

ART AND GENDER  
IN THE *CONTACT ZONE* –  
European Women  
and Indian Miniature Painting

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘contact zone’ was introduced by Mary Louise Pratt in her important book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*<sup>1)</sup> in order to define the point where two cultures meet, the space in which geographically and historically distinct populations interact with each other and establish relationships. It further claims to evoke the space and time in which previously separate entities now coexist, and where their trajectories intersect<sup>2)</sup>. Pratt relates her thoughts to texts from the period of colonisation. In my opinion, the concept of the *contact zone* also offers great opportunities in the field of art history as well as gender relations and perception. As Pratt stated, the *contact zone* angle highlights how people subjected to it are shaped by their mutual relations; it also examines the relationship between the two civilisations not in terms of distinctiveness or separation but instead looks at co-presence and interaction, resulting in understanding and action.<sup>3)</sup> Following this path, one may wonder how the artist shaped his creations while in contact with a completely alien tradition, how he understands,

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<sup>1)</sup> Pratt (2011).

<sup>2)</sup> Pratt (2011: 26–27).

<sup>3)</sup> Pratt (2011: 27).

interprets and adapts it. In analysing the issues concerning the presentation of European women we must deal with two levels of intercultural contact: art and gender, and their interaction. Moving forward, this contact does not have to be permanent or unchanging; it is also relevant how it influenced the understanding of reality and changed perceptions, when temporarily there was no direct relationship. What is interesting is the persistence and transformation of forms created under the influence of direct contact. This can also be noticed on many levels, including indirect contact, which may be regarded as mere familiarisation with the creations of a foreign civilisation, or even as their adaptations made locally.

In literature devoted to colonialism, much attention is paid to the Western perspective, including the issues of how colonising nations created constructs of the 'other' and what strategies they applied to this. However, feminist literature stresses that it is the woman who is the 'other', in opposition to the man. In the study of colonialism, the 'Eastern' woman manifested a double alienation: by gender and by the fact that she originated from territory subject to colonisation. The *contact zone*, as mentioned, concentrates on mutual relationships, not just the perspective of the coloniser. The issue of how European women were presented in Indian painting highlights the Indian response to contact with an alien civilisation and foreign women.

In this context there are also other important issues such as: the gender of the artist, the form of patronage and the position of the women. Professional artists were men, whereas women, if they painted at all, did so on an amateur basis. Some of them were, however, very talented and reached a high level of proficiency in miniature painting. Although few traces of their artistic endeavour have survived, they are most significant, for example, where female portraits are concerned.

The patrons of miniature painting were mostly rulers who supported the workers in their courts. Their choices and demand for certain types of works influenced the kinds of subjects depicted. However, there were times when ladies of the court also commissioned the work of artists. Women of the court sometimes also decided on the creation of works which would lead to the maintenance of the traditional iconography of women.<sup>4)</sup>

A further relevant issue regarding the presentation of women is the fact that they used to live in closed areas (*purdah*), to which admission was strictly limited. So, artists did not even know about their prevalence. In addition,

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<sup>4)</sup> Aitken (2002: 264).

women, and in particular those born into high society, were presented according to an ideal type. So, their paintings are more like cultural constructs of women as well as male imagination of them.

The selected time frame may seem questionable when it comes to the issue of colonisation. In my opinion, the beginning of the process of Britain's colonisation of India may be considered to be the creation of the East India Company, and then the sojourn of the ambassador of King James I (1615–1618) – Sir Thomas Roe (1581–1644) – at the court of Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627). These events marked the gradual arrival of the British in India and as well the exertion of their influence and seizing of power throughout the country. European colonisation proceeded on several different levels, including art. In this regard, contact with the Portuguese would also be relevant, whose presence and gifts in the form of works of art were important for the colonisation of artistic space. In the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a process that can be described as the beginning of colonisation, with both civilisations observing each other. In relation to the area of art and the perception of European women, these relations were often indirect, especially when it concerned contact with women from Europe. Few even came to India at the time,<sup>5)</sup> and often European men embarked upon relationships with local women.<sup>6)</sup> Therefore, Indian artists knew European women mainly from European works or local interpretations and saw them through their prism which would in turn add further interpretation. On this basis, they also formulated their own imagination. Many times, these images were adjusted to their own perceptions and distorted accordingly.

