

From Caves to Miniatures: Portrayal of Woman in Early Indian Paintings

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Abstract

The portrayal of woman in art is a much debated issue and revisited again and again, after the advancement of feministic ideology. In early Indian paintings, woman is often equipped to evoke sensual pleasure for the onlookers. This phenomenon of female objectification has been particularly observed as a socio-cultural issue from 19th century onwards. The depiction of woman in contemporary scenario has been entirely changed compared to the ancient times because female artists are subverting those objectified narratives into significant forms. The bias of representation has been connected from the very dawn of the civilization and reached on its zenith in 17th century. In this way, the historical representations could be a better medium to evaluate the role of women in Indian paintings. The paper aims to discuss the portrayal of woman from ancient to pre-colonial times, in which the non-significant roles of womanhood have been critically analyzed.

Keywords: Women, paintings, feminist, representation.

Introduction

The subsistence of society is exclusively depending upon the feminine facet, in which, the imagination of the endurance of all human being is inconceivable. The status and connotation of womanhood can be defined appropriately through the visual art of the particular time period. In this context, the literature, art, architecture, and religious manuscripts can be included because visual representation is the reflection of society. Hence, paintings can be used as a medium to revisit the role of woman in the society because art is always being related with the socio-cultural tendencies and strongly connected with the taste and demands of the individual.

In ancient age, paintings are made on the walls of caves (pre-historic period), which was considered the first step of human towards development (Mishra 2001). In this perspective, if the cave paintings are explored as an initial stage, the sexual identities for gender significance are not entirely visible due to geometrical -shaped figures on the walls besides few. Therefore, the gender

is not fully visible due to linear composition of the figures. But, the fertility cult and procreation was the most depicted theme in the rock paintings worldwide (Kleiner 2008).

Going through the evidences, fertility and mother goddess cult has been focused from pre-historic period and started to get developed in the Indus Valley civilization. (Wakankar & Brooks, 1976, Mathpal, 1984, Kamat, 1997, Nagar 1998). In Indus Valley civilization, the woman has been depicted in the form of clay figurines, bronze sculpture and on the seals in symbolic manner (Kak. S 2005, Mcintosh 2008).

In the Vedic period, art was a medium for worship and spirituality, in which, the holy scriptures of the Aryans have been initialized. The very first linguistic record has been found in the Rig-Veda (Khanna 2007), the holy writing of the Vedic period (c.1500-900 B. C. E.), and its hymns were used for the guidance of human-beings. In this age, the artistic productions were very limited as per the accounts of evidences. The murals of Ajanta and Ellora are also beautified with the sensuous and sublime figures of woman but the core theme was only related with the promotion of religious ideologies. The Indian sub-continent has also been flourished with the marvelous miniature paintings, which originated in Pal dynasty, in India. Although, it's versatile enhancement has reached on its highest peak during the Mughal period but other dynasties also gave their significant contribution in the production of miniatures.

In miniatures, woman is mostly depicted in an objective manner either in the form of male consort/lover or as the representative of patriarchal hierarchies. The image of woman in Indian miniature has mostly been portrayed with the fusion of societal aspects and sensuous appeal and this stereotype of portrayal has been prevailed till pre-colonial period.

Thus, the present study will be based on an overview of the portrayal of woman in Indian paintings from ancient to pre-colonial times. The role of woman has been observed on the bases of visual narratives. In this context, the representation of woman has been critically observed on the bases of theme, symbolic significance and other related aspects of application. In which, woman has been frequently depicted to project sensual and erotic display and has been neglected from significant roles as compare to man.

Woman in Prehistoric Period in India

The evidence of painting is found from the prehistoric cave paintings of India, where, the signs and motifs of pre-historic civilization can be traced. In these cave paintings, the dominating theme was hunting and daily-life depiction but the identification of sexes (in the paintings) is a challenging term due to the geometrical shapes of the body in more than 80% of the whole paintings. It can also be considered that the gender has no significance in earlier times because the art was entirely based on geometrical or linear forms. It is found that sexuality was not a big issue at that time and the power of reproduction or procreation is highly celebrated as Mathu (2008) stated that:

“In such society, female sexuality was not a threat and did not have to be managed; on the contrary since the very survival of the community depended upon it, female reproductive power was highly valued.”

The magical and religious semiotics can also be traced through some prehistoric paintings.

Going through the theme, it is seen that the portrayal of woman is rarely done. The paintings which represent woman are very few and the dominated theme of those paintings is fertility. Fertility related theme has been identified through the images of pregnant woman. These cave paintings have been deeply observed by Mathpal, who also made some imitations of some of those paintings. His study is particularly related with the rock paintings of Bhimbetaka, Madhya Pradesh, which is considered as a main site of pre-historic period.

In one of those images, woman has been shown as walking with quick steps. The woman is also carrying a stick, which is placed on her head. Her breast has been made larger than her body proportion.



Figure - 1 Venus of Bhimbetaka

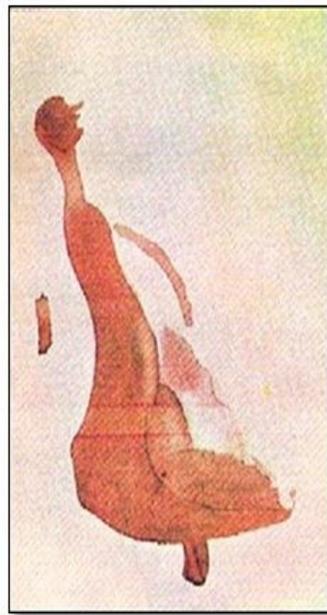


Figure - 2 Seated woman of Bhimbetaka

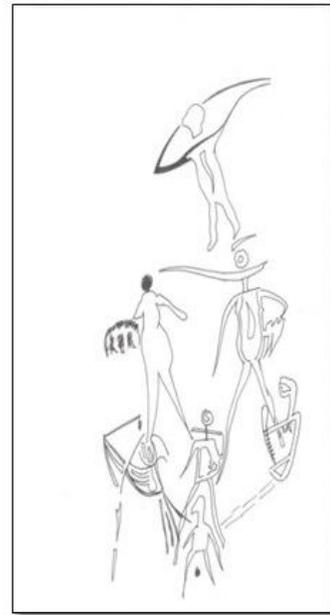


Figure - 3 A Family Scene with a pregnant woman

Figure - 1 Venues of Bhimbetaka, reproduction of Yashodhar Mathpal with Brush on paper, 1984 source Mathpal, 1984
 Figure - 2 Seated Woman, reproduction of Yashodhar Mathpal with Brush on paper, 1984 source Mathpal, 1984
 Figure - 3 A Family Scene with a pregnant woman, handmade sketch, Malla 2013

In another image, a woman has been shown as seated in a resting posture; she is looking pregnant too, which is clearly visible through her body structure.

