Chapter: IV
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As it is highlighted earlier, the contemporary artistic representation of alienated womanhood which searches for a mode of resistance has manifold manifestations. Let us discuss Ravinder Reddy and his sculptures/sculpting style as an interesting model of representing resistant womanhood in this chapter.

4.1 Sculpture of Ravinder Reddy: An Overview

Ravinder Reddy, a contemporary Indian artist, from the state of Andhra Pradesh\(^1\), portrays a distinct dimension of woman portraiture. After holding a position from 1984 to 1990 as assistant director at the Kanoria centre for Arts in Ahmadabad, he now teaches in the department of Fine arts at Andhra University, Vishakhapatnam. His works can be found in numerous private and public collections such as Richmond's Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, London’s Victoria and Albert Museum and the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia. His sculptures (eg: ‘A Sculptural Display’, pl.63) began to be collected by the eminent Indian Art Galleries such as Art Heritage, New Delhi, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, CIMA, Calcutta, IHC Gallery, New Delhi. His works are also collected by the galleries from abroad such as Andy Warhol Museum, USA, Walsh gallery, Chicago from the beginning of 80’s etc.

The Contemporary Art Society and the Economist Group, in association with Grosvenor Vadehra, presented a new exhibition of Ravinder Reddy, at the Economist plaza. The specially fabricated sculptural installation coincided with Reddy's first solo exhibition in Britain at Grosvenor Vadehra's London gallery on Ryder Street. Ravinder Reddy is one of the first Indian contemporary artists to draw serious attention in America as a result of his show at Deitch Projects in 2001. In between the year 1982 and 1984 he
studied sculpture at Goldsmith college of Art and Ceramics at the Royal
College of Art, adding terracotta to fiberglass as his steady medium.

During the eighties of the twentieth century he was based in Baroda where
he started to flourish as a noted artist with his own marked style. The above
mentioned period as showing Reddy’s striking individuality as an artist was
classified by the engagement with the female figures which were
executed from the inspiration of popular culture. It is marked by the Kitsch
portrayal of film heroines in Hindi and Tamil Cinema. He was also deeply
influenced by Yakshi sculpture of Mathura and by the expressive facial
language of classical dance forms like ‘Kathakali’. In the late nineties the
texture of the portraying of the female figures turns into the monumental
iconic woman heads of voluptuous film heroines for which he selects the
shining effects of metallic colour on fiberglass. His women portraits possess
the unblinking eyes, and those eyes are charged with primeval intensity that
conveys a confident alienation and empowerment. These alienated portraits
led his women images towards empowerment through the negation of the so
called femininity of patriarchal world. Ravinder Reddy is one of the geniuses
of the Indian contemporary sculptor. At the later period he was influenced by
Pop art and simplified his works into bulging shapes of fluid figures
(‘Couple’, pl.64), where animal and human character playfully appeared with
the surge of life forces.

He used to create greater than life size sculptures and monumental busts
made up of fiber glass. The figures of his sculptures are usually female and
all are nude in appearance. Their skin covered with gold leaf and sometimes
with silver foil ornamentations. The huge dimension of his sculptures
glittering with gold nudity, (‘Woman’, pl.65), the stylized hairs and black
contoured eyes put an exuberance expression in his woman images. The
high relief and all round sculptures depicting ‘Contemporary City Girls’
(pl.66) interpreted in warm humor through an allusion to Mathura Yakshi.
They are overly challenging and threatening by their exuberant appearance.
These modern statues are loud, yet naively defiant and expectant also of
tenderness and reveal raw feelings under a crude filmy glamour. There is a
deep physical immediacy in them which conveys emotions and association of meaning. Reddy's earlier fiberglass works subdued inner properties of the materials, covering them in flat paint in order to retain only those traits which would emphasize the subjects with its own palpability. In later period at late 80's and 90's he began doing his free standing, oversize heads and relief of nude women images and some postures of lover couples.