The analysed works bring together some fundamental issues – they were created for a local recipient, not the coloniser. Therefore, they reveal the reactions of a local artist created for a local patron. Since the situation changed significantly when artists were employed for British patrons and they created works to suit their tastes. This led to a situation where they even perceived themselves as belonging to the category of 'other', creating works which can be described as autoethnography, to use Pratt's terminology.<sup>7)</sup> This category will include mainly the works of traditional artists under the banner of Company Painting.

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<sup>5)</sup> More on this subject see: Mickelson-Gaughan (2013).

<sup>6)</sup> More see: Ghosh (2006).

<sup>7)</sup> Pratt (2011: 27–28).

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## INDIAN MINIATURE PAINTINGS AND IMAGES OF EUROPEAN WOMEN

The first official contact with Europeans at a Mughal court is recognised as the meeting of emperor Akbar with the Jesuits in 1579. But European influences had reached the court of the Great Moghul long before. Chronicles from Humayum's reign mention European textiles displayed at the court and Abu'l Fazl wrote that in European art 'inanimate objects appear to have come alive.'<sup>8)</sup> However it was Akbar who was first interested in European painting on such a scale. During the meeting with the Jesuits, he received gifts, including works of art. The Emperor greatly admired them, especially images of the Madonna and Child.<sup>9)</sup> Since then, more and more images from outside India appeared at the Mughal court. Sir Thomas Roe, who knew about the Emperor's love of art, gave Jahangir a significant collection of works by European artists. However, as he noted, the ruler had earlier paintings from England, such as 'pictures of the King of England, the Queene, my lady Elizabeth, the Countesse[s] of Sommersett and Salisbury, and of a cittizen's wife of London; below them another of Sir Thomas Smyth, Governor of the East India Company.'<sup>10)</sup> As may be observed from this description, the great number of European works found at the Mughal court also included images of women right from the beginning. From the times of Aurangzeb, artistic creativity started to decline, and many artists sought refuge in local centres such as Lucknow and Murshidabad, contributing to the flourishing of those centres (the style is sometimes called Provincial Mughal) or at the courts of Deccani rulers (Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Golconda). The European influence at Deccani schools manifested itself in two ways. On the one hand, the painting was strongly influenced by the Mughal rulers while on the other hand the rules also maintained direct contact with the Portuguese from Goa.<sup>11)</sup> So they had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the originals from Europe and also their interpretation derived from the imperial studio.

In the area of Rajasthan a similar situation may be observed. Many schools of painting were set up directly inspired by Mughal painting, hence the great influence of that school for local artists. As in in the Deccan area, European

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<sup>8)</sup> Beach (1992: 52–55).

<sup>9)</sup> Lomba (2009: 55).

<sup>10)</sup> Roe, Foster (1899b: 143).

<sup>11)</sup> See for example: Chaitanya (1979: 82).



presentations also arrived. However, the Europeans themselves has less of a presence there in comparison with their sojourns at the Mughul courts and with the Deccani rulers. Thus, European influences were more indirect in character, which also affected the perception of them as a kind of curiosity and also how they were depicted.

European paintings depicting women can be divided into several main thematic categories. The first group consists of religious works, often showing the Madonna and Child while the second involves allegories and genre scenes. Portraits make up the third category. They must have undoubtedly elicited the curiosity of artists for many reasons. Firstly, they showed exotic women, with an intriguing physiognomy and completely different clothes. Secondly, the technique in which they were presented afforded great opportunities for artistic creators. Thirdly, the subject matter was largely unknown, often giving rise to interpretations which differed from the intention of the author. By analysing the representations of European women, or those modelled on them, one may observe the following process of their assimilation into an Indian form: familiarising themselves with a foreign femininity and technique by copying and then adapting it to an Indian theme and then the Indianisation of European women and the creation on this basis of a new type of Indian woman. Images of European women also affected how Indian women were portrayed. So this contact had two main dimensions – European women subjected to Indianisation, while the Indians underwent a kind of Europeanisation.