The theme of remaining paintings is deeply male-centered and represents male dominance because man are depicted as a symbol of great power and energy and engaged in hunting and gathering activities for livelihood. Moreover, the heroic characteristics have also been shown in the portrayal of man, which is also discussed by Mathpal and he divided these images in 28 groups. In this category (which is made by him to define male and female paintings), man is mostly depicted with his weapons and riding on animals etc. (1984).

On the contrary, the woman is depicted only in conceiving state or engaged in very casual routines and being ignored from such powerful display as compare to man. In an image, entitled 'pregnancy', the woman is depicted with two animals and three of them are shown in conceiving

condition (Fig-4). One of the animals, placed on the above side of the painting, is looking like a deer and conceiving an elephant which is visible for the transparency.

Another animal (placed with woman) in the image is seems to be a cow like figure which is depicted as carrying the baby of her own species. The pregnant woman has shown as pointed her hand towards that animal which can be a way to celebrating this happiness after painting on the wall. Moreover, it could be a way to express her condition to the unknown ones. Kamat has argued that the animals and birds constitute the largest subject of these paintings. According to Kamat, the representation of embedding different kind of animals in each other stomach is a way of depicting humor and imagination. It can also be a way to depict magical elements through images. Whatever the message, behind the depiction of pregnancy, the woman mostly depicted in pregnant state rather than any social or working activity.

In this concern, fertility is remained a par-excellence and an exclusive merit of womanhood, so, the society and surroundings of each antiquity sanctioned its uppermost place than any other quality of woman. Childbirth is also celebrated like a divine bliss which is given to woman only, so, it is obvious to display pregnancy for ancient people because they were not aware about any scientifically theories. For instance, the people had beliefs in supernatural powers for the cure of illness and for the bliss of life. Therefore, to give birth is resembled to metaphysical quality in which the woman is considered like goddess but their involvement in other activities is particularly ignored in the depiction.



Figure - 4 Woman with Animals



Figure - 5 Mother goddess

Figure - 4 Woman with Animals or pregnancy, Drawing on paper By Kamat 1997, Prehistoric cave painting, Bhimbetka
 Figure - 5 Mother Goddess, Drawing on paper by Kamat 1997, Prehistoric cave painting, Bhimbetka originally photographed and kept in the Tribal Museum Chindwara
 Source, Figure - 3 and 4- <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/rockpain/betaka.htm>

The other image (Fig-5) is having a mother goddess figure with heavy breast and the fountains of milk are falling on the earth like shower. Thus, the image is typically related with the cult of mother goddess which is a most prominent aspect in Indian ancient paintings. In this context, it can be analyzed that the women in paintings of prehistoric period were discarded from the hunting and gathering works and only their productive energy is shown.

On the other hand, may be the existence of womanhood in these hunting and working activities has remained in darkness due to the geometric or linear shapes in the paintings. Because there are few paintings too, which depict woman's involvement in the working field at the site of Bhimbetaka. According to Malla, a group of some person is shown as gathering the fruits and a woman is engaged to collect the fruits in a basket on her back (Malla 2013).

As Kamat stated that few Bhimbetka paintings show sexual organs. Sometimes to identify a woman they have drawn a small vagina, but have left out the breast. However, in some spots to glorify women, they have drawn large breast and a flow of milk is coming out from them like fountain. The evidence of mother goddess depiction can be traced by two drawings of spider-shaped women, and there is also a scene of family in which a pregnant woman has been portrayed.

In this context, the voluptuous mother goddess who has been frequently dominated over the theme of ancient Indian paintings has also been exhibited in the pre-historic cave paintings of India. It may also be considered that the reason behind the minority of female depiction in paintings could be their own involvement as artists. Because various folk or tribal art of India have been practiced by woman only as a performance of rituals or for the decoration. This point has also been argued by Wakankar and Brook, because they mentioned that a village called Bhagalpur near Bhimbetaka has the same practice (where women decorate the walls on religious ceremonies). In this village, the hut of the head man of the village has been decorated by the women on some religious occasions with wall paintings, which is resembled to the pre-historic rock paintings of that place (Wakankar and Brooks, 1976). Thus, it may also be considered that the artist behind the prehistoric paintings may be a woman or the existence of womanhood has concealed behind the geometrical shapes despite the unveiled fertility aspect. Therefore, the feminine acquaintances have been derived in a very diplomatic subsistence whether they are the harbinger of sexual or reproductive powers or hidden artists of prehistoric caves. In context of pictorial narrations, their role are not much significant than man. The painting related with sexuality or reproductive powers have no significance in framing their vital role in society. It can also be considered that the role of woman is not much contributive in the narratives of rock paintings of prehistoric times. It is only their reproductive power which is celebrated more than their actual identity as a human being.

Indus Valley Civilization (c. 2600-1900 B. C. E.):-

The first Indian civilization after the pre-historic period is the civilization of Indus Valley, where the production of artistic innovation had been more improvised in various techniques including terracotta figurines, seals and pottery. In this innovative era, the path for fulfilling the requirements of living had been discovered by mankind. The innovation of house making and other respective things; various skills had been developed in the field of art and architecture. A variety of seals and terracotta figurines had been found by the archeological surveys (Fig-6). In these figurines, nude mother goddesses are frequently depicted (Coburn 1991, Nagar, 1998, Marshall 1931). In this civilization, the depiction of woman has been done prominently in two

categories; in the form of seals and terracotta figurines (Wangu 2003). Numerous nude female figures have been made in which the sexual organs are highlighted with heavy breast and broad hips (Muesse 2011). In their depiction, the navel and vulva is focused intermittently. Sometimes, a decorative belt overlaps the navel, at times a short wrap hide the vulva. Furthermore, some male figurines and animate motifs have also been found i.e., bull, elephant, unicorn, etc (Fig-7) because manly powers have been represented symbolically through these animate motifs.



Figure- 6 Terracotta Figurine of Indus Valley



Figure - 7 Seals of Animate Motifs

Figure- 6 Terracotta figurine of woman, 7000 BCE to circa 2500 BCE, Mehrgarh (Pakistan)

Source- <https://toranas.wordpress.com/tag/mehrgarh/>

Figure-7 Stone seals inscribed with animals and Indus script. Harappan Civilization, 3000-1500 BC

Source- <http://www.thenagain.info/WebChron/India/Harappa.html>

These small clay figurines have been associated with the celebration of female sexuality because the power of giving birth is an exclusive boon. It is noticeable that this celebration of sexuality is only belonged to supernatural powers and these powers had been taken as a divine worship. There were mainly two kinds of woman, one is heavenly and the other one is earthly. Worship of sexuality had been accepted as course of ritualistic performance by the earthly or common woman to gain child and for the prosperity of children. To some extent, sexual worship is belonged to female deities; it has nothing to do with the common woman except procreation. Sexual worship or mother goddess cult may not be applicable to reconsider the role of woman as an individual. A small sculpture of bronze, which is known as female dancer had also found from the Indus Valley, which represents the engagement of woman in amusement-related activity for man because dancers were usually performed music and dance for the people. In this bronze sculpture which is called dancer, the genitals are not so big like the mother goddess figure, then it may be said that the voluptuous female body is only belonged to sexual worship at Indus valley. The reason behind the lean body of this dancer may be her age factor because she is looking like a young teenage girl. Another major depicted form is goddess Lajja-Gauri, who is frequently depicted as her leg apart and showing her vulva (Fig.9). She is particularly belonged to sexual worship and also related with tantric cults. Martin also added that sexual worship was very much in trends during the time of Indus valley civilization at numerous places all over the world (2012).



