

THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ART THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Mandakini Sharma,

Associate Professor, Department of Visual Arts, Graphic Era Hill University,
Dehradun Uttarakhand India

ABSTRACT

Women have been the subject of venerated artwork for centuries. Despite their many accomplishments in the visual arts, women are seldom shown as the creative force behind the painting. The 20th century was filled with discussions about who or what created art and what it is.

Key words: modernism, feminism, gender, art, artists, painters.

INTRODUCTION

It's difficult to see how humanity might survive without women, given how essential they are to society. The social status and connotation of women in a given era may be properly determined via examination of visual art from that time period. Literature, art, architecture, and religious texts are all fair game because of their ability to reflect cultural norms and values via their visual expression. Paintings may be used to reevaluate women's roles in society since they reflect prevailing social and cultural norms as well as the individual's tastes and expectations. The earliest known examples of art, found on cave walls, date back to ancient times (Mishra 2001). The geometrically organized figures in the cave paintings make it impossible to distinguish the sexual identities for gender significance beyond a select few, as can be seen from this perspective. The gender of the figurines is not immediately apparent due to their lining composition.

However, images of the fertility cult and reproduction were ubiquitous throughout the world. The available evidence suggests that the worship of the mother goddess and related fertility rites originated in the Indus Valley Civilization. Clay sculptures, metal sculpture, and seals all include female figures in Indus Valley civilization. During the Vedic period, the Aryans' holy scriptures were introduced to the world via the medium of art. The Rig-Veda is a religious literature from the Vedic period (c. 1500-900 B. C. E.) that contains songs that may be the first written record of humanity. Historical sources suggest a relative paucity of creative output at this time.

The murals at Ajanta and Ellora feature women whose bodies are both sensuous and magnificent, yet the promotion of religious ideas was the artworks' main goal. In addition, the Pal dynasty's magnificent miniature paintings had a brief period of popularity throughout the Indian subcontinent. The Mughal period witnessed the greatest evolution of miniatures because to their versatility, however other kingdoms made significant contributions as well. Miniatures often depict women in stereotypical roles: submissive to males as lovers or companions, or authoritative figures in male-dominated societies.

Even in the pre-colonial period, the stereotypical depiction of women as possessing both socially relevant and sexually alluring traits is common in Indian miniatures. This study will focus on the evolution of female depictions in Indian art from antiquity to the early modern era. The analysis of visual narratives has been used to examine the roles of women. Considerations like as themes, symbolic significance, and other factors are used to the representation of women. It places a greater emphasis on masculine characters and uses female characters to indicate sexual tension or action.

Evidence of human ability to express themselves visually via art dates back thousands of years to cave paintings in India. Because of the mathematical shapes of the body in more than 80% of the paintings, it is impossible to determine gender. The major emphasis of these cave paintings was on images of hunting and daily life. It may be claimed that gender was of little consequence in ancient art since it was mainly concerned with geometric or linear forms.

To paraphrase what Mathu (2008) has to say: "In such a 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." This points to a period when sexuality was not a big concern and when the ability to reproduce was praised. The magical and religious semiotics of the period may be seen in several antique artworks.

LITERATURE AND REVIEW

SAPTAM PATEL (2015) In this article, I'd like to take a closer look at the life and work of Amrita Sher-Gil, India's most renowned and pioneering modern female artist. I'll be discussing her autobiographical expression in the form of letters and a few articles, as well as her paintings, which display a wide range of influences stemming from her Indian-Hungarian heritage, her exposure to French and Italian discourses, and more. The essay takes a deep dive into the gradations of female characters and the personal biases that emerge from their depictions. Amrita Sher-Gil and her family had a privileged existence in Vienne during the Austro-Hungarian era, and this documentary examines how that upbringing shaped not just Amrita's sense of "self," but also the way she saw the world and represented it in her work. Thomas Mann argues that autobiography is a gateway genre for the outcast, allowing them to blend into society by mimicking those in power. Therefore, Amrita's letters are the sole source for a first-person account of her life. Thus, the essay would go into how autobiographies and other kinds of self-narration, such as letters, diaries, and journals, all fit into the same genre, making it more accessible to women and helping them break into the literary canon. Even though Amrita had no interest in becoming a well-known author, the letters she did write are a valuable window into her worldview and artistic process since they are the sole literature that bears her name. Amrita's writing and paintings, in which we can see the reflection of everything that had gave her writing and paintings a cosmopolitan view, display an attempt to celebrate the 'Indian' part of her ancestry.

