



From Miniature to Modernity: The Evolution of Portraiture under the Nizams of Hyderabad (18th – 20th Century)

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Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to examine the transition of artistic practice from miniature painting to European naturalism under the Nizams of Hyderabad from the late 18th to early 20th Century due to the emergence of photography and academic naturalism. Influenced by the colonial modernity, the Nawabs and the nobles encouraged the European style of portraiture. During this period, artists such as Raja Ravi Varma, Shripad Damodar Satwalekar, and R.W. Deuskar sought patronage in Hyderabad, competing with established court photographers like Lala Deen Dayal. Raja Ravi Varma's attempts to secure commissions from Nizam Mahbub Ali Khan highlight the shifting power dynamics in the art world, as photography gained prominence over painted portraiture. Despite professional rivalries and challenges in gaining aristocratic favor, artists like Deuskar contributed to the modernization of Hyderabad's artistic traditions, blending European naturalism with Indian themes. By the early 20th century, Hyderabad's art scene reflected a complex interplay of tradition, colonial influence, and emerging nationalist sentiments.

Keywords: Hyderabad School, Colonial Modernity, Academic Naturalism, Portraiture, R.W. Deuskar, Nizam Mahbub Ali Khan

1.Introduction

The paper examines the transition of artistic practice under the Nizams of Hyderabad from the late 18th Century to early 20th Century. The paper also maps the development of portraiture painting after the decline of miniature school and how the new taste for European naturalism shaped the patronage by the Nizams, aristocrats and the Nawabs. In this context, the paper discusses the contribution of artists such as Raja Ravi Varma, Deen Dayal Naidu and R.W.Deuskar to the development of Academic naturalism in the Princely State of Hyderabad.

The Princely State of Hyderabad, a province carved from the Mughal occupied Deccani prefecture, was once ruled by Qutb Shahis of Golconda (1591 - 1687). The present location of old city of Hyderabad was built by the legendary Sultan-V, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah in 1591. Almost after a century it was captured by the Mughals and was ruled from the new capital Aurangabad, Maharashtra. Later in 1724, the Mughal governor Asaf Jah-I declared his autonomy establishing the Nizam rule and subsequently moved his capital to Hyderabad along with several nobles, artisans, and Mughal artefacts (Biligrami, 1927). Since then, the city of Hyderabad as a metropolis hosted different cultures, migrants and political powers. As it was the capital city, under the Nizam's reign, it became a hub for art and culture.

Qutb Shahis of Golconda contributed remarkably to the art and culture of the Deccan during 16th -17th centuries AD. They were the chief patrons of Dakhni Kalam which refers to a typical style of Golconda and Bijapur miniature tradition. According to Kondapalli Sheshagiri Rao, Deccani Kalam emerged as distinct style with a blend of Mughal artists working in 'Tasveer khanas', the courts of Qutb Shahis and the Golconda miniature style. This style is noted in the folios created as part of 'pothikhana', (library) but not directly influence local folk art of Golconda region (Sheshagirirao 1956). The rulers of Golconda (c.1512-1687 AD.) were depicted in some miniature paintings datable to 16th to early 20th century AD. Most of these miniatures on Qutb Shahis are said to have produced in the 17th century AD. Some miniatures were also produced in the post-Qutb Shahi and the early Asaf Jahi periods. Since the Qutb Shahis were orthodox Muslims (Shia community) not much representation of the rulers in art in the early period is depicted. However, Ibrahim Qutb Shah is said to have the first patron of Golconda miniature paintings (Pratapditya, 1993).

Lately, both Muslim Nawabs and Hindu nobles commissioned artists to execute portraits, miniatures, and sometimes portraiture in the miniature, in which one can see a deliberate attempt to depict narcissism of patrons (Lavanya 2014). This character is more evident in the provincial sub-schools like, Gadwal and Wanaparthi, where as other sub-school, Shorapur shows depiction of Hindu deities, saints and religious themes. Generally, the samsthanas like Gadwal, Wanaparthi and Shorapur commissioned local artists for making portraits; sometimes they also commissioned artists based in Hyderabad (Lavanya 2014). Several artists worked in the court of Nizams, painting beautiful portraits and miniatures on cloth. One such court painter was

Venkatachalam. Jagdish Mittal remarks that Venkatachalam was a “favourite artist for Nizam Ali Khan”. The painter was granted “a princely annual jagir of 12000 rupees”, and “was responsible for two procession paintings of the Nizam on cloth in 1800 AD” (Mittal 1963).