Figure – 8 Bronze Girl



Figure – 9 Goddess on Seal

Figure - 8 Bronze Girl, made in bronze, c. 2500 BC, dimension- 10.5 c.m.x 5 c. m., Collection-National museum Karachi

Source- https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Dancing_girl.jpg

Figure -9 Indus valley cylinder seal. Mature Harappa.2700-2300 bc. Private collection, Source Martin

Source- https://www.academia.edu/5246382/Lajja_Gauri_the_goddess_of_sexuality_from_Mesopotamia_to_India

There are no official records, which have any account of painting during the time of Indus valley but the mother goddess cult has been initiated after the mark of Indus valley civilization. The goddess worship had been started and prevalent till recent past, these goddesses have been identified as, “*mother goddesses and sacrificial deities*” (Wangu 2003, Muesse 2011, Martin 2012, Tiwari 1985). So, the symbolic significance of fertility has turned its forms in the Indus valley civilization.

Woman in Mural Paintings

The earliest history of painting in India is started in the form of mural at Ajanta (2nd B.C. to 7th CE). The main theme of the cave temples of Ajanta was Buddhism and whole paintings were depicted in narrative form. In the portrayal of womanhood, the graceful female icons have been painted in the form of queens, dancers, mistresses and other secondary forms. The women of Ajanta are well-known for their superb gestures and sublimity in semi-naked and naked form. The exotic and sensuousness of divine *Apsaras* and other forms have been depicted after following the prototype of Indian *Shadanga* (the six limbs of Indian painting). These divine beauties are very much appreciated for their magnificent gestures rather than seductive approach.

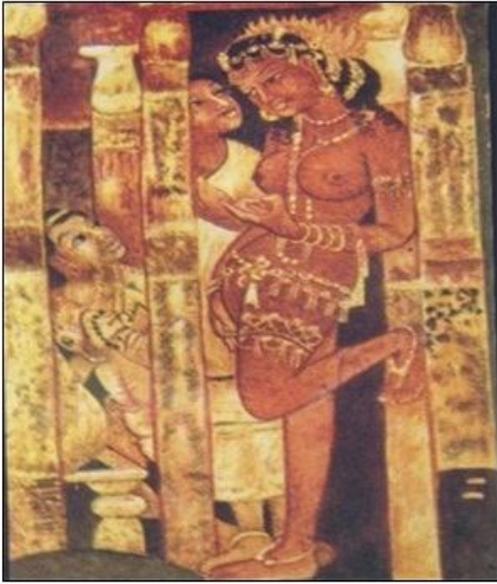


Figure- 10 Mayadevi

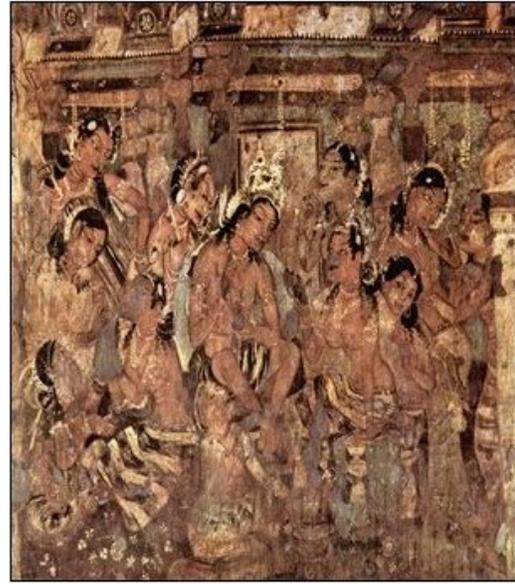


Figure- 11 Chaddanta Jataka Story

Figure- 10 Mayadevi, the mother of Lord Buddha, Murals of Ajanta, Fresco from Cave no. 2, made around 2nd century BCE to 480 or 650 CE

Source- <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/budhist/1094.jpg>

Figure- 11 A Scene from the story of Chaddanta jataka, Fresco from Ajnata of cave no. 10, made in 2nd century BCE.

Source- <http://www.wondermondo.com/Images/Asia/India/Maharashtra/AjantaJataka.jpg>

On the one hand, graceful and charming attitude of woman have been painted by the artists of Ajanta, but, if the paintings are observed on the behalf of the feminine, they are just placed to fulfill the requirement of the story or for the ornamentation, on the other. As Archer stated that the first interpretation of romanticism has been depicted in the cave paintings of Ajanta from 1st century B.C. to 6th -7th century AD. During the 5th century A. D., the Buddha was celebrated as a divine king and his chambers in the form of caves were beautified with all medium of amusements including dancing girls. This dominating subject represents the first major style of Indigenous painting but also “communicates a delight in womanly physics” which represents the “dreams and fantasies of the female form and its promise of bliss (Archer 1956).

Cave no 9 and 10(Circa. BC 100 to AD) has been considered as the earliest cave of Ajanta in which, major paintings are based on the story of Saddanta Jataka (six tusk elephant), the incarnation of Buddha.

In the first phase of the narrative, the elephant is depicted as playing in a Jungle and in second part, the jealous queen has depicted with his attendants. She is depicted in fainting condition after seeing the tusk of his previous- birth husband (dead husband in the form of elephant) for which she has ordered to a hunter(to kill the elephant due to jealousy) (Anand 1973). In this story, the victory of the greatness of Lord Buddha has been represented over the jealous nature of his queen. As per the story, the elephant was the husband of two she-elephants but due to some misunderstanding, one of them thought that Buddha was giving more preference to the second wife. So, his first wife was died and took birth as a woman. She became the queen

and ordered to kill the elephant (Buddha in previous birth) but when she heard about the dignity of him, she realized her rude and unfair behavior for her previous-birth husband.

The elephant sacrificed himself for the queen which represents the sublimity of Buddha for the happiness of the queen. On the contrary, the cruel nature of woman has been defined through the story and the emotions of queen are represented after his death. Here, a woman is politically used to represent the divine nature of Buddha, where Buddha is proved as a divine soul: while the woman is proved an evil, who was either burning for her revenge or regretting for her injustice.