## THE INDIANISATION OF EUROPEAN WOMAN

### COPYING

Indian artists repeatedly made exact copies of representations of European women. This was one of the first responses to contact with a foreign femininity and technique. By making exact copies, they had the opportunity to learn about the artistic representations and styles of different civilisations. Emperor Jahangir himself repeatedly ordered such works. As we may presume from Roe's memories, a portrait of his newly married wife was referred to as his greatest treasure and appreciated for its beauty – including, of course, that of the woman depicted.<sup>12)</sup> Apparent here is an interest in the new and the exotic

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<sup>12)</sup> Roe, Foster (1899a: 254–255).

as well as a male interest in the feminine. Portraits of European women also intrigued the residents of the royal harem, upon whose special request the emperor commissioned copies of these works. The artist committed the first stage of transformation – the European woman was painted by an artist from a completely different culture. Sometimes they were very accurate images, to the point that he Roe could not tell the difference between the original and the copy.

This, however, was not always the case for works designed for a wider audience. Artists sometimes practised their skills by copying European works depicting women. Preserved sketches of this type are most interesting, particularly when on one piece of paper both Indian and European women are presented. Indian women are shown according to the schematic characteristics of a given studio, while European women were painted in different poses. Maybe the author was looking for a suitable pattern which could then be used in the paintings? Or maybe he was just experimenting with a new type of femininity and techniques?

#### FIRANGI

Sometimes, however, the artists had tremendous difficulty in imitating foreign styles and these paintings are far from the European originals. The modelling is flat, along with exaggerated facial expressions. Many works present European women, but sometimes it is difficult to determine whether they were created on the basis of an original work or already repeatedly duplicated and modified. In time, these figures began to operate in isolation from the easily recognisable pattern and are referred to as *firangi*, which was generally used to mean Europeans. The term *firangi* in relation to the iconography of European women form can be used to describe a presentation whose source of inspiration remains unknown or they are quite far from the original work (Fig. 1, 2). The artist could just as well have had in mind a remembered image of European women and then been loosely inspired by that, while retaining all the European elements, such as facial features, dress, and the head (mostly 3/4).

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INDIANISATION OF DETAIL – INDIANISATION OF CONTEXT –  
INDIANISATION OF FEMININITY

Images of European women were subjected to rapid indianisation, which manifested itself by adding local details, placement in an Indian context, or a change in the physiognomy of the posture and some features borrowed from European prototypes.

Portraits of European women were soon subject to a gradual process of indianisation consisting in the first stage of placing their images in decorative frames, characteristic of Mughal works of that time. Sometimes elements were added that suggested a window portrait, with the top of the wrapped curtain visible.<sup>13)</sup> These portraits were precisely embellished with details of the face, clothes and jewellery, imitating European techniques at the same time (Fig. 3). Increasingly, however, the copies themselves became the subject of further copies of copies, and gradually their style and titles evolved. The same Lady Shirley (Fig. 4) was later to figure in a slightly modified version as a Portuguese lady (Fig. 5). In time they were also transformed according to the local stylistic and iconographic spirit – the modelling became flatter, and the woman sometimes ended up with a cup or a bottle (Fig. 6). All the time, however, the original is apparent, especially in terms of the 3/4 head or outfit.

The European woman was sometimes adapted to the local sense of beauty by adorning them in the Indian way – adding elements of clothing or, more often, jewellery. She then became more attractive to the Indian artist and the recipient, while retaining her exotic value at the same time.

Images of European women were also set in the Indian context. Sometimes these were small transformations, for example placing them in the Indian landscape.<sup>14)</sup> These paintings can also show copies of female figures taken from European prototypes during Indian rituals, for instance the worship of the sun (Fig. 7), or even as the heroine of a local story (for example, Laila and Majnun<sup>15)</sup>). Sometimes their appearance was modified according to a certain imagination of the true appearance of women from Europe. For instance, in

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<sup>13)</sup> Window portraits were termed *jharokha* and this was used mainly for portraits in which a person was portrayed at a window with a carpet on the windowsill – more on this later in the article.

<sup>14)</sup> See for example: Verma (1998: 81–82).

