major deities are also shown but are rare as we have very few ivory carvings associated with religious practices. Intricacy was one of the main features and care was taken to show the face and adornments along with the other figures in a very small area. Metal were also acquired a new lease of life and metal statues with some European influences are seen but are very few in number.

**Miniature Paintings:**

The term ‘miniature’ is derived from the Latin word ‘minium’ that meant red lead (*The Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol.19, 1976,170). As the principal pigment used by the medieval illuminators was red lead, it began to be applied to the art and those who practiced it came to be known as ‘miniatori’ Even though the word is applied to all works of art of ‘miniature’ size, miniature paintings meant a very small portrait paintings finely executed on vellum (skin), precared cards, copper or ivory, jewellery, boxes, lockets, palm leaves and paper. Due to the patronage of the rulers and rich gentry the themes of the miniature painting mainly centered around the royal court, pursuit of hunting and other pleasures rather than the toiling masses who formed the bulk of the population. Though the common man was not involved directly in the aesthetic aspect of the paintings, yet it did offer a number of employment opportunities and this must have been a major reason for interest. The karkhanas where most of the production of miniatures took place were workshops which employed the energies of the common man and artists who were proficient in the production of painting material and in preparing paper, brushes and colors.

The representation of women in these miniatures brings to light varied types of miniatures with different themes and styles executed on the solid platform of royalty. The portrayal covers various realms like their work, dress, jewellery highlighting their status and role. To the artists of the Deccan, the womanly form itself became a source of interest and a number of miniatures were executed depicting a variety of royal and local beauties. Apart from revealing certain situational realities in which the women were placed, the pictures also confirm the unending interest of Indian art tradition and its delight in feminine conduct. By and large the paintings depict women or royalty and court scenes which were male bastions of power but we do have the depiction of common women as well. As the miniatures in the medieval Deccan own their
existence chiefly to the royal patronage, quite often, they naturally echo the personal predilections and personality of the persons of royalty namely Queens and Princesses. These paintings represent a male gaze of women as idealized symbol of royal splendor and their power and participation in political endeavours. These miniatures depicting the court life of women or dramatic episodes of the court, highlight that few women enjoyed political power in medieval India and that there was not complete absence of female portraiture in Islamic art, as Queens and Princesses appear side by side with the King in most of the pictures. In totality, apart from symbolizing the royal power of the women, they also depict their costumes, jewellery and decoration which are rich in style and royal in outlook. During the 16th century in the courts of Deccani Kingdoms, several conventional systems of music ragas and raginis were apostrophized as ladies and pictures were made to indicate their themes (Archer WG, *Indian Miniatures*, Greenwich, 1960. Plate 14). Ragas denoting masculine and raginis denoting feminine became a popular trend. These nuances of music which began to be used in visual art incorporated the tradition of classical poetry, namely, the Nayaki-Nayaka lore which minutely analyses the moods of men and women in all vicissitudes of love, the agony of waiting, ranging grief in separation and joy in union. This tradition of *Nayaki-Nayaka* themes was a much sought after subject for Deccani miniature paintings for it could depict the female form in all its beauty which would appeal to the male gaze. In this theme women have been represented as *Abhisarika* or *Nayika* waiting for *Nayaka* in different conditions or situations of love with different emotions, like waiting anxiously in expectation, one who hopefully waits, one who is depressed or cheated or one who ruefully writes a message. The females becomes an objects of love. In totality, Ragmala paintings revolved around love-sick ladies and their intense feelings of love, hope and distress with sensitive expressions. At Golconda, during Abdullah Qutub Shah's period certain ragini paintings were executed. For instance a manuscript entitled *Khawar Nama*, dated C 1645-49 AD consists ragini paintings like Gurjari ragini and Saragini ragini (Nigam ML, 1988. 40).