Mane Khachibabayan(2016) Focusing mostly on Impressionism and Post-impressionism, this essay emphasizes the significance of female depictions in modernist art and literature. It examines the ways in which modernist art and literature defined, reflected, and influenced gender roles via discussions of the distinctive works of modernist painters and authors (including Marie Cassatt, Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, Pablo Picasso, and Virginia Woolf). This article discusses how feminism and gender inequality were portrayed in the works of selected modernist painters.

Ayushi G (2021). The purpose of this survey research was to examine the representation of women in New Delhi, the National Capital Region, and Uttar Pradesh in Indian film. The goal of this study was to examine how gender, women, and film have interacted in Bollywood from its classical era to the present day. The role of women in Bollywood has evolved significantly from the 1950s to the present, as shown by this qualitative and quantitative study. After explaining women's roles in Indian culture and the development of Indian cinema, the research focused on how women have emerged and been portrayed in the film industry, demonstrating how these roles have evolved from victim to powerful. Using a survey approach, we may deduce that early films depicted women in a positive light when they adhered to traditional Indian dress and presented them negatively when they sported more contemporary attire. But things have turned around for the better for women in Indian film in recent years, since box office success is no longer contingent on the presence of a male celebrity. In modern Indian film, both women and their roles have changed.

Sima Singh (2019) Literature scholars have tracked the changing status of women throughout the centuries. Throughout history, women have faced critical sexism and judgment, but they have done so with grace and dignity. Women have ignored the naysayers and kept going on this dangerous path. Modern women have gone a long way, and they now constitute a powerful brotherhood. The following article explores the history of women from the Stone Age to the present day. Freedom for women and their concerns are examined together with the literature's portrayal of women in traditionally dominant positions. Various female writers' depictions of modern women in their works are also explored. In the past, women were supposed to be passive, mute, and constantly accused of talking too much. Due to their inferior position to males in a patriarchal culture, women have been coerced into conforming to men's expectations for a very long time. It's important to recognize that historically most published authors were males, and that this fact contributed to a biased representation of women in literature. This study argues that the fact that the majority of ancient scribes were males who did not see women with an attitude of grace and thankfulness but as a simple tool for home tasks is a culpable cause of this.

Angelica Selinger (2014) How society views women is a major contributor to the persistent gap between the sexes and sexist attitudes and beliefs. Since the power imbalance between men and women allows men's representations of their perspectives on the world and on women to be conflated

with objective truth, even though they are not more valid than women's representations of their perspectives, a large part of this perception comes from fictional representations of women from the perspective of creators who accept myths about the nature of women. Simone de Beauvoir, author of the seminal feminist text *The Second Sex*, observed that men construct the concept of woman based on their own experience rather than on what women actually are, and that women are framed as "the Other," while men are the self and subject. This study analyzes *The Second Sex* and other works by Beauvoir to examine how gender is portrayed in literature. The concept of the Other is inextricably intertwined with the power and pervasiveness of storytelling because, within the fictional universe the creator builds for his story, his perspective is indistinguishable from the truth, with no input from the people he portrays. Fiction's veracity and use in comprehending reality are compromised by the skewed representation of women as "the Other," as constructions based on men's opinion of them, in comparison to the skewed representation of males as the objects of their tales.