<sup>15)</sup> Mughal, 1595–1600, Chester Beatty Library (Leach 1995: 1.240).

a copy of a European painting,<sup>16)</sup> the woman was shown with a hat, which was popular at the time in the imperial court along with a bottle and a cup of the local type. More often, though, a European woman was granted some form of indianisation – in the general style of the painter’s studio, however retaining European physiognomic characteristics (Fig. 8). Artists often imagined her in poses and situations specific for princesses (for instance, on the terrace of the palace), or traditional iconography (for example, with a parrot or a cup). Sometimes, however, a fresh character made her way into the new iconography. An interesting example of this idea is a European woman fishing (Fig. 9).

European women were also depicted coupled with men. There were many variations of this type of imagery<sup>17)</sup>. They could be representations copied entirely from European originals, retaining all the features of the original. Nevertheless, sometimes the artist also transformed them in accordance with his own spirit. An interesting example of the latter type of works is the painting of a monarch (Luis XV) and a lady (Fig. 10). The miniature is titled and the woman is identified as *śāṅkhinī* – this is one of the types of women that, for example, in *Anangaranga* (Aṅgaraṅga) is characterised as follows: ‘her skin being always hot and tawny, or dark yellow-brown; her body is large, or waist thick, and her breasts small; her head, hands, and feet are thin and long, and she looks out of the corners of her eyes (...) she eats with moderation and she delights in clothes, flowers and ornaments of red colour. She is subject to fits of amorous passion, which make her head hot and her brain confused, and at the moment of enjoyment, she thrusts her nails into her husband’s flesh. She is of choleric constitution, hard-hearted, insolent and vicious; irascible, rude (...).’<sup>18)</sup> The Indian viewer, recognising in it his own aesthetic-cultural categories, would classified her as one of the least alluring types of women. This is because she does not reflect the ideal – that is *padminī* – according to which Indian women were usually presented. The darker skin, resulting from copying foreign techniques, and the proportions of her body which did not correspond to the Indian ideals of beauty, resembled *śāṅkhinī* – physically unattractive and full of sexual desire. European women – painted with exposed breasts, openly posing to strange men whose living spaces were not

<sup>16)</sup> Lomba (2009: 70).

<sup>17)</sup> See for example: Losty (2013: 52).

<sup>18)</sup> Burton (2013: 6).

separated and able to spend time in the company of men whom they did not know – were often perceived as shameless and depraved.

There were also a lot of creations in which the artist freely combined European figures by taking a woman from one painting and a man from another, sometimes also adding some local colour. Sometimes they also presented them in accordance with traditional iconography, such as a window portrait<sup>19)</sup> or even in erotic scenes.<sup>20)</sup>

By relying on several sources of inspiration while at the same time indianising the presenting sometimes yielded some surprising results, for example those that are visible in the painting of Victoria Maharani with the princess royal.<sup>21)</sup> The artist based this on the iconographic model of the Madonna with Child and also used the image of the queen. Ignorance of the realities in Europe led to misinterpretations and a monarch known for her puritanical principles was depicted with bare breasts. What is worth noticing, however, that even with such a strong facial stylisation, the artist managed to capture some resemblance to the queen.

Sometimes during the process of becoming accustomed to foreign femininity, the figures of European women took on some Indian features. These are works largely inspired by European paintings, when it comes to technique (for example, *chiaroscuro*) and composition, although the appearance of the woman's face is changed – she gains almond-shaped eyes and strongly accented eyebrows.<sup>22)</sup>

In the interpretation of Indian artists, foreign femininity was subjected to a gradual process of indianisation – and while remaining foreign, she took on specific local attributes. European woman, frozen in time, gained a new life in a different reality.

## THE EUROPEANISATION OF INDIAN WOMEN

Contact between the two cultures also worked the other way round – Indian women were europeanised. In this case, several versions of this type of reaction can also be observed. The first involved the direct inspiration to create portraits of Indian women. In the second, the process looked analogically

<sup>19)</sup> Examples see: Topsfield (1984/85: 359–360).

<sup>20)</sup> Examples see: Rawson (1983: ill. 35, 36); Burton, Arbuthnot (1987: 75).

<sup>21)</sup> Welch (1979: ill. 62).

<sup>22)</sup> See for example: Welch (1979: ill. 59).

similar to the case of indianisation – Indian women were depicted wearing elements of European attire. Another involved the adaptation of European iconographic types to suit their own needs, especially that of the Madonna and Child. Sometimes the artists were merely inspired by the portrayal of emotions in European paintings and tried to apply a similar treatment of the physiognomy of Indian women.