Figure - 12 Mother and Child

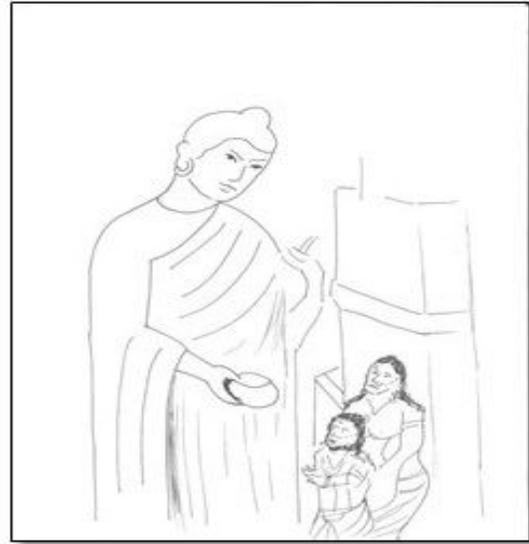


Figure - 13 Handmade Sketch

In a scene entitled Mother and Child (Cave 17), the large composition of Buddha has been drawn to add more concentration to him than the woman in the painting. Although, as per the aim of the painting, this way of emphasizing the main figure has been done to enhance the figure of Lord Buddha, which was a priority of the artists of these caves. In another painting, entitled 'Padmapani Bodhisattva' (c. 462-477 AD), Lord Buddha is again painted larger than the woman next to him. The woman is also portrayed with the same flower (like the Buddha) in her hand and the costumes are also approximately the same. She is depicted in semi-naked condition like the Buddha but the size and the placement is very insignificant. According to Hernandez (2011), the woman on the right of the painting would be the third noticeable part for its viewers. This woman may be the consort of the Bodhisattva but the role of her is not very considerable. The *Apsaras* and queens of Ajanta are often portrayed with full rounded breast and broad hips as per the six limbs of paintings. Despite of beautiful grace and divine gestures, the significant of women in Ajanta are not much preferred than the male representation. Their place has only been driven through their gender significance but the virtual contribution of feminine may be neglected.

After Ajanta, there are also many painting traditions, which influenced by it, in this category the caves of Badami, Sittanavasal, Tirumalaipuram, Ellora, Anegudi, Lepakshi, Tiruparutikunram, Bagh and Sigiriya can be observed. Badami cave temples have situated in Karnataka and established by the Chalukayas (600-700 AD). There is only one surviving mural,

which has the figures of lord Shiva and Parvati, a divine Hindu couple. Shyness and graceful gestures are the major features of the goddess in this painting (Anand 1973). In Sittanavasal (near Madras state), the *Apsaras* or heavenly dancers are still dominated on the theme with their voluptuousness and sensuousness (Archer 1956, Randhawa and Galbraith 1968, Anand 1973).

The cave temples at Ellora had been built from 7th to 11th century AD in Maharashtra by Rashtrakuta dynasty. In the caves of Ellora, sculptures were more preferred than paintings in the temples. In this sculptural representation, woman has been mostly represented as a 'goddess' (Malandra 1993) but the paintings are very less in number. In Ajanta, similar depiction of sensuous feminine figures is prevalent in almost all the murals. As Archer stated that 'in the Jaina cave-temples at Ellora (c. 10th century), dancing-girls were depicted with moulded limbs' (1956). Wall paintings in cave temples of Ellora are in a small scale, but in Kailasa temple, the walls are filled with Hindu gods and goddesses, in which the heroic capability of male-gods has been portrayed. For instance, the battle scenes, riding and god-worship has been shown (Anand 1973).

Bagh (6th to 7th century) was the contemporary tradition of Ajanta at western Malwa and flourished with many murals but most of the paintings are damaged like the Ajanta and Ellora. In the existing paintings, religious theme was not the main concern but tribal Bhil life with full sensuousness has been depicted in murals. In a painting, the dark figures of women have been exhibited in a dancing state showing nude and half-nude women with ornamented detail. In this group, a male figure is placed between the circles of female dancers.

The well-proportioned structure of female figures has again been portrayed with half-nudity to set the seductive approach. In the cave of Sigiriya (Sri Lanka), the painting of two female figures (5th-6th centuries) has been portrayed where the first woman is half-covered with an appearance of a queen or *Apsara*. *She is the focal point* of this painting. The second one may be her attendant, who is following her, made in a simple way to give more focus to the main figure. The flower in the hand of her attendant is may be a symbol of woman's delicacy and tenderness. The flower can also be a symbolic representation of offering purposes. The body structures are also framed in a sensuous appeal with charming gestures. (Anand, 1973).

In this context, this may be said that the representation of woman in the murals has been politically done for mainly two purposes. The first purpose may belong to her objectification, where her beauty and enigma has been used to make the paintings attractive and eye-catching. The second purpose may relate with the thrust of subject, where she has been placed for supporting the narratives of a bigger male-centered story.

Manuscript Tradition 11th and 12th Century-

The naturalistic style of paintings has been developed under the patronage of Buddhism, in which manuscripts have been illustrated to highlight the Buddhist ideology. Similarly, in Gujarat, the Jaina religious manuscripts are also complemented by illustrations. These two styles came into existence to preserve and spread the religious sect through the sacred text of Lord Buddha and Mahavira.

Buddhist Manuscripts Tradition

The Buddhist manuscript tradition was started during the 12th century in Bihar and Bangal, referred as the Eastern school by the critics. The main theme of these illustrations is related to religious beliefs associated with Lord Buddha and his incarnations. Art always existed as a medium to promote and protect religious antiquities as painting is the most convenient medium

to express feelings. These Buddhist religious manuscripts were instrumental for the promotion of religion. In these Illustrations, women have been portrayed in forms of common being to goddesses including queen, princess, attendants, slaves and so on. There is also a manuscript which is fully based on goddess tenet, called, Prajnaparamita.

The goddess Prajna (goddess of wisdom in Buddhism) has been depicted in delightful colors with the scriptures of Buddhism. In these paintings, the goddess is mostly in nude and semi-nude condition with powerful gestures. However, the main concern behind the goddess's depiction is the ritualistic aspect rather than other significant portrayal of common woman. According to Anand, "The *Prajna*, or wisdom, by which *Nirvana* is achieved, is visualized as a goddess named *Prajna Paramita*" (Anand 1973). The style of the illustrations depicts some influence from mural paintings of Ajanta. In this manuscript, various forms of goddess are illustrated with aesthetic appeal in a sublime manner. Due to Muslim invasion, this style migrated to Nepal with the artists. The finest example is the painting of Brahma and Sarasvati on cloth, which is now in Boston Museum.

