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Colonial Modernity In The Princely State Of Hyderabad: A Study Of Architecture, Photography, And Academic Art Under The Nizams

¹Anand Kumar Gadapa, Assistant Professor, Research Scholar, ²Prof.Dr.S.N.Vikas (Guide)

¹Department of Painting College of Fine Arts, Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University, Hyderabad, India

Abstract:

The Princely States in India, ruled as sub-ordinates to the Colonial British, witnessed the Colonial Modernity. This influence is evident in the art and culture with the emergence of academic naturalism, often overlooking indigenous artistic traditions, and the evolution of architecture employing Neo-Classical style. The style, adopted by the nobles and the Nizams, replaced vernacular *havelis* and pavilions. Photography found its way into Indian province as a medium for ethnographic, anthropological, and historical documentation. With the interest in European flamboyance, the Nizams, nobles, and wealthy merchants co-existed with the British Colonial power. The introduction of photography in India showcased its own dominance over developing artistic traditions such as Portrait Painting. Lala Deen Dayal, who became the official photographer of the Nizam opened studios, and R.W. Deuskar and S.D.Satwalekar established first art studio in Hyderabad in 1901. Thus, this paper will discuss the shifts in Architecture, photography and art specially focusing on the Princely State of Hyderabad. It also elaborates on the socio-political conditions that drove the history of the Nizam's courts and palaces, and documentation by Raja Deen Dayal. The paper also discusses about emergence of Academic art by Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar and others.

Keywords: Princely State of Hyderabad, Vernacular *havelis*, Colonial Modernity, Neo-Classical style, Photography, Academic naturalism

1.Introduction

A Princely State is generally defined as a region governed by a local monarch as a subordinate province under the British suzerainty. The local rulers like the Nizams of Hyderabad had internal autonomy but their external affairs and defense was under the control of the British. Despite being the loyal subordinates to the British, the princes enjoyed the privileges of colonial rulers, who often recognized them with suitable titles. Within this context, Hyderabad State was one of the largest and wealthiest princely states amongst 560 princely states during the time of Indian Independence. They had their own administration, army, postal system and currency. Several Princely States had an agent from the British Government as an advisor to oversee the policies aligned with the British. The Princely States in India, which were ruled as sub-ordinates to the Colonial British, witnessed the nascence of Colonial Modernity in India in terms of education, lifestyle and various other respects. This influence of imperial modernity is evident in the art and culture of the country with the emergence of academic naturalism, often overlooking indigenous artistic traditions, and the evolution of architecture employing Neo-Classical style. The style, adopted by the nobles and the Nizams, replaced vernacular *havelis* and pavilions.

Photography came to India via East India Company as a medium for ethnographic, anthropological, and historical documentation, especially for official records, and eventually evolved into an art form. On the other hand, Neo-Classical architecture, which housed grandeur paintings, grew out of a renewed interest in European flamboyance and fulfilling desire for the Nizams, nobles, and wealthy merchants to co-exist with the British Colonial power. The introduction of photography in India showcased its own dominance over existing and developing artistic traditions such as Portrait Painting. For instance, Lala Deen Dayal, who became the official photographer of the Nizam by 1885 itself, opened studios dominating contemporary photographers of the time.

Thus, this paper will discuss such developments which resulted in the shifts in Architecture and introduction of photography in India, specially focusing on the Princely State of Hyderabad. It also elaborates on the socio-political conditions that drove the history of the Nizam's courts and palaces. The paper also discusses about emergence of Academic naturalism and Maratha theatre backdrop painting during early the early twentieth century, and contributions of artists such as Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar (R.W.Deuskar).

