

Kalamkari - A Traditional Indian Folk Art Form

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Abstract

Indian crafts have continued to exist for many centuries. One of these crafts is 'Kalamkari' painted on cotton fabric. Kalamkari derived its name from the Persian word 'Kalam' meaning pen & 'Kari' means work literally 'pen work used to trace outline patterns and images'. This is an ancient style of folk art in which artisans work manually on well-washed cloth of cotton or silk with a pen made off tamarind using natural dyes. Scenes from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Srimadbhagvata Purana, images of Hindu deities, various tales as well as decorative Motifs from Nature, etc. are the salient themes of the Kalamkari art style. We can see two basic traditions in Kalamkari Paintings from south East Andhra Pradesh-1-Masulipatnam, the {200 miles East of Hyderabad } & 2-Srikalahasti {80 miles north of Chennai }. Masulipatnam Kalamkari art is also known as Pedana {a small town 15 km away from Masulipatnam} Kalamkari in which artisans work on the fabric were involved in block printing. The second popular tradition of Kalamkari painting is {1} Srikalahasti [Sri-spider, Kal-serpent, hasti-elephant-three devotees of Lord Shiva]-This tradition was developed in the temple regions which was like other arts, mostly concentrated on Indian mythological themes. Kalamkari art undergoes a slow and very typical laborious process of enduring dyes and printing which usually takes 20 to 40 days. Artisans use four to six inches splinters of bamboo trees to make the 'kalam' for sketching. The tip is sharpened to work smoothly. A fine point is prepared for minute work & outline and a thicker point is used for filling the paint. Though this art is very old still many artisan families continued to practice Kalamkari and made it its prime source of their income. Kalamkari painting expanded many of their intended markets. Prayer rugs, animal figures with various decorative floral motifs on them were made for the Middle Eastern market While various fabrics for dress materials women's skirts, stoles, saris, and children's garments were painted for the European market. Art Activist Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay is a well-known name who established govt. training centers in the decade of 1950s. Many young students got the technical knowledge and stylistic vocabulary herewith these efforts nowadays Kalamkari Paintings are having a flourishing market abroad. These paintings are available in leading stores, crafts exhibitions, and boutiques from the artisans directly. Merchants and traders around the world take a great interest in Indian Folk art. This art widened its branches and Europeans started to call it by its names i.e. The Portuguese called it Pintado and the Dutch used the name Sitz and the British with Chintz.

Keywords- Srikalahasti , Pedana , Kalam, Artisan, mythological

Talking about the diversity of Indian culture , variety & richness of art, many art forms are creative but go almost unnoticed. As we all know that like all other Indian Arts-Indian Folk Art & Crafts are extremely rich in variation and quality. Indian crafts have continued to exist for many centuries. One of these crafts is ‘Kalamkari’ painted on cotton fabric. Kalamkari derived its name from the Persian word ‘Kalam’ meaning pen & ‘Kari’ means work literally ‘pen work used to trace outline patterns and images’. That’s why Kalamkari art has gradually become quite popular because of the minuteness and masterly work of the traditional pen. This is an ancient style of folk art in which artisans work manually on well-washed cloth of cotton or silk with a pen made off tamarind using natural dyes. Many centuries ago, folk artists, whether singers or painters used to move from one place to another in ‘kafeela’ where ever they stay they narrated religious and Hindu mythological stories to the audience or residents of that place that they have already heard from their ancestors. But as time passed this process of narration converted into creating figures and forms related to stories that date back to more than three thousand B.C. at the time of the Indus Valley Civilization. According to the archaeological department, various extraordinary beautiful manual paintings on clothes with Kalamkari art were found at Harappa & Mohan Jodaro site. But no one paid much attention to these art pieces.

Scenes from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Srimadbhagvata Purana, images of Hindu deities, various tales as well as decorative Motifs from Nature, etc. are the salient themes of Kalamkari art style .We can see two basic traditions in Kalamkari Paintings from south East Andhra Pradesh-1-Masulipatnam, the {200 miles East of Hyderabad } & 2-Srikalahasti {80 miles north of Chennai }. Masulipatnam Kalamkari art is also known as Pedana {a small town 15 km away from Masulipatnam} Kalamkari in which artisans work on fabric were involved in block printing. These artisans produced robes, bed sheets, wall hangings, saris, etc., The art style, painted on wall hangings is still displayed in Victoria Museum, London dated the 15th century. Few Historians mentioned that Mughal emperors along with Nizams from Golconda popularized these paintings in Golconda and in few other provinces by artisans known as ‘Qualamkars’. Later few Marathas kings like Chatrapati Shivaji also adopted this art & supported various artisans. The art practiced in Masulipatnam is influenced by the Persian and British patterns. Later Dutch influence was realized when there was an increase in demand from Europe.

The second popular tradition of Kalamkari painting is {1} Srikalahasti [*sri-spider, Kal-serpent, hasti-elephant-three devotees of Lord Shiva*]-This tradition was developed in the temple regions which was like other arts, mostly concentrated on Indian mythological themes. This style is most prominently seen on wall -hangings & dress materials. Artisans of the Kalahasti style entirely depend upon brush-like pens. Srikalahasti process is tedious instead of Masulipatnam. Masulipuram style had been popular for

furnishing. Unlike Srikalahasti, Artisans use both Kalam & block's printing process. The basic techniques of both the style have been same in which the prime color schemes & designs are decided and after that, they start their procedure.⁽¹⁾