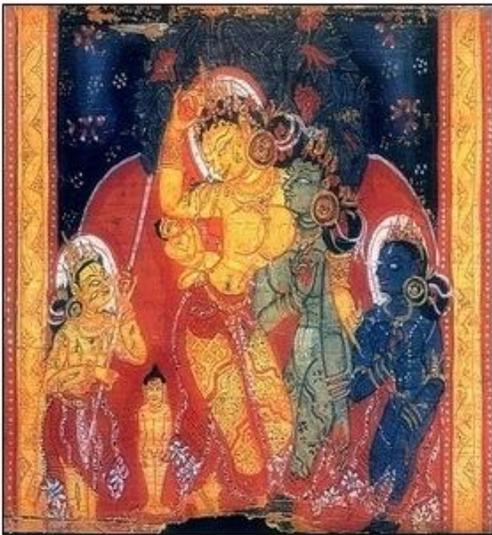


Figure - 14 Nativity Scene, Prajnaparamita



Figure - 15 Mamaki with Vajra on lotus

Figure - 14 Nativity Scene, Prajnaparamita folio, Bihar (India), Mayadevi giving birth in the sacred grove, Collection- Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Ca. 1150, Opaque watercolor on Palm Leaf, Hight, 2.5 in. (6. 35 cm.)

Source.

<http://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/psychology/images/1/1c/Prajnaparamita2.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20071105120330>

Figure - 15 Mamaki with Vajra on lotus Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita Manuscript, Pala Period (India), In the region of Surapala Deva, Late 11th century, Palm leave with painted wooden covers, 58 cm. x 7 cm.

Source- <https://www.asianart.com/articles/allinger/large/x5.jpg>

Jaina Style

The tradition of illustrated manuscripts was developed under the patronization of Jaina merchants. The *pata* (cloth) painting had been supplemented in the Jaina religious manuscripts and started to be preserved in the temples around 10th century AD. These manuscripts can be

divided into two phases, the first phase is being considered from 10th to 15th century AD and the later phase belongs to 1350 to 1550 A.D. in Gujarat. In the earlier phase of Jaina tradition, the depiction of woman has been not properly done because the main concern of the artists was Lord Mahavira but in later Jaina style woman has also become a part of illustrations.

Moreover, the religious theme was more focused than other scenarios. The main theme of the earliest manuscripts was related with Jaina mythology, including the representations of gods, goddesses, monks and other common characters. The paintings are exhibited in a limited extent in these manuscripts. In this category, the main manuscripts are Kalpasutra, Kalakacharya Katha and the Sangrahnī Sutra etc.

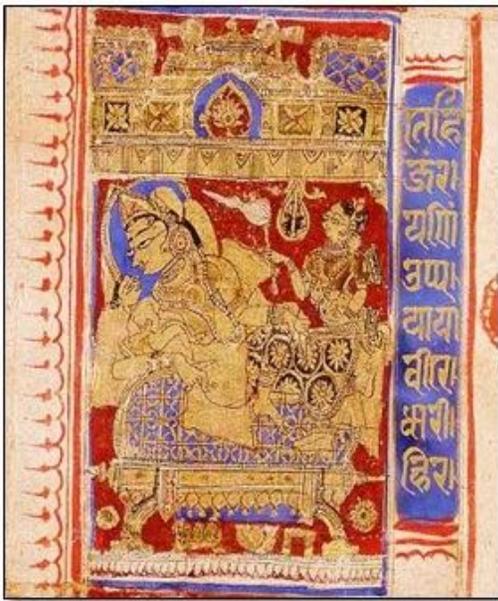


Figure - 16 The birth of Mahavira



Figure - 17 Women Celebrating the Birth of Mahavira

Figure - 16 Page from a kalpasutra manuscript showing the birth of Mahavira. Western India, Late 15th and early 16th century, Opaque water colour on paper

Figure - 17 A page from the Kalpasutra manuscript showing women of the royal household celebrating the sixth Shah Jahan and his Beloved night after the birth of Mahavira, made in western India, late 15th and early 16th century, Opaque water colour on paper

Figures 16 and 17 Source-

http://www.herenow4u.net/fileadmin/v3/media/pics/Jain_history/Art_History/VAMus_016.jpg

The later phase was influenced by the Persian style and a fusion of Persian and Hindu tradition has been portrayed in the form of manuscript in Gujarat during the late sixteenth century (Losty 1992). As well as, the Rajput impact is also found in later period. Although, the phases of Jaina tradition have been divided into three periods by Ghose, (1975) in which, the first style spans from thirteenth to the sixteenth century (Archaic Period), the second one spans from the end of the sixteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth century in the influence of Persian art (influenced by Mughal style). The last style was influenced by Rajput art in the late seventeenth century. The women depiction in early Jaina style had first appeared with in the Oghaniryukti (based on Jaina monks and their life), in which the goddess Laxmi has been portrayed with Kamdeva, the god of love. In another manuscript entitled Digambara

Satkhandagma (scripture of six works), a preaching scene is portrayed with a Jina, and the goddess Chakreshvari. In the Neminathacharita (1241), the Jina Neminath is portrayed with goddess Ambika and a laywoman. The earliest examples of these illustrated manuscripts are found in Kalapa-Sutra and Kalakacharya Katha, in which the theme was particularly related with the lives and miracles of lord Mahavira (Sharma, 1980; Coomaraswamy, 1917). There is very little relationship between the text and the paintings, but some primitive effect was there with imbalanced body structures.

In the later phase, from the fifteenth century, manuscripts were started to be written on paper and the simplicity of these depictions had turned into ornamentally detailed under Mughal influence (Deneck, 1967). The artists started to portray women figures with full bosoms in standard body type. This style had been flourished in Gujarat, Malwa, Mandu, Jaunpur, and Delhi. The love depiction theme was also portrayed in a medieval Gujarati scroll of Vasanta Vilasa or the advent of spring (1451 AD) (Anand, 1973). The Kalpasutra was illustrated in Mandu under the Muslim reign with ornamentation and aesthetical approach to the feminine. The love poem of Lurchanda and Chaurapanchasika (the fantasy of love thief) were also portrayed in Jaina style in Jaunpur. The Krishna stories of Geet-Govinda and Bal Gopal Stuti were also illustrated in Jaina style. It is stated that:

“Sensuality was further enhanced by the larger breast and the jutting-out skirts and the curve of the haunches of the ladies represented in the manuscripts” (Bhattacharya, 1966).

In Buddhist and Jaina manuscript tradition, the same ideology of religious representation had been found. In Buddhist manuscript tradition, woman is particularly depicted in the form of goddess or mother but the grace of female figure, which has started from mural style, has not been actually found in these illustrations. In earlier Jaina style, the female form has been portrayed in an improper manner (*apbhransha style*) like all other forms. However, the other basic characteristics of the paintings had been shown through bright colours. In the later Jaina style, female form had been raised in a sensuous and charming attitude in nude and semi-nude postures, which may be an impact of other styles like Mughal and Rajput. The romantic and love making scenes have also been portrayed, but there was a lack of proper attention to represent the respect for womanhood.