2. Development of Architecture in the Princely State of Hyderabad

The evolution of the architecture in the Princely State of Hyderabad during the Nizam era reflects a shift in taste from indigenous style to Neo-Classical style (Fig,1). The wealthy Gujarati, Rajasthani and Marathi communities constructed their *havelis* celebrating regional aesthetics. In contrast the Nizams, particularly during the time of Mahbub Ali Khan, were attracted by the European grandeur. While the *havelis* and pavilions and Deiris were vernacular in style, and designed with indigenous material, the aesthetics of the palaces of the nobles and the Nizams reflect Imperial modernity. The intention of the new choice was political, if not subjective, making Hyderabad on par with other Princely States in India, and to objectively declare the cosmopolitan prestige.



Figure 1: A typical Neo-Classical Mansion in the Princely State of Hyderabad (Photo: Lala Deen Dayal)

Historian Angma Dey Jhala (2016), in 'Royal Patronage, Power and Aesthetics in Princely India' explained how Indians gradually embraced Western modernity by speaking the Queen's English, table manners, wearing Western attire, and playing 'the gentlemanly' game of Cricket, thinking that the idea of co-existence would make them comfortable and protective.¹ This was a common practice in the elite society to both as acceptance the British sovereignty and attraction to new way of life.

In fact, the British government recognized the local rulers under them as Rajas and Maharajas. These native rulers enjoyed their autonomy by paying mutually agreed taxes in exchange of military protection. This positioning of the princes and nobles enabled the State to embrace the European modernity both in life style and

¹ "Introduction: Cosmopolitan Collectors." in Royal Patronage, Power and Aesthetics in Princely India, (London: Routledge, 2016), 14. (<https://www.artdecomumbai.com/research/princely-states-and-the-emergence-of-art-deco-in-bombay/>).

architecture. In addition to this, their wealth and affinity with Europeans exposed them to new trends across the globe. This played an important role in spreading the modernity amongst other Indian nobles and enabled them to exploit this as one of the opportunities to reinforce their loyalty to the British. There are some instances, where artists were commissioned to create portrait paintings of the British administrators, and such paintings were gifted to the administrators as a token of respect. For example, Bombay became one of the main trade centers, with wealthy communities who were gradually exposed to Imperial modernity. With the opening of the Suez Canal trade between Europe and Bombay became easier, and subsequently, Indian elites took advantage of the facility to travel abroad for education, and vacations (Jhala, 2016). As a port city, it got exposed to modernist architectural styles, thus several mansions came up, demonstrating European architectural styles. Such modernist mansions by the nobles living in the Princely State were in fashion during pre-Independence time. Since Hyderabad and Bombay had an integral connection, a few wealthy Marwadis, and nobles built their mansion in both the cities. One such example is Dhanraj Mahal in Mumbai and Gyanbagh in Hyderabad, both were built by Dhanrajgirs in the Western style. If we observe the old pavilions and mahals, in comparison with changing architectural features, there is a clear shift particularly by the communities who were either associated with the British or forced to become modern aligning with Western modernity as necessary acquisition and validation to be regarded as pro-British during the Colonial period.

2.1 Shift from Regional to Neo-Classical

Later Mughal and Gujarati style of architecture in the Princely State of Hyderabad, belonging to the era of Qutb Shahis, had murals in western Indian style. These havelis, predominantly the wooden pavilions exemplify wealthy patronage of Indian crafts and paintings. Some Gujarati Viashyas such as Bhagwandas family built equisetic double-storied pavilion in mellowed teak, in Karwan area in the city, and few other like Mawala palace and Lakkad Kot which are demolished showcase the interest in traditional Indian art. Whereas, the Falak Numa (literally meaning ‘heaven-like’, named in contrastingly to the Paigah palace, Jahan Numa menas ‘world-like’) palace, designed by William Ward Marrett (1840–1903) with classical inspiration. Considered as second generation of architecture, the palace exuberantly fashioned with Neo-Classical façade having Greco-Roman pillars capitals. Its interiors show assembled artefacts, Roman benches, cast-iron lamps, balconies, the Neo-Classical style of stucco and murals (Fig.2).²

Originally commissioned by the Paigah nobleman, Sir Wiqar al-Umara in 1884, the palace was handed over to the Nizam, Mahbub Ali Khan on his insistence in 1896. Not long after the Nizam shifted the palace, he experienced, ‘unexpected crippled stroke’ and tumbled down from the stairs and died on 29 August, 1911 at the age of 46.³ This palace housed academic style of paintings created by Deen Dayal Naidu, and R.W.Deuskars along with European masters.