**4.2 Iconic Images of Women Portrait: An Alienation from the Stereotype**

Sculptures of Ravinder Reddy were flourished in an individual dimension between the late 80's and early 90's. He introduced a new type of sculptural style in India mainly based upon ‘*Gilded and Multi Coloured Women Heads*’ (pl.67). From the latter half of the eighties of the last century Ravinder Reddy started to work in the form of huge female heads with vivid liveliness. The trend of Indian sculpture of medieval era was a manifestation of exuberant expression, gigantic scale and liveliness. Those sculptures were mainly erected in the walls of Hindu architectures with rough and spontaneous chisel work. From the beginning of this period Indian sculptures started to deny the polished and smoothness of Mauryan sculptures or the ideal approaches of Greco-roman sculptures of Kusana period. Those sculptural figures were not always orientated with religious norms. Sometime they were sculpted in the various moods of secular activities. More over Indian sculptures had a remarkable impact upon Ravinder Reddy's art which he amalgamated in the vision of Western Pop Art through the use of bright and metallic colours. Ravinder Reddy also fuses the Indian sculptural tradition with the contemporary Western pop sensibility mixing a reverence for traditional Indian sculptural forms and an appreciation of Andy Warhol's portraits. In addition to create a dialogue between traditional Hindu art and contemporary pop, he also reflects the way young Indian women are creating the fashionable image to merge a reverence for tradition with an embrace of the contemporary world. Their elaborate hairstyles are adorned with hundreds of delicately sculpted flowers and giving them the effect of iconic appearance (e.g.: *Iconic Head*, pl.68).
But the glimpse of the fully open eyes is the most prominent signs of his female faces. Those eyes are always open to protest against all invasion or gazes constructed by the patriarchal society.

Ravinder Reddy's works also carry the liveliness through different characteristic resemblance with ancient totem figures. Similarly, his life size figures and voluminous heads are executed to bear an aphorism. His sculptures are holding full bright eyes, floral ornamented hair style and expressive thick lips, which recall the essence of a search; a search of his own tradition in the arena of contemporary cultural practice. At the same time, these images have masqueraded an immediate resource of present scenario of life. Through their individual bodily form and easygoing posture they acknowledge the point to be real, self-confident and proud being a woman. The expression of the faces are loud even bordering on the exaggeration and they are simultaneously defiant and expectant as well as tender and revealing, beneath their crude flimsy glamour.

His contemporary nymphs from coy adolescent girls to middle aged women are often painted in iconic colours like the hue of blue and built in massive and monumental scale. In spite of their iconic execution these images are intimately exposed with the exuberance of earthen body. They look at the viewer directly with their large open eyes almost hypnotically. Utterly tactile, fluid and powerfully synthesized yet with a capacity for delicate and detail nuance or splashed under synthetic pigment and garish ornament. His sculptures look like the classical visual language of Indian traditional art. The facial expression of the female heads carries the resemblance of powerful fetish goddesses of Indian sculpture. The traditionally enriched art of ancient India have come down into the wider expanse of contemporary space and have found vistas of new experience to rejuvenate itself.

A sculpture of Ravinder Reddy titled ‘Young Girl’ (pl.69) executed in the year 1996 is a typical example of the iconic head of Reddy’s works. It is painted in blue with contrast black contoured lines in the eyes and eyebrows. This image was not as polished as his recent sculptures. The iconic head has a similarity with the primitive sculptural heads of Harappan culture. Ravinder
Reddy’s affection towards ancient Harappan art is found in the early works of 80’s decade. An example could be taken in context to his affection toward the ancient art through the sculpture titled ‘Bearded Head’ (pl.70) executed in 1989, which resembles the famous ‘Priest figure’ or ‘Pries Head’ (pl.71) of Indus valley art. The above discussed blue head of the ‘Young Girl’ appears as a primitive woman, with a sense of Other beauty, which is not controlled by the beauty/fashion norms of the consumer world. As usually, the bright and expressive eyes and thick sensual lips are exposed with the feelings of exuberant livelihood. The hue of blue is typically a symbolic representation of Indian culture which negates the affection towards the white skin and also denying the naturalistic aspirations of Western art. It has been repeatedly seen that the Indian god and goddess (such as Krishna and Kali) are represented in the hue of blue to symbolize them as the icon of the common (black) people of India. Through this sculpture it would be noticed that Ravinder Reddy has taken various materials from different areas of Indian tradition and culture and tried to mixed them in a new iconographic form in late 80’s and 90’s of 20th century.