## PORTRAITS OF WOMEN

Portraits of European women were probably the direct inspiration for portraits of Indian women. Both in Persian and earlier Indian art, women were portrayed according to certain canons and even though portrait existed as a genre, they often did not convey a faithful physiognomical reproduction.<sup>23)</sup>

The first known production from the Mughal era in which women are represented as individuals is a miniature sketch depicting the *Birth of Jahangir* by Bishan Das,<sup>24)</sup> where many women are depicted with a variety of very different physiognomies.<sup>25)</sup> In this painting, women are part of a very elaborate scene.<sup>26)</sup> From the time of Jahangir, there also begin to emerge independent images of women. These may be divided into several types. The first of these show highly individualised physiognomies, which appear to have been made on the basis of direct observation. The second category includes paintings showing characters very similar to each other, with only slight differences. The third involves works depicting women according to a kind of ideal, reproduced with minor modifications in details.

The first of these types is most interesting, as it probably reveals the women's true physiognomies. They show great individual expression and face modelling.<sup>27)</sup> The medallion shape, which they sometimes took, could be a reference to European portraits, including miniature paintings of women. One

<sup>23)</sup> For a discussion on portraits in India see: Kaimal (1999: 59–133).

<sup>24)</sup> Ca. 1610–1615, Museum of Fine Art, Boston, this painting was reproduced and discussed many times, see for example: Das (1998: 118–119).

<sup>25)</sup> This painting has been analysed many times, see for example: Aitken (2002: 249).

<sup>26)</sup> Interestingly, many of the women who were presented in the painting of Bishan Das later appeared in separate portraits, which may confirm the hypothesis that they were images of real women from the zenana (Beach 1992: 95–96).

<sup>27)</sup> For example: Mughal c. 1660, The Cleveland Museum of Art, see: Leach (1986: 127).

of the first works of this type were those of Isaac Oliver, who brought with him his cousin, Sir Thomas Roe.<sup>28)</sup> As previously mentioned, these images are copied on the request of the emperor, and so were probably a direct inspiration for Indian works. As strange men were not allowed to cross the threshold of the *zanānā*, some confusion surrounds the authorship of these miniatures. However, sometimes women were also involved in painting. A few examples of Mughal era works made by women at the court have survived.<sup>29)</sup> The collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi contains a miniature portrait of a woman painting another female resident of the palace.<sup>30)</sup> Therefore, it seems highly likely that it was the women who created this type of painting. These works, however, were made for private viewing only and were not publicly exhibited. This would have been a violation of the intimacy of the women's life in the *zanānā*.

There are also paintings, which are not described as portraits yet show highly individualised types. One is especially interesting: two elderly women in a landscape with a cat.<sup>31)</sup> They have an Indian regard and costume, and therefore are not directly based on a European work. Moreover, their physiognomies are full of inner tension. It might be assumed then that this is a double portrait of women familiar to the artist. Probably they belonged to the lower social strata and they could have been seen by people not belonging to the royal *zanānā*.

Such works resulted in the establishment of Indian women as individuals, rather than merely the epitome of an ideal type. They overcame not only the physical barriers separating them from the male world, but also cultural ones stipulating that they personify a certain ideal. Though few in number, they represent a most important body of work, for social reasons as well as artistic. So we can say that the portraits of European women contributed to the establishment of individuality in the art of Indian women.

The second category provokes controversy among researchers. Most think that they are idealised images, not based on direct observation.<sup>32)</sup> However, there are voices that the characters depicted in these images do in fact differ from each other, which may constitute evidence that they carry individual

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<sup>28)</sup> Roe, Foster (1899a: xxiv).

<sup>29)</sup> Lomba (2009: 69).

<sup>30)</sup> Mughal School, c. 1635–40, Desai (1985: 76); Michell, Lampert, Holland (1982: 136).

<sup>31)</sup> Mughal, c.1640, Chester Beatty Library, Leach (1995: 3.78).