WOMEN IN ART HISTORY

Art reflects the values and attitudes of its era. Its origins in the cultural, political, and religious climate of its time make it inevitable. Its importance has made it a focal point for historians who are interested in alternative interpretations of the depiction of its themes. This research guide has collated materials useful for writing a paper on women's portrayal in art history. This study guide draws on a variety of historical and artistic sources to give arguments for and against the validity of depicting women as they really are in works of art.

The reference work is divided into a General Overview portion and a variety of sub-sections, with the latter focused on Victorian, Renaissance, and Enlightenment-era art. Gender Neutrality in Art, Gender Differences in Art, Sexuality and Eroticism in Art, and Representation of Rape in Art History are some of the other topics covered in this encyclopedia.

These materials provide a counterargument to the revisionist historical treatment of women's portrayal by providing instances from the canon that include both sexes. A conclusion may be formed by criticizing depictions of males and comparing them to those of women.

Portrayal Of Women in The Visual Arts Throughout the Ages

Throughout history, we have found inspiration in the idealized depictions of mythical gods and goddesses made by ancient Greek and Roman painters. It's possible to see some very great specimens in the Saint Louis Art Museum. The Greek Kalistrate Stele is a funeral monument picturing a beautiful young woman with long, loose hair.

By the 1400s, portraits were depicting individuals realistically, with the wealthy often ordering pictures to reflect how they envisioned their loved ones to be. The female characters were shown as part of a privileged group. Female portrait subjects were often shown in far more lavish clothes. Male models expressed a desire for photographs of their spouses to reflect the affluence and prominence of their social circles.

When I visited the Saint Louis Art Museum, I was given a tour of the Renaissance and early European paintings by Judy Mann, the curator of European art up to 1800. Mary is seen in "Lady Guildeford," a picture by Hans Holbein, wearing not just gorgeous attire but also golden jewelry and, at her husband's request, clutching a book to demonstrate her culture and education. Honhorst's "Smiling Girl" portrays a sassy, battered young woman (perhaps a prostitute) holding a painting of another young woman's derriere. Vasari's "Judith and Holofernes" depicts the young, powerful woman as she prepares to behead the Assyrian commander. Cephalus stares helplessly as Procris dies in Wtewael's "Cephalus and Procris," another depiction of the terrible conclusion of the fabled romance. Moreover, they only represent a small fraction of the full magnificence of the museum's rebuilt galleries.

The curiously smiling Mona Lisa at the Louvre, Picasso's dismembered women in *Les Femmes d'Alger*, and Manet's nude courtesan Olympia from 1863 are among examples of modern masterpieces that are instantly recognizable across the world. And surely no one would refuse to waltz around Degas's "Little Dancer" at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Gustav Klimt was an Austrian artist who was active at the turn of the last century, depicting women at different stages of their life. Klimt's depictions of women span their whole lives, from childhood to old age and the fading of their physical beauty. Like many of his contemporaries, Klimt saw femininity as something that occurred naturally, and he strove to convey this concept in his portraits of women.

Contemporary art features women in a diverse array of roles. During World War II, the government spread propaganda depicting women in the workplace and contributing to the war effort. I think of Kiki Smith's golden, dismembered nude in the Chipperfield new wing of our art museum; Hanna Wilke's works depicting women who have dealt with breast cancer; and the current exhibition of Kara Walker's silhouettes featuring graphic, often difficult imagery of female sexuality, on loan from the Alison and John Ferring collection; all of which make me think of "Rosie the Riveter" and the present day.

In light of these occurrences, I feel it is necessary to share the director of the Sheldon Art Galleries, Olivia Lahs-Gonzales's, thoughts on the portrayal of women in photography. She said that looking at a woman (the male gaze) is a "possession" that makes them desirable. She said that in her 1975 book "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," theorist Laura Mulvey spoke about "gaze," calling the "male gaze" a sign of "gender power unevenness." The theme of nakedness in photography is resonant in her filmmaking as well.

One of the most famous films that examines the portrayal of women in art is *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*, which was inspired by a painting by Vermeer of the same name.