Ravinder Reddy brought a unique technique through his sculptures by merging different disciplines of visual arts together in one form. He is not a conventional sculptor who commonly makes sculpture in pure sculptural elements. Reddy builds statues with the plastic materials to catch the main structure of the art piece in first step and then he paints over it with highly delicate lines and gorgeous colors. Sometimes he also inlays objects or pigments upon the finished art work at the end.

The iconic character of Ravinder Reddy’s sculpture is having a separate identity beside other sculptural works of contemporary India. He has consciously muted different visual phenomenon to create a contrast character and visual plurality in his art works. He has taken elements from Indian traditional sculptures, which have inspired him with their voluptuous figures and exaggerated facial expressions. He has also taken elements from primitive and folk art of India and South Asia. The sharp contoured lines of nose, lips, chins and eyebrows of his huge portraits were inspired from the geometric formalism of primitive art and the folk art of India. Even Ravinder Reddy hasseven taken elements from different popular cultures of
India, such as rituals, festivals and popular performances of Indian art and culture.

His works suggest a multifaceted woman world that is rooted in the past while mingling with the contemporary world. Ravinder Reddy's works could be out of place neither in a modern bazaar nor in an Indian temple. Some are given ordinary Indian names while others are bestowed with the names of great deities. He made a dramatic rupture with contemporary covert icons and offered a retake on classical Indian traditions. With amazing figural skills he began to redefine contemporary sculpture in terms of a theatrical ensemble of modeled, cast painted and frontally posed figures in a somewhat individual mood. Also he found a way of further monumentalizing the iconic form in classical Indian sculpture, making the gilded icon a voluptuous object of contemporary delight.

Hence the most enduring theme, the gargantuan head of the women, in Ravinder Reddy's oeuvre is exposed with their large unblinking vision. His women images fall short from delivering themselves as the object of desire. Reddy's women become ethnic and distinctly uncommon not stereotype and suspended between the urban and the rural/ past and present, signifies a cultural hybrid. Also the gilded and painted heads are almost kitsch but their grand, confrontational stance and unblinking stare prevent them from becoming a comic spectacle. These nonchalant and confident women images are expressed with a sensation of detachment; a detachment from the man made stereotyped women images of the physical world. Ravinder Reddy's imaged women are alienated in the self and personal space and became empowered in iconic exuberance.

4.3 Women Alienated and Empowered: Resistance in Heraldic Heads
A woman in this patriarchal world is already alienated through the essentials of gender discrimination. The stereotype projection of woman in some generalized character builds her image with some eternal difference. These differences cannot be omitted from their identity which makes them alienated from the mainstream society. That stereotype image of woman has been rejected by the women heads created by Reddy and they become
deliberately alienated to create an individual position against the constructed feminine images of the patriarchal society. Women are predominantly alienated sexually in this society. The power politics of sexual opposition makes a woman different from the man, which ultimately carry the eternal tools of oppression and discrimination and led women at the extreme point where the sexual alienation could make a fetish power.

Ravinder Reddy mostly deals with huge and decorated sculptural heads with a heraldic presence. During the 80's of 20th century, the gigantic, exuberant sculptures of Ravindar Reddy, brought an untouched and an unfamiliar style in Indian contemporary art to show the empowerment of woman and their resistance against all types of authoritative practice of patriarchy. His woman images are apparently represented in extremely gorgeous appearance, but they internally behold the poise of self dignity.

