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Reviving Kalamkari Craft with Interior Architecture

Sandwich Panels made using Kalamkari Painted Fabric

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Abstract: Kalamkari is a type of hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile, produced in Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Kalamkari is known to be a healing fabric, as the colours, motifs and the narration of magical forms create an aura that heals an individual physically and spiritually. The word 'kalamkari' is a conjoint of kalam (pen) and kari (work). Most traditional crafts are labour-intensive and depend on locally available materials. Now with the use of handlooms in interiors, be it furnishings or artefacts, the possibilities of doing up a home in signature style are both endless as well as exciting. The strength of kalamkari has always been its vegetable dyes, which faced no competition from other textile centres of the world. Kalamkari sandwich panels are a solution to revive the traditional craft, increase workmanship and usage of locally available materials while adding drama to interior space with its bold colours and patterns. These panels are a light weight and cost effective solution to brighten up any space and can be used in many different ways for example, for wall partition, false ceilings, bed back, to accentuate an empty wall, for pooja rooms etc. With everyone looking for sustainable solutions, these panels are an answer to save the environment and the original craft, all while making a space look better.

Index Terms - Kalamkari, revive, textile, sandwich panels, workmanship, Interiors

I. INTRODUCTION

Kalamkari is a type of hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile, produced in Isfahan and Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana using only natural dyes. This art involves 23 tedious steps of dyeing, bleaching, hand painting, block printing, starching, cleaning and more. Kalamkari designs and colors are very vibrant and bright. Motifs drawn in this ancient art of Kalamkari include flowers, peacock, paisleys and also divine characters from Ramayana and Mahabharata. Kalamkari was born out of an art of story-telling. After being world famous, the artisans modernized Kalamkari designs and came up with new ideas and themes. These artisans came up with innovative ideas highly influenced by Persian motifs, Hindu mythology and religious symbols; that gave identification to Kalamkari designs.



Kalamkari painting patterns

I. ETYMOLOGY

Historically, Kalamkaris used to be known as Pattachitras, an art form still found in neighboring Odisha and other parts of India and Nepal. The term "Pattachitra" in Sanskrit translates to "Patta" meaning "cloth" and "Chitra" means "picture".

Under medieval Islamic rule, the term Kalamkari, Persian, which is derived from the words kalam (pen) and kari (craftmanship), meaning drawing with a pen came to be in popular use under the patronage of Golconda sultanate.

II. HISTORY OF KALAMKARI

The colorful Kalamkari art dates back to more than 3000 B.C. According to the historians, fabric samples depicting Kalamkari art was found at the archeological sites of Mohenjo-daro. In ancient times, groups of singers, musicians and painters, called chitrakars, moved from village to village to tell the village dwellers, the great stories of Hindu mythology. They illustrated their accounts using large bolts of canvas painted on the spot with simple means and dyes extracted from plants.

In the same way, one found in the Hindu temples large panels of kalamkari depicting the episodes of Hindu mythology and iconography, similar to Buddhist Thangka paintings. As an art form it found its peak in the wealthy Golconda sultanate, Hyderabad, in the Middle Ages. The Mughals who patronized this craft in the Coromandel and Golconda province called the practitioners of this craft "kalamkars", from which the term "kalamkari" evolved.

Under the Golconda sultanate, this art flourished at Machilipatnam in the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh and further was promoted during the 18th century, as a decorative design on clothing by Britishers in India. The Kalamkari textiles were mainly used as canopies and hangings as the backdrop in the image of deities. The themes of such paintings and murals were inspired by Hindu Mythology and religion including-bird and tree of life motifs. The designs reflected the social scenario of the contemporary world including the geometric figures, animals, stylised plants, creepers, women etc.