² Elizabeth Dickson, “Falaknuma: The Timeless Past at Hyderabad,” *Architectural Digest* 34 (March 1977): 146–154; “A Hyderabad Palace,” *Great Britain & The Empire* 48 (11 March 1937): 373; Harriett Ronken Lynton & Mohini Rajan, *Days of the Beloved*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 96–97;

³ Neela, I. (2021). Asaf Jah dynasty rulers of Hyderabad: A study. *Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices*, 6(12), 43. <http://www.anveshanaindia.com>



Figure 2: Interiors of Falak Numa Palace

The Nizam used to have several Palaces such as Saradar Villa, Pranai Haveli, Saroor Nagar Palace, Saifabad Palaces apart from Falak Numa. Among these, Saifabad Palce was the last home built for the Nizam in built in 1885 and the palace was converted into offices as early as 1910.⁴

3. Photography in India

Photography was introduced in India by the colonial authorities very early than in other parts of the globe just a decade before the Sepoy Mutiny (1857). It arrived with an intention to document the picturesque sub-continent and as an attractive medium for the colonial elite class; it soon found its place enjoying the popular patronage of the time. The East India Company proclaimed Photography to be used for documenting the architectural and archeological monuments for official records and for travelers as it is the most reliable and economical medium. With induction of modern equipment of Photography by early 1850s and with its life-like realistic effect and outcome, Photography challenged various genres of art during and after the East India Company regime. Not surprisingly, painting portraits, exuberant picture making and painstaking miniature style came under pressure of the new medium that showed an aptitude to render perfect details without much effort. Instead negating the predominance of the Photography, portrait painters began using photographs of the sitters as references in order to reduce the number of sittings required for the painting. The role of artists, artisans and photographers were to create exotic imagery of conquered territory for the foreign trade but soon art became a medium to record and establish power of British rule in India. As a parallel medium for visual communication, British had also used Photography for colonial propaganda, as a tool to conduct socio-cultural anthropological surveys India and to cater wider market outside the subcontinent. Even though the first record of Indian photograph can be traced back to 1844, there is no substantial evidence available when and how the technique arrived India. The earliest available source suggests that the Indian Office Collection shows the native Indian name of Nawab Ahmed Ali Khan of Lucknow who is believed to have taken the first picture between 1845 and 1855. Scanty evidences show that the first portrait studios were active and several daguerreotypes as well as a few salt prints of early Photography belonging to 1849.⁵

3.1 Photography in the Princely State of Hyderabad

While foreign photographers were very active carrying out their assignments largely assisted by several Indian apprentices, there were more than seventy studios found in Bombay and about forty in Calcutta, as well as many located in other cities like Delhi, Hyderabad and Agra. With at least two-hundred members, the Bombay

⁴ Nihal Singh, *The Nizam and the British Empire*, (Hyderabad, 1923), pp. 91, 110

⁵ Bertrand Puvion de Chavannes. *Visions of India 1860-1940: a peep into the history of photography in India*. Pondicherry : Kailash Gallery, 2010.