Woman empowerment in Hindu goddess is treated as one of the important subjects in Indian women activism. Hinduism is a religion that holds the practice of deity worship and it has one important stream that is Shakti cult mainly concentrating upon the goddess images. Feminists sometimes have considered these women images as an aspiration of woman power in the context of pro-feminism. There are different images of mother goddess in India, who holds the power to resist the evil forces. These goddess images could be viewed as the force of women power and their gestural appearance inspires women to believe upon their own strength. This is one of the important ways that how women could realize her own internal strength and power, which could awaken the empowerment of woman. There is a continuous debate among the contemporary feminist theories in India based upon the pro-women aspiration of Shakti images (goddess). Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has critically questioned this essential practice of the feminists and described her own ideas about the Hindu goddess and women empowerment. Previously, Tanika Sarkar's Comment has been taken in this context in the 1st chapter of this thesis, where she made a comparative analysis of the goddess Kali and goddess Durga. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan had taken an account of the goddess images of India in her essay 'Is the Hindu Goddess a Feminist', where she told, ‘It would be generally agreed that despite the great symbolic value and veneration bestowed on the
consorts of the trinity the goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati it is the autonomous constructions of female divinity such as Kali, Durga and their numerous spin-offs who are representative of 'Stri Shakti' (Woman-power)' (Rajan, 2004, p-319)

She described Stri Shakti of Hindu goddess but she also argued about the projection of Hindu Goddess as feminist is problematic. It is quite obvious that the making of the Hindu goddess as ‘Stri-Shakti’ is also a patriarchal trap. Above all these different images of Sakti or power goddess is controlled by one god who is Shiva, the husband (a man) of all incarnations of Stri Sakti, Durga, Kali, Parvati, Sati etc in various narratives of Indian myth. Even these goddesses are represented primarily as mother not as a single woman who has individual desire. In spite of these problematic, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has acknowledged the presence of goddess images under the glory of empowerment of Indian woman. She writes:

I shall focus on the disagreement of the centering on the last claim, but shall treat certain other definitions as starting-points and assume certain ideas to be consensual: one, that 'feminist' here will mean 'pro-woman', 'empowering women': two, that the Hindu goddess is unique in that Hinduism is the only contemporary world religion that has a tradition and continuing process of goddess-worship; three, Hindu goddess-worship is radical insofar as the goddess is not inscribed in the mainstream of deities and her devotees are drawn largely from lower castes, women and even non-Hindus thus clearing certain spaces of alternative belief and practice in the monolith of brahminical Hinduism, and finally, that it is not only the existence and worship of the goddess, but also her representations in 'feminist' ways—as complementary 'female principle', as autonomous female agent, or as powerful cosmic force—that are under discussion here as aspects of her 'feminist' recuperation.(Rajan, 2004, p-319)

Woman's empowerment is not similar to power theory. Empowerment did not encourage any force or dominance to practice its hegemony through the power. In feminist theory empowerment means to enable a power (another norms of power) to do something in context to pro-women. Empowerment is not holding any authoritative doctrine to establish some essential discipline or normative. Rather woman’s empowerment opens the horizon of women’s
liberation and frees them from stereo-typed womanhood. Empowerment brought an enthusiastic connotation in third wave feminism, through which women started to perform their own genius without going into the age old comparison with men.

Empowerment encourages the identity of women in various ways and could obtain an ambience of free space for them where they can raise their own ideas. Ravinder Reddy’s sculptures were internally empowered with the enthusiasms and pride of woman. They never showed any authority or coercive influence but they put forth a resistance through their empowerment. Empowerment is one of the key factors of third wave feminism, where this term works in two ways; i.e. internally and collectively. Women had developed a position of self identity through the political and social activity from the beginning of 60’s and during the period of second wave feminism, but they became more certain about their individual identity by internalizing the meaning of empowerment at the time of Third Wave Feminism. Empowerment also encourages women to work in a collective way that they could fight together to make the resistance against any kind of discrimination and inequality. Through this collective work the possibility of egalitarian perception could develop, which would ultimately empower women within the larger meaning of equality.

The women images of Ravinder Reddy have enhanced the internal power of woman with their aggressive expression and vivid liveliness. Those women images enabled the basic consciousness of their individual identity to make an encounter against the social injustice and inequality of gender. Their self-conscious confidence projected a sense of empowerment and these sculptural women images of Ravinder Reddy became unique in individual identity. Though these women images are deliberately represented with gorgeous golden skin, perfectly painted thick lips, thin eyebrows and intricately fasten hair with bids and enlarged eyes, but they never executed any feelings of feminine beauty. The reason could be that these images are strongly attached with the consciousness of the woman existence; the existence which emerged from the empowerment of individual woman.