All of this has me thinking about "Beauty and Bias," a project co-created by the Saint Louis Art Museum and the Anti-Defamation League's "A World of Difference Program" that questions who gets to decide what constitutes beautiful and why.

Women shown in artworks in a museum or gallery may represent a broad variety of ages, sizes, socioeconomic statuses, and levels of education.

An Overview about Women Artists from the 1930s till the 1990s

Art, which is molded by social and cultural processes and is not independent from them, has not always felt the liberation effect since constitutional rights for women have not always matched with transformations in women's traditional status and standing in society. Painting was retained as a pastime for the rich since it was so difficult for women to earn a living as painters. They had the support of family and friends, which allowed them to keep doing art.

In this historical moment, feminism was more commonly known as "women's issues" and was seen as a state-led modernization policy in the early years of the Republic, with the Republican state policy lingering like a specter: "Why would there be a need for a feminist movement when the state has already bestowed women with their rights?" Women's professional painting in the 1950s and 1960s represents a departure from the norm. After years of being stifled by the State Academy of Fine Arts and its Istanbul outpost, the Istanbul State Museum of Painting and Sculpture, women finally found a way to assert their independence as artists in the late modernist era of painting. In the '50s and '60s, women painters broke new ground by making more introspective and complex pieces than had been seen before. Canan Beykal, however, shows that the Academy is still important today as a student there from 1968 to 1972.

The artist's self-portrayal, the work's reception, and the perspective of the audience have all recently come to be seen as critical elements in the creative process. There was a rise in private collections and a thriving art gallery scene in the 1970s, but artists were still dependent on state funding, which meant they had to abide by the rules set forth by the Academy and State Museum. The State Museum was the only reputable repository available at the time. A shift occurred, but it wasn't enough to release creatives from government control. However, in the 1980s, the liberal economy and the "free-market" supplanted the state in the art world.

Woman in Mural Paintings

Murals in Ajanta date back to the second to seventh centuries CE and are the oldest examples of painting in India. Buddhism was the primary focus of the paintings of the Ajanta cave temples, and whole scenes were often painted on a single wall. Queens, dancers, mistresses, and other secondary figures have all been used to depict beautiful women throughout history. The ladies of Ajanta are renowned for their graceful poses and utter majesty whether shown in either a semi-naked or fully nude state. Following the model of Indian Shadanga (the six limbs of Indian painting), the glorious Apsaras and other forms have been represented in all their exotic and sensual glory. Magnificent actions, rather than a sexual attitude, are what garner the most praise from admirers of these celestial beauty.