Photographic Society was established in 1854 and subsequently, within two years, a few other similar bodies were formed in Calcutta and Madras in 1856. Raja Deen Dayal had also opened studios in Indore, Bombay and Hyderabad all were running at one time attracting many indigenous patrons. Most of the colonial Photographers directly or indirectly propagated the Imperial vision by presenting subjects of the Victorian era. Raja Deen Dayal said to have prepared albums, which contain 6000 images. These picture demonstrate flamboyant Durbars, architecture, ruins, and people negotiating with the exotic and the romantic; the gorgeous and grotesque imagery. Thus, the Indian Photography was method of expressing one's emotion without sacrificing the aesthetics that matched the perception of British. Photography in Hyderabad flourished with an initiation of studio by Raja Deen Dayal, as several amateurs drawn towards the exotic medium. Although, the photography was used as a tool for various ethnographic, anthropological and historical documentation it was more an art form for nobles in Hyderabad. The legacy of Deen Dayal was well-preserved and presented for future generation by his grandson Amichand Deen Dayal, who also became a professional photographer trained in National Art School, Chicago in 1937. His account of political transition during 1948, when the Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan merged the State in the Indian Union is a noteworthy archival material. Due to Amichand's generous acceptance, Clark Joan Worswick, a California based historian and curator of Photography, acquired invaluable collection of Raja Deen Dayal and made public by publishing a book "Princely India: Photographs by Raja Deen Dayal" in 1980. Subsequently, Amichand's daughter Hemlata Jain helped in putting up exhibitions of works by Deen Dayal in Bombay, Pune and London between 1979 and 1982.⁶



Figure 3 The Nizam in the Procession, by Deen Dayal

4. Academic Art Practice in the Princely State of Hyderabad

As discussed in the previous section, the European influence on painting began appearing by the early 19th century. Life-like Photography, naturalistic and realistic style of portraits, and theatre backdrops were regarded as accurate representation. In the Princely State of Hyderabad, the preference for naturalism over traditional miniature style, particularly the old theatre curtain painting that was used for street plays, was impacted. Thus, demand for commercial art, crafts and decorative Indian art forms gradually declined paving way to the new taste for academic naturalism in the Princely State of Hyderabad. For instance, a theatre backdrop artist, Qayyum Sahab gained fame for his realistic representation of scenes attracting the theatre goers and spectators (Rao 1958). In the context of Andhra region, O.J.Couldrey's tutoring in Rajahmundry and backdrop paintings by A.S.Ram became models for the early twentieth century artists like Damerla Rama Rao, Adavi Baipiraju, and Chamkur brothers. However, in the context of Hyderabad, Seshagiri Rao opines, Qayyum Sahab's role as a

⁶ Jain, Hemalata. "History of Photography in India," Visions of India. web, <http://visionsofindia.blogspot.in/p/history-of-photography-in-india.html>. retrieved 17 Jan 2018.

backdrop painter, was a major modernist shift towards commercial art in Hyderabad.⁷ Simultaneously, Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar, who migrated from Maharashtra, was trained abroad under the patronage of the Nizams of Hyderabad brought back their experiences to enrich the local art scene with a Naturalistic approach to painting. His nephew, Gopal Deuskar and son Sukumar Deuskar, also studied abroad, funded by the Nizams rendered their services by contributing to the field of visual art in Hyderabad.⁸ The three Deuskars were excelled in Academic naturalism and painted portraits of the Nizams, Salar Jungs and Qutb shahis.

The earliest available sources suggest that the first ever art studio in Hyderabad was established by R.W.Deuskar (1869–1957), who pursued his formal education at J.J.School, Bombay between 1895 and 1900. He later on 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 the finest painters under the Nizams. He is referred as “the pioneer of modern painting in Hyderabad” (Parimoo, 92). He himself collected several antiques, paintings and made copies of European paintings to set up a museum for the Nizams. By 1910, he painted life-size portraits of the erstwhile Nizams, Salar Jungs, and later was appointed as the first curator of the Dewan Dewdi Salar Jung Museum (1950s).