Kalamkari art undergoes a slow and very typical laborious process of enduring dyes and printing which usually takes 20 to 40 days.⁽²⁾ These artworks have to pass through many stages until the result is obtained. The Artisans soaked the clothe in various chemicals and wash & dry the cloth multiple times. They bleached the clothes with cow dung. Wax resist is used for dying cloth in different colors. When the artists dye the cloth they use various seeds, herbs, and roots. These dyes smell as evil as a boiled mixture of odd substances. Kalamkari artisans prepared a paste of myrobalan [Aanvala] fruit mixing with fresh unheated milk of buffalo. The ration of the mixture for 3 meter fabric remains 100gm myrobalan : one litre milk. The mixture is kept for one hour so that seeds could become soft and tannic acid could be extracted and easily dissolve into milk. As soon as the mixture is ready the cloth is being soaked in the solution to make the cloth light yellow. After drying the cloth it is stored for three months when the cloth is ready to work on the artisan's sketch. Sometimes with charcoal, lead pencil, or sometimes with charred tamarind twigs. The ink which is used for sketching black dye or 'kasimi'. First applying 'kasimi' to the cloth the color looks dull brown-grey but after some time it becomes deep black. Artisans use dye for patterns instead of a loom and very often ochre color is used as cotton fabric takes it easily. But Artisan's palette expanded for other colors, too, they have to use mordant initially so that the desired hues prepared by artists may be absorbed accordingly. Artisans use earthen colors like rust, mustard, black indigo, green, etc. extracted from natural sources. The blue color is obtained from indigo. They extract mustard color from pomegranate peel after boiling, black color is prepared by blending jaggery, iron, and water filling in an earthen pot, and red color is made from the bark of madder. The green color is obtained out of two colors yellow and blue. Artisans filled the colors in different shapes according to demand and outlined with black color in the last. Alums are used for red color. Fifty gram alum powder is dissolved in one litre of warm water until it becomes as thick as curd. Artisans paint alum solution on full cloth for appearing red. The cloth after drying for two days is rinsed in flowing river water to remove access alum. This solution can be stored in a glass container for several months. The tool to apply the mordant is a brush or block. Artisans use four to six inches splinters of bamboo trees to make the 'kalam' for sketching. The tip is sharpened to work smoothly. Fine point is prepared for minute work & outline and thicker point is used for filling the paint. A dye reservoir is wound around the bamboo made of coarse wool about 1 to 1 ½ inches from the nib. This reservoir absorbs & retains the solution for painting, artisans regulate the color which flow down to the tip through controlled squeezing while squeezing artisans must take

care that the reservoir should not be dried and washed thoroughly after completing the work.^{3} so that the next colour should be filled. Though this art is very old still many artisan families continued to practice Kalamkari and made it its prime source of their income. Kalamkari painting expanded many of their intended markets. Prayer rugs, animal figures with various decorative floral motifs on them were made for the Middle Eastern market. While various fabric for dress materials women's skirts, stoles, saris and for children's garments were painted for the European market.

Art Activist Kamala Devi Chattopadyaya is a well known name who established govt. training centres in the decade of 1950s. Many young students got technical knowledge and stylistic vocabulary herewith these efforts nowadays Kalamkari Paintings are having a flourishing market abroad. These paintings are available in leading stores, crafts exhibitions, and boutiques from the artisans directly. Merchants and traders around the world take a great interest in Indian Folk art. This art widened its branches and Europeans started to call it by its names i.e. The Portuguese called it Pintado and the Dutch used the name Sitz and the British with Chintz.

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2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalamkari>
3. Mohan, T. (2022). "पहले सफ़ेद कपड़ा लेते हैं, उसको वाश कर लेते हैं, वाश करने के बाद ये हरड (Chebuli Myrobalan) होता है ना, उसका पाउडर करके दूध में डीप कर लेते हैं, डीप करने के बाद उसको सुखा लेते हैं, ब्लैक के लिए एक गन्ने का गुड़ होता है, ताड़ का गुड़ होता है, दोनों को मिक्स करके एक जंग पड़ा लोहा – इन सबको एक मटके में डाल कर 20 दिनों के लिए रख देते हैं, इस mixture के पानी से ब्लैक मिलता है, जहाँ पर तमक चाहिए, वहाँ पर alum होता है ना वहाँ पर फिटकरी लगा देते हैं। उसके बाद इसको वाश कर लेते हैं। वाश करने के बाद एक Algerian (मंजिष्ठा) होता है उसे पाउडर करके पानी में डाल कर इवपस करके कपड़े को उबाल लेते हैं, जहाँ पर हमने alum लगाया है वहाँ पर red आता है, फिर कपड़े को वाश कर लेते हैं, फिर उसे दूध में डीप कर लेते हैं फिर उसे अच्छी तरह उबाल कर उसका जूस आता है जिसे येलो की जगह नेम करते हैं, फिर वाश कर लेते हैं जहाँ हमें ग्रीन चाहिए, पहले येलो के बाद ऊपर ब्लू किया तो ग्रीन आता है, ऐसे स्टेप बाए स्टेप होता है, ये सभी vegetable colours हैं, ये सभी हमारे जंगल में मिलता है, आंध्र प्रदेश के, Seshachalam Forest, हमारे यहाँ पीढ़ियों से ये काम चल रहा है, हमने अपने बच्चों को भी सिखाया, दुप्पड़ा, स्टोल, साडियाँ सेल होती हैं, एक दुप्पड़े की कीमत लगभग 1500 /, "श्री मोहन, कलमकारी कलाकार से क्राफ्ट म्यूजियम, दिल्ली में व्यक्तिगत वार्तालाप के आधार पर फोन नं० 9966083689, पता— 12 223/1, Bahadurpet, Srikalahasti, 517644 , Chittoor Dist, [A.P.] email-kalamkari97@gmail.com