From the beginning of 90’s a new trend has arrived in Indian contemporary art i.e. the representation of Indian iconic images. Basically the Baroda
based painters have adopted a style to relocate Indian traditional Goddess images through their own art works. Ravinder Reddy was one of them who had exposed a new arena of Indian iconography. In the beginning of his early career his works were not huge or gigantic like today’s works, and they started to establish a new feature of resistance by the images of empowering women at the last decade of 20th century.

It is already discussed that Ravinder Reddy’s women images are highly fashionable with delicate hair styles and bourgeois appearance. The artist has carefully handled these folk, primitive and traditional aspects and amalgamated them with the contemporary paradoxes of fashion and beauty. Though these heads are artificially designed in a contemporary look but they never became the image of femininity or a product of beauty. These women have appeared with their own narratives and they are not claustrophobic by any pre-construction of beauty ideals. Reddy’s portraits are primitive in their simplified organic forms, and are also traditional by their vivid youth and liveliness. They are popular with their gorgeous theatrical appearance like folk performances. They are fashionable with thin eyebrows, colored lips and delicate hair style which summon up the impression of urbanization. All above mentioned qualities are clubbed together and formed a new icon through Ravinder Reddy’s sculptures in the contemporary visual art of India.

In this context Geeta kapur’s vision on Ravinder Reddy could be taken into account. She observes:

‘Reddy’s sculpture is about seduction, ornament, gigantism, iconicity, repetition, fetish. Fixed with a burning gaze, such a code defines the erotic nature of nearly all Indian art. This has less to do with subjective mutualities, more with a dangerously bold encounter of the human and the divine that sanctions similarly permissive play by mortals. Reddy equates the eroticism in the divine and popular, high and low traditions and thereby puts into place a kitsch-sublime that goes beyond parody.’

(Kapur, 2000 p- 393)

The sculpture ‘Krisnaveni’ (pl.72) is one of the mature example of Ravinder Reddy’s iconographic woman head, executed at the year 1997 and the primary materials of this art work is polyester resin fiberglass and gold leaf. This huge head is 52 inches high and its width and diameter was respectively 49 inches and 53 inches. Krishna is an Indian epic character
taken from ‘Mahabharata’ and her other name was ‘Draupadi’ the wife of Pandavas. According to the legend of Mahabharata, Krishna had unfasten her long hair and taken an oath that she will not fasten her hair until she could wet her hair with the blood of Duhshashana, the brother of Duryadhana and the enemy of Pandavas, who molested Krishna in the public court of Dhritarastra. In the latter half of the epic Krishna had wetted her hairs with the blood of Duhshashana and also fastened them together. Krishna or Draupadi is a significant character of Indian myth. Her image became a cultural signifier and emerged with different cultural meanings in different Indian community and established a separate identity of worship instead of the iconography goddess. Here Reddy has shown Krishna with an intricately fastened hair which means that she has successfully sustained her oath and ultimately resisted the invasion of a common patriarchal behavior. Her smile shows that she is now satisfied after taking her revenge against the Kauravas (Duryadhan, Duhshashan etc). This very image of woman is executed with full enthusiasms and liveliness. Her eyes are brightening with the plea of success; her thick lips are strongly conjugated but having a glimpse of smile with the pride for victory of her oath. Her strongly adjoined hairs are melting through the curvilinear lines is a significance of empowerment of women against all kinds oppression organized by the patriarchal antagonism.

His sculpture ‘Devi’ was featured in the ‘New York Times’ as it is a gorgeous and overwhelming work. The other works like ‘Head with choli’, and ‘Under the tree’ are both audacious and exuberant. They are about over life size, richly colored and covered with gold leaf, sensuous and unblinking. His portraits have a power that is extremely attractive and at the same time, repellent.

