

The Courtesans in Deccan History

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Miniaturists of medieval Deccan in the creation of the themes related to women produced theme of reality, sensuality and fantasy, among which depiction of courtesans constituted an important part. These paintings give us glimpse into the life-style of the courtesans and their role in Golconda and Hyderabad Kingdoms during 17th and 18th centuries.

A courtesan is a lady who is associated generally with wealthy, aristocracy or nobility as a prostitute or dancer who entertains them. Concubines are those ladies who cohabit with a man without being legally married to him, a mistress or a secondary wife to a certain extent. Both courtesans and concubines played a prominent role in medieval kingdoms. The life styles of these women almost remained the same, both being the representatives of sensuality and attractiveness with beauty to entertain the sultan and his nobility to fullest extent. They remained within harem and noble houses and such harem sense with royalty became one of the themes for artists to depict these courtly beauties and aesthetic figures in royal courts. The miniatures paint them amidst dark, vaulted cellars, huge halls, fountains and tanks which constituted one of the most striking styles of architectural excellence combined with artistic perfection.

In the miniatures depicting courtesans, we find a fusion of European, Persian and indigenous elements mainly during Golconda phase. During the Hyderabad school of paintings, the synthesis of Mughal and Deccani styles gave a new direction to these paintings.

A variety of lively and playful paintings were executed under the patronage of Qutb Shahis and Nizams with a typically Deccani swing. Gestures and glances exchanged among personages in paintings established a psychological personal wearing slippers, a rare feature of Deccani painting.

Similar painting depicts Bhagmati standing under a branch of a tree with a maiden she wears transparent skirt and seems to be enjoying the natural – beauty and sip of wine, which her maiden offered. A miniature painting of Deccani style depicts another courtesan Taramati seated on a terrace listening to a musician. She was dressed in typical Hyderabad style with a turban and textile- pattern. The musician has a Hindu look with large big eyes and elegant features.

In another painting of a courtesan Premamati, she was depicted swinging with her attendants with a beautiful Deccani spring background. Among her attendants there are musicians with tambura who are entertaining her. Two maiden's help her in swinging premamati was the favorite mistress of sultan Abul Hasan Tana Shah, the last of Qutb shahis.

An interesting beautiful miniature depicts premamati enjoying the fragrance of small flower, which she holds in her right hand. She stand facing right in profile, with garments and jewelry typical of Golconda. It is apt to point out here that there was a distinction in the dress worn by women of the Qutb shahi and Asaf Jahi periods. From the pictures of Qutb Shahi period, it appears that women wore narrow pyjama and a broad jama, sometimes the portion of the chest was open. Asaf Jahi ladies wore slightly narrow pyjama choli, kurta on which gold and silver laces were stiched and khada dupatta was used. The khada Dupatta continues to be worn today by the Muslim bride on the day of her wedding. Besides Muslims, this dress was prevalent among the families of Hindu of the upper classes, as this dress is combination of the Islamic style and the sari of the Hindus.

Miniature paintings though less evocative and more conventionally pretty covering the four sides of a small lacquered papier-mache box, perhaps a jewel casket, depict various scenes of princess and courtesans of which one side depicts a courtesan dancing. She wears typical Golconda dress of jama, veil and bodice and has curly shapes with broad features of a dancer. Meticulous draughtsman ship and restrained colors creates a mood of delicate sensuality. It was signed by Rahim Deccani. By that time Indian lacquer was beginning to influence Iranian lacquer ware. The other side of the casket depicts a prince with three courtesans.

At Golconda a miniature painting of a courtesan dated (c1630-1650 A.D.) depicts her enveloped in orange and purple scarves, which is a virtual translation of Isfahani work into Indian terms. Here Persian elements persisted in less assimilated form in the Deccan, seen in blue and white bottle and in the curly courtesan's hair. The azure background, violet and pink rocks and fluttering veils reveal the naked flesh of courtesans till waist. These are derived from European style of painting. The vermilion, crimson, yellow-green, blue and violet colors are combined in the frenetic and textile like border is artfully related to the circular patterns of the flowers in the foreground of the miniature and to the trees on the horizon. The jungle-like border breaths of life and fertility.

An artist working at Golconda atelier painted a picture of courtesan deriving from Islamic, Indian and Chinese sources. In it, the courtesan wears diaphanous robes of pink, while her veil and border of the painting are green-like foliage. She holds a little bird, in her delicate left hand and wears necklaces made of pearls. Her dress decorated with roses is an oriental symbol of beauty.