Mughal Paintings

Persian impact can be observed in Indian paintings from the 13th century, when Delhi was conquered by Muhammad Ghori (in 1192), a successor of Turk and ruled by his viceroy Kutb-uddin Aibak. The influence of Islamic tradition had started in Indian paintings with the fusion of many styles. In Malwa, a fortress named Mandu became an established kingdom under the reign of Pathans and the display of erotic scenes in paintings was started around the 13th century. “The women have flowing skirts, narrow waist and full hips and breast.” (Randhwa & Galbraith 1968).

The founder of the Mughal Empire Babur (1526-30), had started the artistic enhancement of Persian style in India, and then his successors continued it till the 16th century. The depiction of women in Mughal paintings had been done in manuscripts, which are very few in number. Furthermore, the Mughal miniature paintings are intricately detailed and associated with the narration of court scenes and social life, in which representation of political status was more highlighted. Moreover, the focus was derived by the factors of self-appreciation of the king and his belongings including ancestries too. Apart from that, some paintings were particularly done

for the manuscripts of many religions including Hindu mythology (Lewis 1976). The custom of veil was very prevalent in Islamic culture and strictly followed by everyone making it very difficult to seek a woman in courtly paintings and portraiture besides of few erotic paintings. In Mughal miniature paintings, there are many images of women engaged in erotic display like a man is surrounded by many women in a toilet scene. Dancers, maids and concubines at courtly scenes are depicted in many paintings. On the other hand, the women are also shown in the form of a mother or princess enjoying or resting but in a limited extent.

In the period of Akbar, the Hindu epics and stories had also been illustrated in manuscripts, for instance, Ramayana, Mahabharata and so on. In these stories the women were also portrayed as per their role in the story. A painting contained “the episode of Ramayana in which Sita, after her abduction by the demon-king Ravana, is asked to prove her purity in a test by fire” (Randhawa, 1981). Jahangir was a lover of nature, so he mostly patronized the paintings of animate and natural elements along with the courtly appreciation of other kings. The subject of the paintings in Jahangir's period was particularly related with flora and fauna, animals, the life on common people, the courtly life and so on. Unlike Akbar, the women were more prominently depicted in the paintings of Jahangir's period in various forms including European, Persian and as well as Hindu. There is a painting, in which a young person is making love with a woman is considered “the sensuous painting of the Jahangir period” (Randhwa & Galbraith, 1968). The scene of elopement and love meetings are also depicted with erotic display. There is a painting entitled Jahangir playing Holi, in which many women were depicted with sharp features (Okada, 1992).

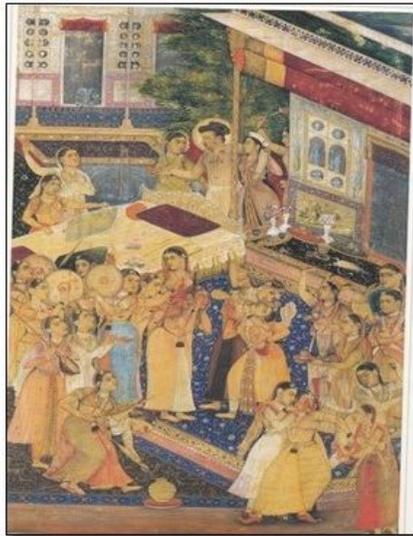


Figure – 18 Jahangir Playing Holi

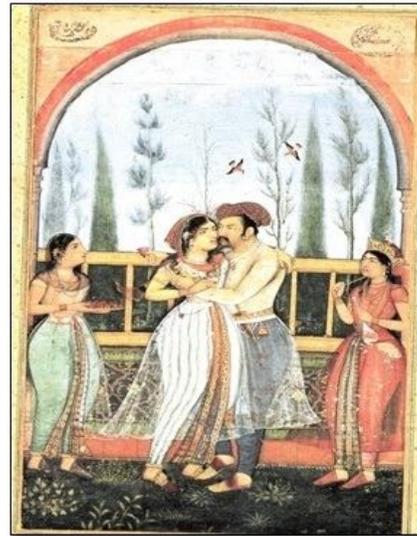


Figure – 19 Shah Jahan and his Beloved

Figure - 18 Jahangir Playing Holi, circa 1615-1625, signed by Govardhan, a page from the Minto Album, Chester Beatty Library Dublin, Source- Okada
 Figure -19 Shah Jahan and his Beloved, circa 1632, signed by Govardhan, a page from the Kevorkian Album, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Source- Okada

After Jahangir, his successor Shah-Jahan (1628-1658) become the emperor and contributed in art and architecture. Women are frequently depicted with their charming appearance. Romanticism was on its peak in portraying the glory of court life of the king and other glimpse of

his personal life in inner quarters as well. The women are portrayed with sensuous mood in transparent clothes either waiting for their lover or enjoying with her female servants.

“It was to repeat, an age of pleasure and calm. Other paintings showed princesses in Transparent Muslim blouses seated on terraces surrounded by their female servants listening to music”; this romantic theme was more preferred during the later Mughal paintings with feminine grace and perfection (Randhwa & Galbraith 1968).

Some independent provinces had taken shape in the western and southern parts of India during 15th century. Among the five kingdoms set up by The Muslim Afghan rulers (also known as Bahmani kingdom), Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golkonda were the most prosperous. They had patronized the miniature painting style and these provinces had become major centers for reproduction for the art form. The manuscripts like Anvar-i-Suhayli (the lights of Canopus), Tarifi-Husayn Shahi, Najum-ul-ulum, are complemented by miniature paintings. The Ragamala painting, which flourished between 16th and 19th century AD, was also influenced by Mughal and Rajput style. The influence can be observed in women portraiture where the same sensuality remained at various sites of drinking with music and dance.

In some provincial paintings, mainly in the Oudha, Hyderabad and Lucknow, women were adopted as a particular subject of painting during the sixteenth century. The love poetry and romance with sensual erotic encounters were mainly portrayed. The court dancers with beautiful appearances and couples embracing each other, making love are also considered for depiction (Randhawa 1991).

After Muslim invasions, the art of miniature had been started in India, and then women particularly had been used as an object of male-gaze. It was the era, when woman has been politically farmed for the offering purposes. In imperial Mughal style, the woman portrayal has been started as making love, waiting, in toilet scenes, engaged with women and so on. The so-called goddess or princess phenomenon, which has started from the mural tradition has been mostly faded after the mark of the Mughal period and only the beautiful and well-proportioned woman has been much on display through erotic encounters. The reason behind this erotic display could be based on the individual taste of the emperor because at that time the paintings were mostly created for the private collection of the emperors. The artists were also directed by these emperors or the artists made such paintings for pleasing their emperors for the reward and highest rank in his regime.