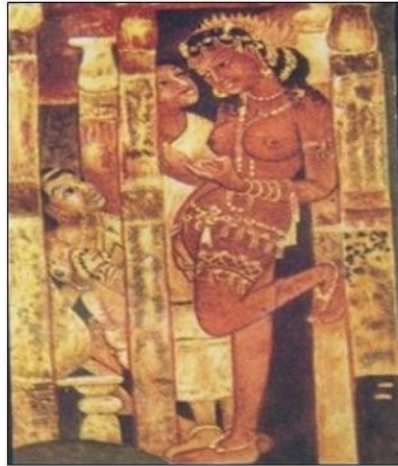


Fig 1. Mayadevi

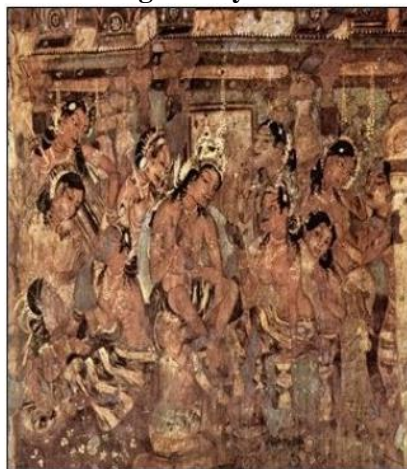


Fig 2. Chaddanta jataka story

A female viewer of the Ajanta paintings will notice that the ladies are not central to the narrative or the aesthetic; rather, they serve as props or ornaments. Archer claims that the romantic style may be traced back to the Ajanta cave paintings, which were created between the 1st century B.C. and the 6th and 7th centuries AD. The Buddha was treated like a king in the caves where he stayed in the fifth century A.D., complete with dancing girls and other types of entertainment. Indigenous art is characterized by its focus on female subjects, which "communicates a delight in womanly physics" or "the dreams and fantasies of the female form and its promise of bliss" (Archer 1956), and which also serves as a hallmark of the first major creative movement of its sort.

The rebirth of Buddha shown in the Saddanta Jataka (six-tusked elephant) paintings of Caves 9 and 10 (about 100 B.C. to 100 A.D. In the beginning, we see an elephant enjoying a good time in the forest; in the middle, we meet the jealous queen and her minions. She loses consciousness after seeing the tusk of her husband's past life partner (her deceased husband, disguised as an elephant; Anand, 1973). In this story, Lord Buddha's grandeur is juxtaposed with and finally wins over his jealous queen. The mythology claims that the elephant was married to two women, but that one of them got envious when she saw Buddha to be favoring the other.

His first wife had to die, and she came back to life as a woman. In a prior incarnation, she treated her ex-spouse badly, and as a result, she was proclaimed queen and given the order to slaughter an elephant, who was really Buddha. Buddha's selflessness in guaranteeing the monarch's happiness is represented by the elephant's ultimate sacrifice for her. In contrast, the cruelty of women is defined, and the queen's sorrow at the murder of her husband is shown. The political usage of a woman to represent Buddha's divinity is a two-edged sword; while establishing Buddha's divinity, the woman might be portrayed as evil, seeking retribution or seeking forgiveness for her crimes.

The woman and the Buddha seem to be dressed same, and they are both carrying flowers. She, like the Buddha, is almost nude, but unlike the Buddha, her image is small and badly placed. The third

most eye-catching element, according to Hernandez (2011), is the woman on the right side of the painting. Even though she is the Bodhisattva's spouse, this woman has just a tiny role in the narrative. Apsaras and queens of Ajanta were shown as having large, full breasts and broad hips in six-limb paintings. Women's contributions to Ajanta are underappreciated while being on par with men's. Their elevated standing is based only on their gender, yet the intangible value of women risks being overlooked.

Many additional caves, such as Badami, Sittanavasal, Tirumalaipuram, Ellora, Anegudi, Lepakshi, Tiruparutikunram, Bagh, and Sigiriya, might be linked to the Ajanta style of painting. The Chalukaya dynasty constructed the Badami cave temples in Karnataka between the years 600 and 700 AD. Only one mural, of the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati, has been preserved to the present day. Anand painted the goddess in 1973, depicting her as demure and refined. Due to their allure, the Apsaras, or heavenly dancers, remain a popular subject of discussion in Sittanavasal (a region close to Madras state; Archer 1956; Randhawa and Galbraith 1968; Anand 1973). Between the seventh and eleventh century AD, the Rashtrakuta Empire in Maharashtra built the Ellora cave temples. Ellora's cave temples were more interested in sculpture than paintings. Women are shown as deities in the majority of sculptures (Malandra 1993), however this is not the case in paintings.

Sexualized images of women may be seen in almost all of Ajanta's paintings. For example, Archer said, "at the Jaina cave-temples at Ellora (c. 10th century), dancing-girls were represented with moulded limbs" (1956). Walls in the Hindu temple at Kailasa are adorned with portraits of deities, including portrayals of the gods' heroic strength. These murals are far more elaborate than those at Ellora's cave temples. There have been depictions of battle, equestrian sport, and even religious worship. (Anand, 1973). Bagh (6th to 7th century) flourished in western Malwa with several murals in the same style as those at Ajanta and Ellora, however most of these paintings have been destroyed over time. Rather than depicting religious scenes, the existing paintings highlight the sensuous side of tribal Bhil life.