4.1 Theatre Backdrop Paintings and Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar (R.W. Deuskar)

In Maharashtra, in the era of theatres, painters were hired and commissioned to create backdrops. The painters would generally copy Raja Ravi Varma's style to obtain illusion of realistic settings on the curtain paintings. Presumably, this is the period, when Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar was working as backdrop painter for the Marathi theatre. Several accounts of his life ascertain that he was closely associated to Keshavrao Bhosale, Chintaman Kolhatkar, Dinanath Mangeshkar, and had familial relation with Bapurao Pendharkar who got married to Deuskar's daughter.⁹ Nadkarni (1999) mentioned that Ramakishna Deuskar was associated with theatre figures such as Anna Saheb Kirloskar, Shripad Krishna Kolhatkar, and Bhaurao Kolhatkar. In his early years of artistic career, he worked for Marathi drama companies painting large “theatre curtains” at one stage of his career.¹⁰ The sketchy idea of R.Deuskar's early stint in backdrop paintings was established by the renowned Maratha theatre backdrop painter, P.S.Kale. He, in his book, “Lalitkalechya Sahaswasat”(1956) reveals that it was Ramakrishna Deuskar who sent him to Keshavrao Bhosale to take up the curtain painting as a profession. Kale further elaborates that he learnt the art of painting the curtains for drama stages under Deuskar, who was assisting Deuskar in Carpet designs for Deuskar's factory of Persian Carpet making, left for Pune in 1921 and became a permanent background painter for Keshavrao Bhosale's theatre company known as Lalit katha Natya Santha.

Suhas Bahulakar (2015), while tracing the relationship of R.W.Deuskar with his nephew, and renowned painter, Gopal Deuskar, stated that the city of Hyderabad has been a home for a large Marathi population many of whom were very active in arts, music, and theatre, and in other cultural pursuits. Deuskar was also involved in many such activities and came in contact with theatre personalities such as Keshavarao Bhosle, an acclaimed actor-musician, artist P.S.Kale, Bapu Pendarkar and others expanding his sphere of fame (Bahulkar 2015). Bahulkar discusses that R.W Deuskar himself became a host to various performances by artists such as Keshavarao Bhosle, and Bapu Pendharkar. Deuskar also got his daughter married to Bhalji (Balachandra Pendharkar), who rose to fame later. In 1921 he got in contact with some other stalwarts like Anand Rao Mistry and Babu Rao Mistry (Painter), which got involved him several theatre productions in Bombay till the death of Keshavarao Bhosle in 1921.

⁷ However, Qayyum chose to leave Hyderabad and relocated to Karachi (present Pakistan) during post-Police Action era in Hyderabad. Unfortunately, his time in Karachi was short-lived, as he succumbed to illness soon after his departure.

⁸ Sheshagiri Rao, Kondapalli. Telanganam, Hyderabad: Deshoddharaka Granthamala, 1956.

¹⁰ Nadkarni (1999). ‘The Deuskars of Hyderabad’-*Nadkarni Eye* .Jan 31, 1999.



Figure 5 : The Nizam VII Oil on Canvas by R.W.Deuskar, year 1911



Figure 4: Salar Jung III Oil on Canvas by R.W.Deuskar, year 1911

4.2 R.W. Deuskar at J.J School of Arts

Ramakrishna Deuskar received his formal training in art and craft at J.J.School of Arts between 1895 and 1900. He had a short stint under the tutelage of John Griffith.¹¹ M.V.Dhurandhar (1867-1944) of Kolhapur was his senior student along with M.F.Pithawalla (1872-1937), whom Deuskar admired. Later on Pestonji Bomanji (1851-1938) and Dhurandhar had become mentors in the same institute. Deuskar became model student, and his mentors would invite him to their ateliers, both for assisting them and gave him commission works. While assisting them in their personal work, spending quality time in their studios, Ramakrishna would observe how their mentors brought about the illusion, their use of the tonal variation, and the life-like naturalistic treatment in their paintings. Because of his strong affiliation with the European teachers, he not only got an opportunity to hone his skills, but also came to know about well-known artists and art institutions in European countries.