By the late nineteenth century, the close aids of the Nizams also showed interest in expeditions, photography, collecting artefacts and accumulating material wealth. Among these, the Paigahs and the Salar Jungs, who were Grand Vaziers to the Nizams, had their own Dewdis and acquired invaluable collectibles as well. The Salar Jungs enjoyed the foremost order of nobility, among the closest families of the Nizams, second only to the highest ranked nobles, the Paigahs.¹ The Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad is a testimony of their interest in collecting and preserving the art and artefacts.



Figure 1 ‘Three Noblemen in Procession on an Elephant’,
by Venkatachalam (active 1780s–90s)
18th century, Hyderabad, India. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper.



Figure 2 Portraits of Jamsheed Quli Qutb Shah (left)
and Ibrahim Quli Qutab Shah (right) based on
Kulliyat-E-Diwani Manuscript (above)

Apart from Venkatachalam, Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar (1869-1957) and his son R.Sukumar Deuskar (1911-1952) were trained in academic realism and famous in creating portraiture in Oil colours based on Deccani miniatures from two illustrated Manuscript (Kulliyat) Diwan-e-Sultan Quli Qutb Shah bound with Diwan-e-Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah, AD.1630, which is preserved in Salar Jung Museum (Pal 1993).

¹ The Salar Jungs (literally means Leader of the Battle) belonged to Umra-e-Uzzam nobility. The lineage of Salar Jungs can be traced to the land of Arabs. A few historians claim that they belong to the Qarani clan of Yemen, particularly to the descendents of Uwais ibn ‘Amir ibn Harb al-Qarni, a contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad. The Paigah (which means “pomp and rank”-title given by the Nizam) nobles were regarded as the higher order, being sons-in-law and brothers-in-law to the Nizams, next only to the Nizams, followed by Umra-e-Uzzam.

The appropriation was necessary as the artist was commissioned to make portrait based on authentic sources available to them. Hence, both Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar and Sukumar Deuskar painted the portraits in oil blending the academic and Hyderabad School styles (Fig.2).



Figure 4 Muhammad Safdar Khan Bahadur
Ghaur Jung, Portrait by R.W.Deuskar, 1932



Figure 3 Nawab Asaf Jah. Portrait by
R.W.Deuskar, 1932

2.Portraiture in Colonial Era

The coming of East India Company and the Colonial modernity drastically changed India's fate. The Colonial intervention in the field of education and the effect of scientific advancement on Indian societies may have altered Indian values but during the course, the patronage for art had largely affected the artistic traditions. The new taste for western modernity and modernist values in art, helmed by the changing socio-political conditions, gave rise to a new worldview that divorced from Indian cultural roots. The incursion of academic naturalism via traveling British artists, and the growing demand for Romanticist landscapes, changed the perspective of Indian aristocracy. With this new perception, Indian nobles started patronizing European artists, as well as the indigenous artists, who could work in oil painting with ease. While European artists were employed to make master works such as portraits of English nobles and exotic landscapes, the native artists were gradually inclined to the academic style, and would copy the paintings due to the demand for European realism in order to secure their place in field of art. With a new outlook, the portraits and other paintings had been commissioned were exchanged as precious gifts among the aristocratic families, as a mark of love and respect. As a result, paintings portraits gained momentum playing a very important role in projecting the dominance of the princely rulers as well as "aiding in diplomatic solidarity and acceptance" (Agarwal 2014). As the genre had become popular with its exquisite quality, several amateur artists who worked in oils, earned name and fame. A few such artists, "with humble origins in Europe transformed into an influential artistic personality in the Indian sub-continent" (Agarwal 2014).

The genre of portraiture in oils had been fine-tuned during late 19th century due to introduction of Photography and establishment of British schools in India. Art, in general, transformed into a more technical rather than a didactic one, inspired by the European pedagogy, and its self-proclaimed progressive ideology to "improve" status of Indian art and "attitudes" of the middle and lower classes. In a way, the art institutions regulated making of art by disseminating modern ideals, taste, and an aesthetics devoid of Indian classicism. Thus, new ideas that emerged through academic art practice had been impinged as 'modern' or 'real' in contrast to the idealized Indian art, its technique, and the conventional training. Dr.Ratan Parimoo (2014) observes that there was gradual change in "the structure of tradition from its primordial - traditional moorings towards modernization" replacing the traditional artist by elite artist, the change in the perception of the artist, who believed in his "own artistic pursuits" rather than influenced by social conventions (22).