<sup>32)</sup> See for example: Gangoly (1928: 5–11).



features.<sup>33)</sup> Maybe it was possible in some cases that the artists had seen or knew from stories the characteristics of some ladies of the court. They may include Nur Jahan (1577–1645), who held a position of influence at the imperial court, and often flouted the convention that she should remain invisible to the world.<sup>34)</sup> So, maybe some images depicting her life bear some features of her appearance.<sup>35)</sup> One of the paintings is particularly intriguing: because the empress is shown with rifle, full of power, even looking at first glance like a man.<sup>36)</sup>

Another example of a woman whose portraits bear the traits of individualism is Lal Kunwar, the beloved wife of the eighth Mughal Emperor Jahandar Shah (1661–1713).<sup>37)</sup> In this case, the way she was presented could have been down to her roots – she was originally a dancing girl, and so her appearance was familiar at the court; her influence at the court of the ruler was secondary. Thus, women were most likely to have been the decisive force in choosing such a convention. However, they may have wanted even to a small extent, if at all possible, to show their face to a wider audience and stand on an equal footing with men.

The third of these categories does not constitute an individualised approach and women are shown in accordance with an ideal type differing only in the style of the particular artist's studio.

#### THE INDIAN WOMAN AS A EUROPEAN LADY

Inspiration for the attire or general appearance of European women came primarily from several sources. The first was contact with real objects originating from Europe. The second was works of art, while the third – much rarer – was direct relations. Indian women had contact with many artefacts from Europe during the times of the Mughals. Many of the various gifts sent to the imperial court were then transferred to the *zanānā*.<sup>38)</sup> Hats proved to be particularly popular among the residents, which were brought at their

<sup>33)</sup> Aitken (2002: 249–250).

<sup>34)</sup> More see: Findly 1993.

<sup>35)</sup> Gangoly (1928: 5–11); Aitken (2002: 249).

<sup>36)</sup> Abu'l Hasan, 1612–1613 (Beach 1992: 96).

<sup>37)</sup> Walters Art Museum, Ms. W.712.

<sup>38)</sup> Findly (1993: 149).



request.<sup>39)</sup> This was also the most frequently occurring item of European clothing in the representation of Indian women. The appearance of European women and their outfits were so different that they often functioned as a kind of curiosity. Some paintings show situations where the lady of the court is entertained by women dressed in various items of European apparel, even including men's wear.<sup>40)</sup> It seems that both kind of attires – whether male or female were so exotic, that Indian ladies (or the painter) occasionally combined them into one outfit (Fig. 11).

Sometimes an Indian couple wears Europeans costumes but they are presentment in typical Indian iconography and in an Indian interior, which seems to have a similar significance – entertainment or curiosity of exotic garments. One painting of this type presents scenes depicting an ashamed woman brought by another lady (older or servant) to a man who is waiting for her on the bed – a theme popular in miniatures from the 18<sup>th</sup> century especially in Rajput paintings.<sup>41)</sup>

Paintings depicting Indian woman in a somewhat Westernised form show them mostly in European attire, or more rarely in terms of the physical setting (for example, sitting on a European chair). Often the hair of ladies from outside India became the object of attention, sometimes inspiring artists to present Indian women with flowing, fair-haired locks (Fig. 12). Sometimes many elements were combined in one painting, some of them with only a vague similarity to European clothes and jewellery.<sup>42)</sup>

All these elements were a selective response to contact with a different femininity, chosen and processed according to the personal discretion of either whoever commissioned the work or the artist himself. It often occurred that the various Indo-European elements were mixed to such an extent that sometimes it is impossible to determine whether the presented subject is an Indian lady dressed or portrayed in a European way, or a European portrayed in an Indian context (Fig. 13). In these paintings, two seemingly separate worlds are merged into one form.

Sometimes the image of a European woman was a model that was then transformed and combined with other elements, and then went on to function and develop independently of the original. An interesting example of this

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<sup>39)</sup> Danvers (1897a: 108–109).

<sup>40)</sup> Mughal 1742, Desai (1985: 82–83).

<sup>41)</sup> Mughal Style, c. 1700, The British Library, 1955,1008,0.17.