Rajsthani Painting

The miniatures of Rajasthani style are also known as Rajput school and the major patrons of this style were the kings of Mewar, Kotah, Bundi, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Kishangarh during the early 17th century. The main concept of the paintings was related with the Lord Krishna and his heroic tales; “the musical mode, the epics and romances, religious theme and love theme” (Reiff 1959). Many illustrated love poems of Sanskrit were complemented with passionate love and erotic depictions. The feminine charm and beauty was enhanced and represented in a refined form. The gestures of female faces are quite enchanting with their appropriate physical balance as per the Indian stereotype of beauty. The feminine icons are represented in various forms and moods through a fusion of Mughal and Hindu art. It was the period, when paintings have been made on the love poetry and lyrical ballads. It was the high time of celebrating the love and union between man and woman union in the forms of poetry. Krishna was the main idol for the kings of numerous places and they had often been represented as Lord Krishna.

Illustrations of manuscripts of love poetry including *Gitagovinda*, *Rasikpriya*, and *Ragamala* are portrayed with the other religious theme. In these paintings, the man is always portrayed with heroic manipulations and woman is portrayed as the module of perfect feminine in appearance (Mode 1970). In Kishangarh, the love of king and his beloved is portrayed in the form of Radha and Krishna through erotic display. Abbasi stated that “in Rajput paintings the sensuality has presented-wearing transparent fabrics draped around their bodies. (2013)”. The eyes of the heroines were made wide and sharp with exotic features. Their erotic desires had often been represented with naked and semi-naked projections in those paintings. (Randhawa & Randhawa, 1980). The adoption of lord Krishna emerged dramatically in the paintings in which romantic and a sexual depiction was prevalent to satisfy the demands of Kings.

“Priests belonging to the cult of Pushti Marg (the pleasure path) performed their worship of the image of Krishna in a beautiful ritual in which followers and incense played a conspicuous part. Dressed in silk, anointed with perfumed oil, the high priests of Pushti Marg developed an aesthetic religion whose followers were the rajas, the aristocracy and the wealthy enacted in places and mansions in many Rajput states”(Randhawa 1981).

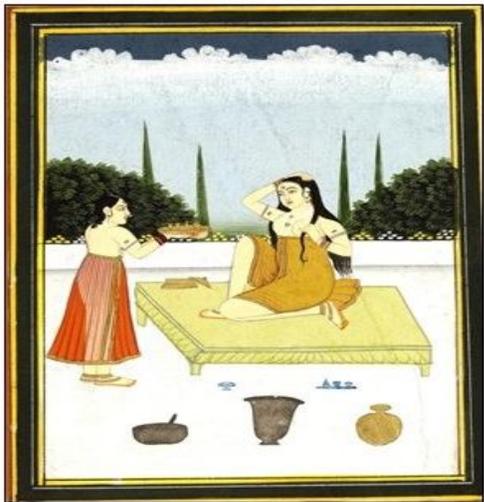


Figure - 20 Untitled

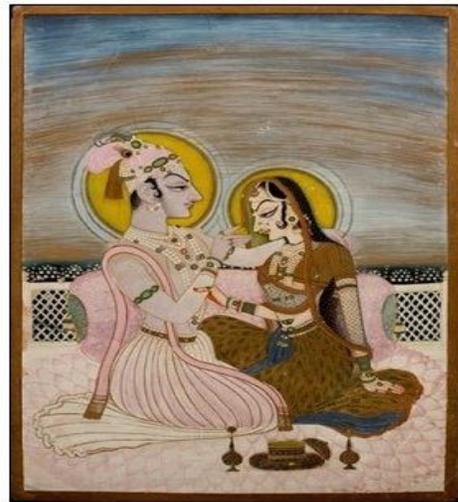


Figure - 21 Savant Singh and Bani Thani as Krishna and Radha

Figure - 20 Untitled, made in Jaipur (India), 19th century, painted in opaque water colour on paper, Height-182 mm, and width- 201 mm, collection Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Source- <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O405254/painting-unknown/>

Figure - 21 Savant Singh and Bani Thani as Krishna and Radha, Artists Nihal Chand, made Kishangarh, ca. 1760. Madison Avenue Gallery

Source-

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/34/2_Attributed_to_Nihal_Chand_Savant_Singh_and_Bani_Thani_as_Krishna_and_Radha_Kishangarh_ca_1760.jpg

Kishangarh remained as a popular site of Rajasthani miniature paintings because the king of Kishangarh, Sawant Singh was known as a great poet. He was also known for his affair with a courtesan of his court, who was known as Bani-Thani.

Pahari Paintings

The Pahari style developed in the regions adjacent to the Himalayas during the late seventeenth century. The main centres of this style were Basohli, Kullu and Chamba, Kangara, Guler etc. In Pahari School, the tradition of depicting Krishna in painting prevailed and reached in its zenith

which actually started from Rajput miniature style. Though some other themes had also been chosen as a subject but the main concentration was on love-depictions. The heroic hegemonies of Krishna had become the super premise and the women were only a medium for erotic display whether in the form of Radha or Gopis. The major reason for depicting Lord Krishna may be based on the will of those kings, who wanted to be served as a god from people (Fig-9-10). The kings were often compared with the Gods from the ancient time for proving their divinity and courage. As well as, they have borrowed the custom of having many women in their *harem* or bathing places for the satisfaction of their sexual desires and also portrayed themselves in the paintings in the form of Krishna with many women. “Through such equations, kings become manifestation of heroic, Krsna-like erotic power, infinitely, seductive, naturally drawing every woman under their litigious sway (Aitken, 2002)”.