While most of the late nineteenth century artists were drawn towards academic naturalism due to the prominence of British schools established all over India except the northern part, a few others looked for answers in the Orientalist schema. The distinction between Indian classical painting and European academic naturalism was successfully established by the schools and the popularity for the "modern" methods in painting increased as several of the "trained artists" adopted oil and illusionistic techniques. The popularity increased many folds, when Raja Ravi Varma was accepted as a native Indian Artist, who synthesized classical subject and modern schema. With these developments, several artists earned the title "professional artist" seeking rich aristocratic patronage and thus the illusionistic treatment, easel painting and modern portraiture became new vogue in aristocrat circles. As Partha Mitter observes that the interest for European art has been "oscillating from an enthusiastic and wholehearted acceptance of western art to a strong resistance," and resulted in new "Weltanschauung". The enthusiasm for academic training and conditions helped in emergence of new class of artists leaving behind all the artisans in deprivation due to their economic conditions and illiteracy. Thus, the shift in class composition bred "a new, self-conscious, literary attitude to art" (Mitter 1994).

By 1920s, two broad sections, i.e the artists with Orientalist bent and the others who consciously imbibed academic naturalism, had emerged. While Bengal was an epicenter for Nationalist/Revivalist art in support of the Swadeshi/Swaraj movement, several schools started to appear with same intention in the western parts of India. For instance, Ravi Shankar Raval, who studied at the JJ School established a school in Ahmedabad inspired by Bengal Revivalism. Another student from the Bombay school, Fyzee Rahamin also followed the Orientalist ideals. In the south, Andhra Jateeya Kalashala (est. 1910) at Machilipatnam emerged as a centre for both Nationalist and Regional Nationalist school. The Machilipatnam school produced several artists encouraging the revivalist art and spreading the spirit of "Nationalism" and "Swadeshi"² (Reddy 1994). However, the Bombay school neither showed interest in Havell's revivalism nor supported the Orientalism but strived for "its own form of contemporary". By 1919, JJ School of Bombay, under the supervision of Cl. Gladstone Solomon, developed its own Indian style parallel to Bengal Revivalism, which later came to be known as "Bombay Revivalism". Therefore, it is clear that the artists of Colonial India chose their path according to the condition, needs and patronization.

Similarly, the artists in the Deccani region showed interest in their cultural expression, sometimes they were grappling with western model by resisting to the pan-Indian paradigm. The two major schools Machilipatnam and J.J.School emerged as notable institutes with a difference in the princely state of Hyderabad. The Machilipatnam School could not attract the Nizams and nobles of Hyderabad because, it was firstly, anti-colonial and secondly, its content revolved around either Hindu or Andhra nationalist subjects. Also, the revival of Indian art was meaningless for the Nizams, as they had been affluent patrons of a miniature school. Later, in 30s, the Nizams took up the preservation and restoration of Ajanta paintings. Since, the Revivalist art associated with political ambition, and anti-colonial, they were neither interested in rejecting academic art nor they supported Swadeshi movement. Because, the aristocracy was by then exposed to the European modernity, and could not resist the supremacy of the British raj. Moreover, their predilection and compulsion for Occidental art and artefacts compelled them to welcome the "Oil Painters" to their court.