<sup>42)</sup> See for example: Beach (1965: 178–180).

adaptation is a characterisation inspired by allegory of poetry<sup>43)</sup> (Fig. 14). The creator probably did not know the original meaning of the work and was merely inspired by the half-naked bust. In one of the first versions, the indianised allegorical character appears as one of several thematic motifs brought together on one page of a manuscript (Fig. 15). Soon, however, this figure was presented alone and, moreover, in a style of portrait reminiscent of *jharokhā* (Fig. 16).<sup>44)</sup> This type of image derived from the custom of showing the emperor at the window during *darbār*. As demonstrated by J. P. Losty, this kind of portrait was European in origin and used to present the images of European rulers, mainly Queen Elizabeth I – with regards to the presentation of the characters and the windowsill covered by a carpet usually reserved for the Madonna and Child or royal personages in fifteenth and sixteenth century paintings.<sup>45)</sup> During the reign of Aurangzeb it was also used for half-naked female figures, but initially only with a drawn-up window curtain and without an imperial carpet. Gradually, however, this changed and the carpet appeared in the depictions of women, even naked ones. This presentation became extremely popular and was reproduced in imperial studios, and later spread to the Deccan and Rajput schools (Fig. 17, 18).

#### THE MADONNA BECOMES AN INDIAN MOTHER

Among European works, images of the Madonna proved very popular with artists. Initially only copied, they gradually became the model for the representation of an Indian mother and her child. Some refer explicitly to European prototypes – the artist copied the composition, robes and European style, changing only the facial features. Sometimes they are vaguely based on one specific prototype and the artist combined several elements from different paintings to create his own vision of European-Indian motherhood.<sup>46)</sup> The vast majority are works from which inspiration is drawn from the composition, the relationship between mother and child (the child sometimes has a European appearance), while adapting the facial features, dress and decoration to a local style. Paintings of this type were created mainly in Rajasthan (Fig. 19).

<sup>43)</sup> Beach (1965: 86).

<sup>44)</sup> Very similar version is in the collection of The British Library.

<sup>45)</sup> Losty (2013b: 52–64).

<sup>46)</sup> See for example: Mason, Goswamy (2001: 156–157).

## INDIAN WOMAN – EUROPEAN EXPRESSION

Indian artists, as mentioned earlier, were often inspired by selective elements of European representations. One of the characteristics of foreign painting, which was considered interesting, was how emotions were shown on the face. In Indian art, emotions were depicted more by means of context rather than facial expression. Of course, there are works that depart from the traditional timeless look, but these often depict dangerous deities or provide comic overtones. European art exemplified a wide range of emotional expression. Artists frequently and skilfully copied these faces full of emotion. Occasionally, they even adapted them in their own style, adding laugh or tear lines, sometimes with a little shading. This brought interesting results, sometimes giving the impression of ageing or even adding an element of unintended humour.

## MIXED FEMININITY

As previously mentioned, the European woman was mainly perceived as 'other' and exotic. The same was true for members of other nations, such as Chinese women. Artists sometimes, without much understanding of the subject, brought them together in the same painting, where several foreign nations exist in one reality. One of the most unusual images of this type is the representation of two Chinese women shown in a European reality, probably French. In another one, two elegant Chinese ladies are depicted in an Anglo-Indian home, sitting on European chairs. Interestingly, on the wall behind the ladies are European portraits as if suggesting that they are ancestors or family members. For the artist, these two nations were so alien as to be combined into one<sup>47)</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Contact with European femininity in the period from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was mostly indirect. This contributed to a variety of interpretations and perceptions as well as attempts at understanding. Very soon, the European woman was somehow absorbed and converted into the Indian reality. She functioned primarily as a quaint curiosity who was sometimes combined in this way with women from other cultural circles. Various aspects also

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<sup>47)</sup> Topsfield (1984/85: Fig. 20, 21).

inspired artists from different backgrounds. For example, in Mughal art the image of the Madonna and Child was not adapted to secular performances. This may be due to the fact that the Holy Virgin was also honoured as the mother of one of the prophets of Islam. For Hindus, however, these representations did not have any religious overtones and appealed to a culture in which motherhood played a very large role in the lives of women and society. The often tried to convey the mood of these paintings – the bond between the mother and child, sometimes demonstrated in the techniques applied – with imitation *chirascuro* or sometimes by trying to reproduce facial expressions, often with an unintended comic effect. This period is so interesting from the angle of the coexistence of the two nations – European and Indian in the early stages of colonialism. The European woman, though a stranger, easily blended into the Indian reality. Paradoxically, the arrival of a large number of real women in India and the possibility to become even superficially familiar with them was one of the factors which led later to the separation of these two nations.