A significant sphere in which woman were reflected and illustrated at Deccani courts under royal patronage were woman depicted as Yoganis. Most of these miniatures of Yoganis executed belong to Bijapur and Golconda period. Yoganis are depicted with beautiful facial features presenting a look of nobility. They are invariably shown with matted hair raised up ward and
carrying either a monarchical (Peacock feathers) or a trident in one of the hands some times they are depicted holding a musical instrument ektata or a fan made of peacock feathers. Their garments consisted of tight brocaded pajamas, a khesa (upper garment of bhagava or saffron color), a zari dupatta, elongated jama, long dupattas, a scarf over her hair and embroider based band. The Yoginis wear shoes and are covered with ornaments like necklace (selhi) made of pearls ear rings (mudari) made of rubies, wristlets studded with gems and rosaries as bracelets (Nigam, 1988, 35). This suggest the high descent and aristocratic dignity of the Yoginis. In spite of this decorations Yoginis used to smear their bodies with ashes and applied quashqa (paste of sandal on the fore head which give them the look of an ascetic).

An important feature of medieval Golconda miniatures depicting women is that apart from the usual representations of women of royalty, several illustrations of common women like maidens, artists, courtesans, engaged in royal service and entertainment and other local women performing their day to day activities like praying, smoking, distributing hukka and playing music were painted. These illustrations breathe with life and capture the intense feelings of the women.

Though most of these women are in serving roles, beauty formed an important part in these paintings. A miniature by Ali Naqi of Golconda illustrates a woman admiring herself and her beauty in a mirror. (Zebrowski, 1983, 149). A maiden helps women in decorating herself. All the toilet tier substances are kept in a plate at the bottom of the miniature and the lady in attendance is helping her mistress to dress up and the mistress has the final word if she is satisfied or not. Both the mistress and the maid are shown with beautiful curves and there is not much class difference, which one can see here in terms of depiction and both are objects of desire. Another painting, datable to late Seventeenth century, comprises of a brilliantly sensual sleeping girl. In this miniature there is an alluring tropical world spring to life. One can almost feel the warm breeze and the languid pace. Delicate twist of lose-end garments and serene expressions of the girl suggest both inner contentment and sexual joy and beauty. Here, both the sleeping girl as well as maiden is richly ornamented. There are a number of food and other luxury items lying on the floor. The plantain tree, which is regarded as very auspicious for the Hindus, can be seen in the background. Although such pungent celebrations of life are profoundly Indian, they are more frequently encountered in sculpture than in miniature paintings. Hence this illustration acquires an importance among the miniatures representing the sensual life of women. Another miniature painting illustrates a beautiful girl, expressing her beauty (Stuart C. Welch, 1963, Plate
Narrow waisted and voluptuous, she wears a transparent red, green and orange costume, trimmed with gold and tarnished silver. A rich group of pearls, gold jewellery is set with green and orange stones. The overall features of the girl with the background of shimmering gold sky streaked with orange and blue clouds augment her radiance and beauty. A few stylistic elements of this painting like gold, red-orange, blue sky and feathery tree are peculiar to Golconda painting. The overall feeling is of voluptuousness and beauty.

In the miniatures depicting courtesans, we find a fusion of European, Persian and indigenous elements. A painting of Golconda School dated 1630 A.D., depicts a courtesan enveloped in orange and purple scarves (Stuart C. Welch, 1963, Plate 13). Here Persian influence is mainly seen in the curly courtesan’s hair. The naked flesh of courtesan till waist is designed from European style. In the painting the naked flesh is the center of attraction and almost subdues the decorations around it. In another miniature of a courtesan, she wears diaphanous robes of pink and green color veil. She holds a little bird in her left hand and wears necklaces made of pearls (Zebrowski, 1983, 201). Her dress decorated with roses, is an oriental symbol of beauty. She has a very sensuous form and the overall impression is of sensuality. The naked flesh peeps out of the robe and the only covering appears to be the many chains of small pearls and corrals which do not hide any of the flesh but accentuate it. The specialty of the Golconda paintings, is that apart from Indian themes, few European themes portraying women, too formed the corpus of miniature art. In consequence to the diverse trading contacts that the Deccan had with Europe, we can find some miniatures, which were either drawn by the European artists at Deccani courts or by the indigenous artists, who happily acknowledged the European influence and painted several themes based on European models.