2.1 New Era of Portraiture in Hyderabad

The miniature painting tradition saw a declining phase in nineteenth century as by now the patrons show interest in Academic Realism. Further, the coming of photography increased interest in capturing the frozen moments and life-like portrayal vis-à-vis rigid, idealized representation. Most of the patrons in Deccan region showed interest in getting their portraits done in the idiosyncratic ambiances whereby they tried to demonstrate their rank, status, and wealth. In addition to this, the patrons paid attention in documenting their families and the people associated with them. For instance, Nizam Mahabub Ali Khan, popularly known as Mahbub Ali Pasha, assigned the gifted photographer, Lala Deen Dayal to record the events, personalities and women of the zenana, developing a new taste that wiped out the miniature tradition. Even though he was Jain by birth, Lala Deen Dayal earned name and fame among the Muslim dominated court and drew attention of Mahabub Ali Khan. He became a favourite court photographer for the Nizam, who was conferred the honorary titles "Musawwir Jung Raja Bahadur", and "Ustadon ke ustad" upon him (Luther 2003).³ Thus, the curious case of the Nizam, and his interest in 'Realism' drew Raja Ravi Varma's attention. During one of his meetings with Raja Deen Dayal, Raja Ravi Varma had expressed his interest in meeting the Nizam of Hyderabad. Sensing the demand for portraits and photography in the court of Mahabub Ali Khan, Raja Deen Dayal had promised Ravi Varma to be introduced to the Nizam of Hyderabad for a lucrative commission.

² Sudha Reddy explains that as early as 1920s, native artists who had studied at Santiniketan followed the revivalist tradition responding to the Oriental/Pan-Asian ideology and Swadeshi movement. This would seem that the artists were conscious of the socio-political and economic changes, taking place in the Indian society. During this period, a few art institutions such as Rajahmundry Arts College (estd.1907), Andhra Jatheeya Kalashala (National College of Andhra) (estd.1910) at Machilipatnam and Navayuga Chitrakala Samiti at Macherla were established. The Andhra Jatheeya Kalashala of Machilipatnam, established in 1910 on the lines of Swadeshi ideology, was buttressed by the Indian National Congress. The Congress had taken a resolution in 1906 and funded for the initiation of the institution. The school flourished under the guidance of Promod Kumar Chatterjee and Ramendranath Chakrawarthy as several artists explored Indian themes employing Oriental technique. The origin of the institution, "aimed at a model which would help people of the region in understanding the nationalist ideology and contribute to the ongoing 'Swadeshi' movement".

³ B.N. Goswamy, as quoted in Narendra Luther's 'Raja Deen Dayal: Prince of Photographers (2003)' cited the Farhang-I Asifiya, which records the Nizam's appreciation in the form of a couplet, "Ajab yeh karte hain tasvir mein kamaal kamaal/musavviroon ke hain ustad Lala Deen Dayal." Narendra Luther also cited that the sixth Nizam himself composed a couplet in honour of Raja Deen Dayal, it reads: "Ajab yeh karte hain tasvir mein kamaal kamaal/Ustadon ke hain ustad Raja Deen Dayal" (In the art of photography, surpassing all/A master of masters is Raja Deen Dayal.)



Figure 5 Sir Nawab Asman Jah Bahadur, Prime Minister of Hyderabad from 1887-1894 (left) and Nawab Akbar Jung Bahadur, Kotwal Of Hyderabad, c 1890s (right)-By Lala Deen Dayal.

Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelburger's "Raja Ravi Varma, portrait of an artist: The Diary of C. Raja Raja Varma"(2005) confirms that Ravi Varma was interested in the patronage of the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, and visited Hyderabad between 1901 and 1902. Partha Mitter (1994) also points out that Ravi Varma was invited and hosted by Deen Dayal during their visit to Hyderabad. The Varmas had a trial to improve the perspective of a gloomy painting by an English artist, and had to wait for the Nizam's approval. Meanwhile Ravi Varma's younger brother Raja Raja Varma painted local landscapes among which 'Hussain Sagar Lake' later on won a silver medal at Madras Fine Art Exhibition. After failing in getting due appointment with the Nizam, the Varmas moved out of the residence, and in desperation painted a full-length portrait of Mahabub Ali Khan using a photograph taken by Johnston and Hoffman instead of borrowing the same from the Nizam's personal photographer, Deen Dayal. This shows the worsening relation due to "professional jealousy" between the Varmas and the photographer as "despite the advent of camera, painted portraits still carried greater prestige." (Mitter 1994, 96-198). Initially Varmas were disappointed with the treatment in Hyderabad as they could not get the direct access to the Nizam even though they were promised to get an appointment. Raja Deen Dayal, who had access to the Zenana also failed to help them out and was indirectly criticized by Raja Varma in one occasion. On March 12, 1902, Raja Varma wrote, referring to the Nizam and his men, that he was utterly disappointed with the people of Hyderabad and remarked, "Hypocrisy, un-punctuality and failures to keep promises are the sins of the people high as well as low."