After his studies, Ramakrishna moved to Hyderabad as Pune came under unrest in 1897. The conditions in the city of Pune changed drastically due to the spread of dangerous bubonic plague epidemic followed by political unrest. Such incidents forced many families to leave Pune (Ramanna 19-25). Bahulkar observes is that Ramakrishna Deuskar, while he was studying in J.J.School of Arts, befriended Pandit Shripad Damodar Satawalekar (1867-1968), who later came to be known as 'Ved Maharshi'. Both migrated to Hyderabad in 1901 and setup a studio at Residency Bazar area¹² (Bahulkar 2015). Satawalekar studied Fine arts at J.J.School of Arts. Even though, he started his career as a Painter and Photographer by establishing studios in Lahore and in Hyderabad by painting portraits of the aristocracy, he devoted his time in reviving Indian values reacting to the hegemony of Colonial rule in India.¹³

¹¹ Griffith moved to Montgomeryshire after his retirement in the same year when Deuskar joined the college

¹² Old name of present day Sultan Bazar, which lies between two commercial areas Abids and Koti.

¹³ He was closely associated with Lokamanya Tilak, who played an instrumental role in several rebellious activities such as Gadar and Home Rule movements, and participated in Quit India movement for which the British Government prosecuted him several times. Later, Satwalekar founded the Swadhyaya Mandal, a Vedic research institute, at Killa-Pardi, Aundh of Satara district in Maharashtra in 1918. See: Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal, Volume 6, Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, 1969, India, and The Indian P.E.N., Volume 32 P.E.N. All-India Centre., 1966 - Indic literature.

Around this time, Lala Deen Dayal, became the official photographer of the Nizam and opened studios in Hyderabad. European studio photographers were also active with lucrative commissions under their belt. As several rich class people were attracted to the new medium, photography, and the life-like realistic depictions in oil medium. Reacting to the conditions, Pandit Shripad Damodar Satwalekar and Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar established a common studio in Hyderabad in 1901.¹⁴ Deuskar took care of the photographic section in the absence of Satwalekar. Finally, both parted ways as Satwalekar sensed risk of getting arrested because of his nationalistic activities and speeches. (Bahulkar 2015). Sumathi Ramaswamy (2010) in “The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India” gives an account of Satwalekar’s studio in Hyderabad. Nadkarni (1999) also confirms 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.” 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. According to the sources available hitherto, indicate that Ramakrishna Waman Deuskar was the first artist of the Princely Sate of Hyderabad, who initiated academic realism in Hyderabad, and took up modern portrait painting seriously.

Conclusion

The colonial modernity in Princely State of Hyderabad gained its increased visibility via architecture, photography and painting. Raja Deen Dayal, who photographed moments of the Nizams’ life, captured the grandeurs of interiors and exteriors of the Nizams courts and palaces. These vintage photographs serve as archival material to understand the era of the Nizams. Even though photography was introduced to India as means to document architecture and archeological monuments, it eventually developed into a modern art form in Hyderabad. Similarly, we notice shifts in the tastes of the Nizam, in building palaces that are heavily influenced by Neo-Classical architecture over the indigenous styles of *havelis* and pavilions. This shift in architecture is observed to have occurred alongside increasing trade, and the influence of Colonial Modernity, which led the Nizams, nobles and wealthy merchants to build palaces in the Neo-Classical style in the city. This is evident when we look at the Falak Numa or even Deori Imad Jung, a building that functioned as the Central School of Art and Craft from the 1940s until 1963. This mansion features a European façade with Greco-Roman colonnades reflecting the influence of Colonial modernity on architecture and design in Hyderabad.

At this juncture, several backdrop paintings and portraits of aristocracy demonstrate that R.W. Deuskar was as one of the pioneers of Modernism, and practiced academic naturalism similar to his contemporaries. That is the reason why well-known art historian Prof.Ratan Parimoo termed him as “the pioneer of Modern Painting” in Hyderabad. Along with the emergence of academic art, initiated by artists who were associated with theatre curtain paintings, the modernist architecture and photography shaped the cultural and artistic landscape of the city during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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