A miniature painting of Bhagmati depicts her standing elegantly holding a rose in her right hand. She wears flowing robes of Deccani style and was depicted with simple-ornamentation. Another painting depicts Muhammad Qulin Qutb Shah meeting with Bhagmati with Golconda fort in the background. This painting is an artist view of the romantic episode of the royalty with a courtesan Bhagmati, who later on became the mistress of Muhammad Quli. Her name given to the city and capital of the kingdom that was named Bhagyanagar. Later on, when the Sultan married her and bestowed on her the title of "Haider Mahal" it was named Hyderabad. It depicts Bhagmati with broad features, sensitivity and delicacy. She was depicted dressed in a mixture of Hindu and Muslim fashion, with long designful skirt and dupatta overhead. Which covers her bodies. She was depicted.

A painting during transitional phase depicts a young prince seated on a throne in a garden surrounded by beautiful women, most probably courtesans of the time. "A painting during transitional phase depicted around (C1700-1725 A.D.) depicts ladies enjoying wine. It is an excellent picture of courtesans in a harem enjoying exotic life and pleasures of palace. A color – scheme of blue sky, orange and yellow flowers, pink flower – filled carpets, yellow, pink, brown garments etc., can be perceived in the painting. The women have beautiful facial features mainly of Hindu look, while the maiden with morchhal depicted has a Muslim look. The picture also depicts musicians entertaining these ladies. **(PLATE-XXXII)**. Hence, the courtesans used to have their own courts complete with wine and entertainments and copied the Sultan. The scene is one of the luxury and well. Beautiful carpets are spread along with cushions and a large number of wine bottles lay scattered. The illustration of the cat seated is another common feature of Deccani painting.

This painting illustrates the sporting of courtesans who charming on account of their hirsing as if struck water from syringes discharged by naught gallants. These lovely women under the exhilaration of wine generally seize royalty. The quarters in which courtesans were depicted gives the feeling of swelling wild music and fragrance of their aesthetic bodies. The general entertainment aspects of royalty included singing and dancing by artists and courtesans, who are involved in these artistic pursuits, as if entwined under the gulf of love. Such depictions of courtesans are visual images of human affinity and create gay ambianc suffusing pleasure and enticement.

Another miniature painting of early 18th century depicts prince playing holi in harem with princess, musicians, courtesans, and dancers. "(PLATE XXXIII). Holi is a festival of spring and god of love and a festival, which occurs at the time on the full-moon day also known as Holika or Holaka. In this particular painting, the sultan seems to be playing Holi with his ladies of harem, while the floors are While the prince and his courtesans are involved in playing Holi, there are musicians who are entertaining them.

In such circumstance, the royalty are directly engaged in the ritual of throwing powder and musk, as a part of culture, which often delimits itself by its traditions and customs. The king being historically the functional and theoretically the representative of social order and prosperity of citizens in the social system and hence as symbolic overseer of the festival articulates that order and as conveyor established the legitimacy of the celebration in which the ladies are the main source of enjoyment.

In other words such depiction of festivals responds to a broad spectrum of human concerns, in the sphere of politics, it can be turned to account to celebrate and reinforce the power of sultan and in the social sphere it is a time of entertainment and merry making indicative of the annual renewal of society and in the sphere of religion, it celebrates the exploits of the gods and human worship of rejuvenation and renewal and the relationship between nature and humanity and in particular of men and women in which courtesans derived full length spirit at harem contributing their love and feeling to royalty.

Another panting during transitional phase depicts prince adored by courtesans of his harem. These ladies have Hindu way of dressing style and seem to be happy with the visit of the prince. Different patterns of printed textile formats and ornamental decoration of these women can be perceived in the painting. It was illustrated around 1700 AD.

Similarly few bewitchingly beautiful portraits of courtesans were painted at Hyderabad school under Nizams patronage, which were resuscitator of Deccani independence. These painting represent the idealized tenderness and gentle eroticism of courtesans.

One miniature painting depicts the leisure life led by these ladies in a garden, where they are depicted engaged in various pursuits like gossiping, drinking wine, listening to music, relaxing, moving – about, etc. This painting of courtesans carousing in the garden was executed about first half of 18th century.