An example of the evident desperation of the Varmas on the character of the Nizam appears in the personal diary notes of Raja Varma: On Tuesday, February 25, 1902:

We have not yet succeeded in a sure way of approaching the Nizam. He never leaves his palace and receives very few visitors . . . He (the Nizam) is said to be badly wanting in punctuality. Though young and brought under new systems, as soon as he was invested with sovereign powers he went back to the old oriental ways of life in the interior of his palace. His surroundings too are not all that could be desired. His Highness I hear is an exceedingly good Prince, kind and liberal to a degree (Neumayer and Schelburger 2005).

These excerpts from the diary notes of C.Raja Raja Varma reveal that Ravi Varma paid visits to Hyderabad and had connection with wealthy nobles of city. Among them were Raja Bhagvan Das Gopal Das and Permanand Das. A note dated Tuesday 5th May 1903, establishes that Ravi Varma painted Nizam's portrait along with a portrait of Raja Bhagvan Das. Raja Raja Varma writes, "I wrote a letter to Raja Bhagvan Das on behalf of brother regarding the settlement of the account in connection of the Nizam's portrait" (Neumayer and Schelburger 2005). Finally, after repeated efforts, they sold the portrait for half price in 1903.

While Ravi Varma was busy painting portraits of well-known people, Raja Deen Dayal's magical photographs were also in vogue. During this time artists such as Pandit Shripad Damodar Satwalekar and Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar were interested in showing their artistic potentialities aspiring for the patronage of the Nizams, and established a studio in 1901. Sumathi Ramaswamy's "The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India" (2010), gives an account of Satwalekar's studio in Hyderabad. Nadkarni (1999) also corroborates saying, "With the legendry artist-turned-Vedic scholar, Shripad Damodar Satawalekar, he (Deuskar) established a studio in Hyderabad. As Satawalekar got more and more involved in the work of the Arya Samaj and in his Indological researches, it was Deuskar who single-handedly looked after the studio" (2).



Figure 6 Mir Osman Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VII, the last Nizam. By R.W.Deuskar 1911



Figure 7 Portrait of an English Resident in Hyderabad, By R.W.Deuskar 1940

Therefore, it is clear that R.W.Deuskar established an art and photographic studio along with Pandit Shripad Damodar Satwalekar in 1901, and incidentally it was the first artist studio in Hyderabad, where academic naturalism was practiced. R.W.Deuskar (1869–1957), who pursued his formal education at J.J.School, Bombay between 1895 and 1900, went to Europe to specialize in Painting. He was a close associate of Salar Jung III, Mir Yousuf Ali Khan and was regarded as one of the finest painters under the Nizams. He is referred to as “the pioneer of modern painting in Hyderabad” (Parimoo, 2014). He himself collected several antiques, paintings and made copies of European paintings to set up a museum for the Nizams. He painted life-size portraits of the erstwhile Nizams, Salar Jungs and was appointed as the first curator of the Dewan Dewdi Salar Jung Museum.

Conclusion:

The patronage of the Nizams of the Princely State of Hyderabad was crucial in the development of Academic naturalism in the region despite the regional schools like Machilipatanam and Rajahmundry were leaning towards Swadeshi art. The transition from 18th century miniature style to European realism may be seen as influence of colonial modernity but it reshaped as interplay of tradition and modernity with conscious patronage of the Nizams which is evident in works of R.W.Deuskar and Sukumar Deuskar who were commissioned to develop portraits of Qutb Shahis and Salar Jungs. This suggests us to understand that the Nizams and the aristocratic families who are rooted in native traditions gradually adopted the Western sensibilities reacting to the changes occurred during the first quarter of the 20th Century.

It is evident that colonial era created new opportunities and challenges for artists in Hyderabad with the coming of photography and subsequent changes in Indian art world. One way it enabled the artists such as Ravi varma and Deen Dayal to progress further responding to the changing taste of the elite patrons, who were drawn to occidental aesthetics. This transition under the influence of colonial modernity had wiped off the miniature practice in Hyderabad and its samsthanas but helped the artists to embrace a new mode of artistic practices. As a result, the establishment of first photographic and artist studio with Academic bent by Deuskar and Sripada Domodar Satwalekar in 1901 mark as a significant shift from miniature to academic realism.

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