Ravindar Reddy’s ‘Radha’ (pl.73) is one of the examples of woman empowerment. This sculpture is made of polyester resin and fiberglass medium and with gold leaf inlay at the end. This sculpture is bigger than the sculpture ‘Krishnaveni’ and it is 79 inches in height. This sharp and glossy woman head executed as Radha is a married woman beholding an important character of Indian religious legend. Radha’s secrete love with Lord Krishna (the incarnation of god Visnu) made a negation against stereotyped feature of making love in patriarchal norms. Being a married...
woman, *Radha* had broken up the constructed normative made for the woman who are married and violated the protocols of in-laws house. Here Radha is carrying a laugh (not smile) in her joined lips, with a glory of pleasure and freedom. Pleasure is an important aspect of feminism, because feminism traces upon the liberty of enjoyment of pleasure in a woman’s own way, which should not be controlled by the outsider power. The use of gold leaf by Ravinder Reddy on his women faces gives an effect of hard edged metal. The glossy bright golden skin of the head illuminates an exaggerated fashion that gets reflected upon the eyes, eye brows and lips. Even the hard lines become softened by the highlight of the metallic leaf. Reddy’s metallic representation seems to be viewed through the perception of the solidity of plasticity of the material, which would strengthen the empowering appeal of the image of female heads.

The sculpture known as ‘*Blue Head*’ (pl. 74) is also made by the polyester resin and fiber glass. But Ravinder Reddy used the blue paint instead of the gold leaf. This female head executed in 2007 is apparently not different with the other works done by him in outer structure. There is almost similar use of eyes, lips and other parts of the face and executed with the same colour scheme. Perhaps Geeta Kapur had stated this type as repetition. Inspired by the repetition in outer structure Ravinder Reddy focused upon the individual character internally in each sculptures and in each woman head. The inner vision of the expressive eyes of the women portraits always reflects some different narration that helps them to make their own individual discourses as the *Other* against all forms of panopticism\(^7\).

These female heads are referred as fetish by Kapur, may be for its dominant and powerful attitude. Fetish, in anthropological analysis is something that could pursue power over other. Also the so called erotic approach of the faces may be analyzed in the concept of sexual fetishism. Therefore all the characteristic features of Ravinder Reddy’s sculptural heads have exposed an arena of women liberation, where the women can breathe in the airy space, where the space is no more claustrophobic, where they can think their own thoughts, where they can peruse their own ideas, where they are empowered collectively as well as individually and internally.
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2. See the article ‘Significance of Aharya Abhinaya in Kathakali’ written by Kalamandalam Govindan Kutty. (Kutty, 1995, p.)

3. See, the article Of Whiting, ‘Introduction’. In the book, A Taste for Pop. (Whiting, 1997, p. 3)

4. See, the article Of Whiting, ‘Worhole, the Public Star and the Private self.’ (Whiting, 1997, p. 147-148)

5. According to the Dictionary of Feminist theory it can be derived that, ‘The concept of alienation is central to feminist theory. Women’s alienation has so many different elements, feminists argue, that a new theoretical framework can be used, but it must go beyond Marxism. It must link women’s oppression in the home, in culture and in sexuality, with our experience in wage labour. Even within wage labour, the sexualisation of women’s work and the sexual harassment of women create a gender-specific form of women’s alienation…’ Sandra Barkey claims that alienation defines the relation between contemporary. Forms of female sexuality and other features of women’s lives, since sexual fetishisation or reification is the extreme form of alienation. See Bartky (1979)’… ‘Ann Foreman Sums up these theories by declaring that femininity itself is alienation. To the extent that men and women conform to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, they will be alienated from each other in incompatible ways.’ (Humm, 2003, P. 7).

6. Dictionary of Feminist theory discussed about Woman’s Empowerment that, ‘A term used to describe facilitating oneself or others to work towards or attain personal aims. In a feminist sense it is used to describe an enabling power to do something rather than a power over some one for example feminist anthropologists distinguish empowerment and authority, arguing
that empowerment involves strategies of persuasion and other forms of non coercive influence (Ardener 1981)’ (Humm, 2003, p.78)

7. ‘Panopticism: expression formed from ‘pan’ and ‘optic’ (‘all-seeing) and coined by Foucault (1975) to describe a form of power which relies not upon overt repression but upon the constant surveillance of a population and ‘discipline’, or the regimentation of the body.’ (Macey, 2000, p. 290)