A dark painting depicts a dance by women who are partially or fully undressed. One male figure dances between the two groups of ladies. In the seductive arts, representations of gorgeous ladies in mid-dress are expected. Painting from the 5th or 6th century depicting two ladies, one half-clad and appearing like a queen or an Apsara, was discovered in a cave on Sri Lanka's Mount Sigiriya. She is the focus of this piece of art.

It's possible that the secondary one's only purpose is to divert viewers' attention away from the main character and towards herself. A lady's tenderness and susceptibility might be symbolized by the flower carried by her maid. In a figurative sense, the flower might represent an offering. Appealing hand gestures and a seductive positioning of body parts complete the picture. (Anand, 1973). There are two possible political motivations for including women in this context in the paintings. The paintings may have had a twofold purpose, the first of which was to objectify her attractiveness and mystery. The second possible reason is that she has been placed there on purpose to emphasize the story's male protagonist.

CONCLUSION

During this historical period in Indian art, women were often shown as mere objects or secondary topics meant to enhance the glorification of a male deity or ruler. Women of this era did not have these characteristics shown in art. Instead, women were instruments for fulfilling the needs of men, whether they were a ruler or a male deity.

REFERENCES

1. SPTAM PATEL (2015) WOMEN AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONS IN AMRITA SHERGIL'S PORTRAYALS. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES (IJELR) A QUARTERLY, INDEXED, REFEREED AND PEER REVIEWED OPEN ACCESS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL <http://www.ijelr.in>
2. Khachibabyan, Mane. (2016). Modernism and Feminism Representations of Women in Modernist Art and Literature. wisdom. 1. 118. 10.24234/wisdom.v1i6.71.
3. Ayushi G. "Analyzing Portrayal of women in Bollywood Cinema." J Mol Genet Med 11 (2021): 180.
4. Sima Singh (2019) Portrayal of Women in Literature – Through the Ages.

5. Angelica Selinger (2014) Portraying Women as Beauvoir's "Other".
6. Wreyford, N. (2015). Birds of a feather: Informal recruitment practices and gendered outcomes for screenwriting work in the UK film industry. *The Sociological Review*, 63(S1), 84-96.
7. Winge, T.M., & Stalp, M. (2013). Nothing says love like a skull and crossbones teacozy: Crafting contemporary subversive handcrafts. *Craft Research*, 4(1), 73-86.
8. Christiansen, Keith, Stefan Weppelmann, and Patricia Lee Rubin. "Florence." In *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, by Keith Christiansen, Stefan Weppelmann and Patricia Lee Rubin, 86-189. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.
9. Christiansen, Keith, Stefan Weppelmann, and Patricia Lee Rubin. "Some Thoughts on Likeness in Italian Early Renaissance Portraits." In *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, by Keith Christiansen, Stefan Weppelmann and Patricia Lee Rubin, 64-76. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.
10. Christiansen, Keith, Stefan Weppelmann, and Patricia Lee Rubin. "Understanding Renaissance Portraiture." In *The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini*, by Keith Christiansen, Stefan Weppelmann and Patricia Lee Rubin, 2-25. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.
11. Campbell, Stephen, and Michael Cole. *Italian Renaissance Art*, by Stephen Campbell, Michael Cole, 10-15. Thames & Hudson, 2012.
12. Grassi, Marco. "Faces of the Renaissance." *Art and Architecture Complete*, 2011: 27-32. Kent, Dale. "Women in Renaissance Florence." In *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginerva De' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, by David Allen Brown, 26-47. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001.
13. Masters, Rachel D., "The Portraiture of Women During the Italian Renaissance" (2013). Honors Theses. 118. https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/118
14. Sandberg, S. (2013). *Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead*. New York: Knopf.
15. Ridgeway, C.L. (2011). *Framed by gender*. New York: Oxford University Press.