A painting based on European print, depicts Madonna and child (Zebrowski, 1983, 104-106). The emphasis now shifts completely when the woman is depicted as a mother. There is no sexuality enhanced with the garments. The breasts are now shown completely covered, now as a source of nutrition rather than objects of male gaze. The Madonna is of the same facial type, which heavily stippled features and wears innumerable pearl chains. The painting retains Deccan colors of black, red, white and gold. In another painting showing European theme of Holy family
of about 1630-35 AD has pictures of angels, maidens and other royal ladies (Barret Douglas, 1958. Fig 6). However, the Arabesque and other decorative elements in the picture are typical of Golconda. Females in it have doll-like faces. There is a dark background with a palette of mauve, orange and green liberally enhanced by gold.

Another miniature of European theme illustrates a picture of virgin Mary dated 1640-60 A.D., where Mary stands on a crescent moon holding the Christ (Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, 1981, 238-441). Two angels fly above bearing a crown. Though these paintings are based on European model or inspired from an European engraving, the landscape in the background, ornaments, carpet, cushions, coloring and the flowering paints confirm its Golconda origin. Thus a due cognizance should be taken of the fact that, a crisp new idiom had aroused which combined European portraiture with Deccani extravagance.

Regarding the representation of women, one can note that women in Golconda society served in different capacities as Queens who exercised power along with the Sultans, evident from the Queens depicted with the King in many pictures, as Princesses, representing romance, as maidens who formed a part of royal court, as musicians, dancers and other artists, who displayed their talents and entertained the Sultan along with the royal guests as courtesans, who were recognized in society mainly because of their utilitarian value for the sake of enjoyment and as other common women representing local history and culture. Woman in these miniatures appear complementary to the events in historical context rather than as portrayals of any probable likeness. These female pictures are painted by different artists and include woman of different status. The difference is clearly marked by head gears, costumes, ornamentations and place. The pictorial representation of ragas in miniature paintings became essential for formulating the imaginative impulse which is responsible for transforming abstract notes of music to concrete images. This pictorial illustration of the Ragmala was necessary for visualizing the aesthetic or emotive essence of music for the attainment of perfect peace and enlightenment. The association of Deccani miniature paintings with music indeed made the episodes relating to women more visualized, lyrical and romantic. It is also evident from the pictures depicting ladies reading letters, books or composing poetry, those women, those of elite in particular were educated and intelligent.
Generally speaking, it is not a gainsaying to point out that womanly form in art itself remained as source of interest and this naturally resulted in the execution of a number of miniatures depicting common and local beauties apart from illustrating the habits and activities of the palace women revealing Indian delight in feminine conduct. The portraits of women attract the looks of a person mainly through their sensuality and exquisite glamour. Though there is no evidence to prove that the artists were allowed to enter the Zenana to portray its members and also to train women in painting, the main objective centered around narrowing the gulf between the portrayal and exact feature of the women who were perceived at royal courts and establishments. However, one has to accept the existence of certain portraits which are more ideal than real. These paintings were also based on imitation of reality with an extended dose of idealism.

But one should be careful precisely when ascribing the tendencies and emotions that are manifested in these miniatures as they could have been the patron’s personal inclinations towards that particular way of depicting women that made the artists to represent the women in that way rather than the actual feeling or situation of women. The royal desires shape the artist’s hands wielding the brush. However, this alone cannot disqualify the miniatures as a potential source of historical interpretation since every source is embedded within its own historical frame and a certain way of representing reality. Thus the artist wielding the brush also draws from his own traditional oeuvre in the very act of representing female forms—big breasts, narrow waists, wide hips as the ultimate embodiment of feminine charms. These paintings depicts the different domains which a woman normally occupies— at home, the bed, in front of a mirror, the mother involved with the child or the freedom of the yogini and the courtesan (Pande, Rekha and Lavanya, 2004, 84). The artist is also very clear about the woman’s restricted space in a court before the public gaze. So, if one is careful enough these miniatures unfold before us a world of women’s works and activities and give a scintillating picture of life of women in various realms and thus serve as gold mines in reconstructing and representing women’s history.