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Fig. 1. Two European ladies in French clothing, Udaipur Style, c. 1720, © Trustees of the British Museum (1956,0714,0.26)



Fig. 2. Damoiselle Converse, Henri Bonnard II, (1637–1711), © Victoria and Albert Museum, London (E.21379–1957)



Fig. 3. Oval bust portrait of European woman in 17<sup>th</sup>-century dress (fragment), Mughal School, The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (MS. Ouseley Add. 171)



Fig. 4. Lady Shirley, Mughal School, c. 1650 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IM.8-1913)





Fig. 5. Portuguese lady, Mughal School, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Bibliotheque Nationale Paris (fol. V. 6200)



Fig. 6. Portrait of the lady, Mughal School, late 18<sup>th</sup> century, private collection



Fig. 7. Woman Worshipping the Sun: Page from the Gulshan Album, attributed to Basawan (active ca. 1556–1600), c. 1590–95, Mughal court at Lahore or Delhi, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)



Fig. 8. A woman in European clothing feeding pet birds in a cage, Udaipur Style, c. 1720, © Trustees of the British Museum (1956,0714,0.28)



Fig. 9. A European lady fishing, Uniara, c.1760, private collection



Fig. 10. Two lovers in European clothing seated on a terrace Udaipur Style, c. 1720, © Trustees of the British Museum (1956,0714,0.27)





Fig. 11. Portrait of a woman, Rajasthan School, 18<sup>th</sup> century, © Trustees of the British Museum (1920,0917,0.13.7)



Fig. 12. Portrait of a woman, Mughal School, c. 1740, private collection



Fig. 13. Lady with two attendants, Rajasthan, late 18<sup>th</sup> century © Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.461–1952)



Fig. 14. Poetry from *The Liberal Arts*, Engraving by Cornelius Jacobsz Drebbel (1572–1634), after Hendrik Goltzius, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Fig. 15. Page from Muraqq Gulshan (fragment), early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Gulshan Library, Tehran (Milo Cleveland Beach, „The Gulshan Album and Its European Sources”, *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Vol. 63, No. 332 (1965), 87)



Fig. 16. Portrait of a woman. Mughal School, c. 1700, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS.259–1952)



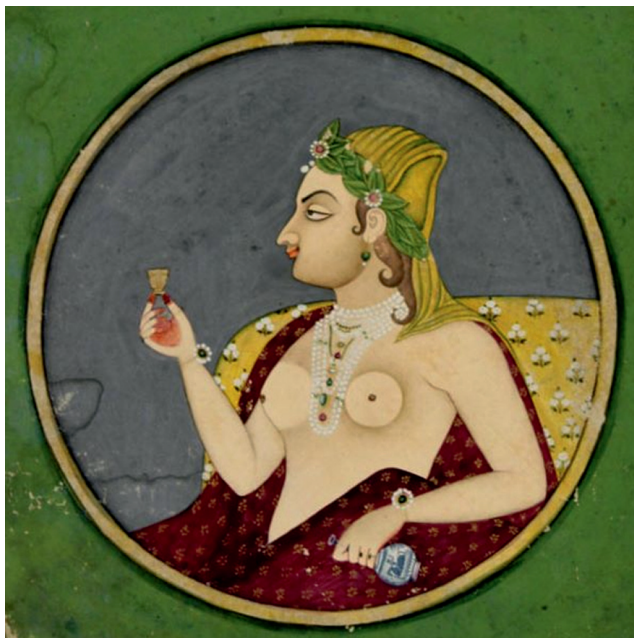


Fig. 17. Portrait of a woman, Jodhpur, c. 1830–1840, private collection



Fig. 18. Courtesan with cup and flask, 1770, Bikaner, private collection



Fig. 19. A bust portrait of a mother and child. Rajasthan School 18<sup>th</sup> century (early), © Trustees of the British Museum (1949,1008,0.23)