Figure - 22 Untitled

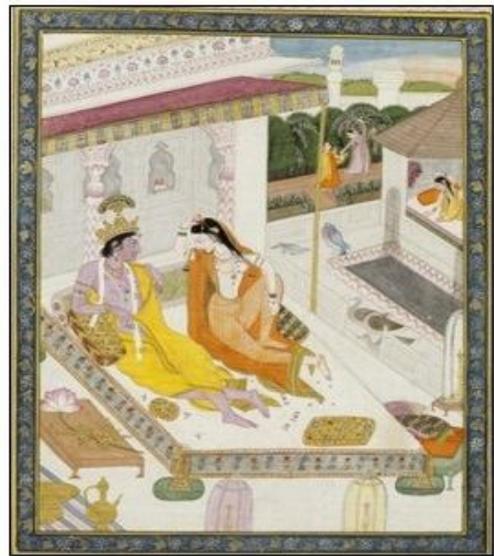


Figure - 23 Radha & Krishna

Figure - 22 Untitled, made in Mankot(India), Ca. 1730, painted in opaque water colour on paper, Collection- Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Source - <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O96535/painting-unknown/>

Figure - 23 Radha & Krishana, made in Garhwal India, Ca. 1860-1870, painted in opaque water colour on paper, Collection- Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Source - <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O72847/radha-and-krishna-painting-unknown/>

The manuscripts based on the Krishna theme had come into existence in poetic language with coloured paintings. The romance was highly celebrated and the theme was filled with colors of love-making, waiting for the lover, embracing with love in semi-nude and nude positions. Lord Krishna had been depicted with erotic passions with his beloved Radha and sometimes with other group of Nayikas or Gopis. The male oriented heroism of Krishna cannot be avoided for mapping the scale of gendered politics. On the other hand, the female deities were depicted only with their one lover or husband which reflects the attitude of the contemporary society. Contrary to their male counterpart, the female deities were accompanied by only one spouse representing the attitudinal difference of the society between male and female which was very prominent in that era. In this way, the inner scenario of the phallus centric society or kingdoms has been satisfied

for the demonstration of sexual intimacy of man with many women but in the case of women, it is much prohibited. The hunting and war scenes of the kings were fully promoted and only the objectification of women had been done without promoting their feminine skills. According to Levine (1971), *“the music of Krishna’s restless flute which pulls virtuous women from their homes/ and drags them by their hair to Shayam”*. In this way the sexual relationship was permitted in the divine forms through the god himself and followed by kings. Levine further added that *“it is a divine license, socially unpermissible, and it is the circle which provided the paradox with its most appropriate visual representation”*. These paintings were filled with the emotions in romantic premises with naturalistic beauty. The artists had equipped the love-depicted fables of Lord Krishna and Radha with the detailed ornamentation of nature. The divine love was dominated over the entire paintings and literature in semi-nude and nude body display. Coomaraswamy (1912) concluded that:

“ in the human figure there is great concentration and intensity of emotions; eye looks into eye, as Blake would have drawn it, hand clasps hand, the very animals are spell-bound by the sound of Krishna’s flute, the elements obey the rags and raginis”.

In such fusion of naturalistic romance, the female imagery has encountered numerous in the offering condition for their one heroic god (Archer, 2004).

Conclusion

In Indian paintings of this era, women were objectified and were used as ancillary subjects to glorify the main subject of the painting which used to be a male god or king for most of the times. There are various factors which frame the identity of a woman since the earlier times and can be observed in the pre-historic cave paintings. These traits of women were not included in the paintings of this period. Rather the women were used as a medium for satisfying the desires of the males: may it be a king or a male god like Srikrishna. One of the probable reasons may be that the pre-historic period was an initial stage of art development where linear forms were mostly drawn on the walls, making it difficult for the primitive painters to create sensual curvilinear feminine shapes. Then the evidences of Indus Valley were only concentrated around the theme of fertility and procreation and these aspects neither represent the objectification of woman nor represent their significant values. Later, the murals of Ajanta and other places can be considered as significant because the portrayal of woman had been started in a unified form. These forms are opulently enriched with eye-soothing postures and sublime gestures of a woman. The prototype of well-proportioned figures with seductive beauty had been served up to entertain the onlookers. The major purpose behind their depiction was to establish the visual narratives in order to promote Buddhism, where their projections were done to support the required theme. Their very first role was to become the part of the story, where the entire significance had been given to Lord Buddha only. And another role was related to their beauty and sensuous appeal in nude or semi nude position. Moreover, in the form of the mother or divine woman, they were again somehow manipulated to make them less important than male through the help of background placement and other subjects. These phenomena of promoting or securing religious antiquity may be also responsible for such biased arrangement to add some attraction value in the paintings. Feminine beauty and grace is always celebrated through the creative genius because the thing, which has the attributes to attract the minds, is always captured through various mediums. In ancient times, art was the only medium to capture those things, which draws human attention like the photography in present day. It was also a medium to communicate ideas or knowledge in an easy

way. In this sense, to attain human's sight for such religious stories, feminine grace and sensuality had also been incorporated to make them more attentive and considerable. On the contrary, woman may also be an essential part for those stories for her exclusive feminine qualities like the power of giving birth, her love, compassion and so on. But her representation and role is only restricted to those biological or social attributes of womanhood as compared to man. The main concern behind such projection was to glorify Lord Buddha and the women had only become a tool for his glorification. The portrayal of male was also well-associated with the contemporary ideology of perfection and power, which was considered as the greatest virtue of man. In general, beauty and sensuality had been associated with woman and power and efficiency had been associated with man. In this context, the identity of woman had been derived from such patriarchal thought process and their appearances had been manipulated for offering to the males who were considered to be on higher social strata. Then this very construction of beautiful and sensuous female bodies had further been adopted in manuscript traditions but there are examples where they were also emerged in the form of goddess and worshipped along with male-gods.

During the time period of Babur, who had established the Mughal dynasty, the erotic display had rarely been done because his ruling period was very short and he also concentrated on architecture. During the reign of Akbar, the courtly scenes and portraits were mainly illustrated and women were rarely found in the portrayal. But, in the time period of Jahangir, the erotic display was on its pinnacle and the portrayal of men had frequently been associated with a group of women. The scenes of Harem had been depicted with a male surrounded by many women, which entirely belonged to patriarchal dominancy because it is very difficult to find a painting of a woman surrounded by a group of man. Thus, this gender biased imagery of woman had been particularly done in Mughal period, where women had become only an object of sensual desire and erotic display. This kind of representation may also be a way to depict manly power over woman, where woman has been identified only as a male counterpart where her existence is particularly depicted in the association of her physical beauty or her lovers' desire.

In Rajasthani period, the king often been represented as Lord Krishna, and her mistresses and queens had been considered as his cow-girls or *Gopis*. Thus, the religious icon may often use to portray women in romantic postures. The heroic and powerful imagery of Lord Krishna had been conferred upon the king, who becomes a lover of beauty, and the helplessness of women has been represented through the group of *gopis*.

As it is discussed earlier that the religious sentiments were fully subjugated on the art and paintings in Pahari style, so the Krishna had become the idol of kings and the human-beings too. In this concern, the kings may be impressed by the tales of Krishna, so they implicated him in the paintings, or in the heroic literature. There are so many descriptions in literature, which proved the passionate nature of kings regarding female and their divine entertainment of luxurious life. The *gopis* or *Nayikas* were depicted with lord Krishna in the erotic display, which represents much similarity with the *harem* scenes of the kings. It can be said, that the stories of Lord Krishna had been used as an aegis to exonerate the passionate nature of the kings in front of the society. In miniature paintings also, the erotic and sensuous projections of women dominated and the objectification of woman has been done for offering purposes.

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