III. TOOLS AND RAW MATERIALS



Plain white cloth is used



Kalamkari pen made out of bamboo and cotton



Design sheets are used as reference



Maggam to secure cloth at both ends while working



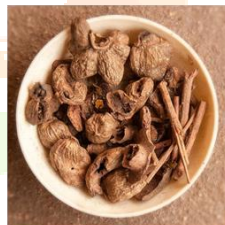
Alum is mixed with colour to strengthen the hold of colour on fabric



Mayrabolan mixed with cow milk forms light yellow



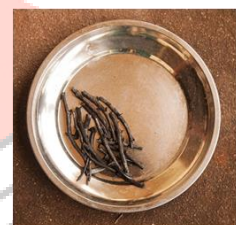
Natural Indigo leaves produces Blue colour



Pomogrenate peels used for golden yellow



Mayrabolan mixed with milk and used in dyeing for creamish shade fabric.



Tamarind tree sticks are burnt and used as charcoal to draw the design

IV. MAKING PROCESS

Kalamkari painting involves a whole of 23 to 25 steps of dyeing, bleaching, hand painting, outlining drawing, washing and ironing. Kalamkari being one of the earliest and most complex techniques of textile painting uses natural vegetable dyes for colours, different sarees can take up to 2 to 3 months for completion and a simple one may complete in 10 days also, however many artists involve themselves in a single saree while painting. The outline is drawn by the experienced craftsmen and the areas inside are drawn by the less experienced.

The process is divided into four parts: Dyeing the fabric, brush and colours, drawing the design, painting on the fabric

DYEING PROCESS

Chanderi fabric is washed with plain water to remove the starch and dried. After drying, the fabric is then treated with a solution of mayrabolan fruit and cow milk. Mayrabolan fruit is grinded and squeezed to obtain milk which is mixed with pure cow milk. The cloth is evenly soaked in this solution for 15 to 20 minutes, squeezed to remove excess solution and dried again in natural sunlight for 6 to 8 hours and stored in room temperature for one day, then finally the fabric is ready to be painted. This process is done because in turn smoothens the cloth and makes sure that the outline colour (black) doesn't spread while drawing.

COLOUR AND BRUSH

Kalam or kalamkari pen is basically prepared with a small bamboo stick, one end of the stick is sharpened until required, pure cotton cloth is rolled on, near the sharpened edge of the stick and then tied tightly in a crisscross pattern with a cotton thread making sure that the cotton cloth stays in the exact position.

Kalamkari art primarily use earthy colors like indigo, mustard, rust, black and green. Natural dyes used to paint colors in Kalamkari art is extracted from natural sources with no use of chemicals and artificial matter. For instance, craftsmen extract black color by blending jaggery, water and iron fillings which they essentially use for outlining the sketches. While mustard or yellow is derived by boiling pomegranate peels, red hues are created from bark of madder or algerin. Likewise, blue is obtained from indigo and green is derived by mixing yellow and blue together.



Kalamkari pen and the natural dyes

DRAWING THE DESIGN

Burnt tamarind stick is used to draw the outlines of the fabric. Master draws the outline/ design on the butter sheet or tracing paper and small holes are pierced along the borders on the sheet. The tracing sheet is then kept on the fabric and black powder is sprinkled along the borders, which forms an outline on the fabric below.

PAINTING

After the outlines on the fabric are drawn using the kalamkari pen, the fabric is stretched full length on the ground or on the kalamkari maggam (wooden frame), and then the colouring filling process starts. Karaka pooh (maroon) and alum is mixed together to form a solution, alum is basically colourless but also acts as an highlight to the colour when painted, it also is a natural mordant which makes the colour stick firmly to the fabric.

The areas, which are to be filled in red/ maroon, are first painted and then left to dry under diffused sunlight for 1 to 2 days until the fabric absorbs the colour completely. The fabric is washed in a rhythmic manner making sure that excess alum is removed. Cloth is then dried soaked in pure milk and dried again. Milk acts as wax, which prevents colour from spreading on the fabric when other colours are applied later on.

The fabric is then painted with vibrant colours such as grey, yellow, golden and blue. Alum is used in all colours because it possess a mordant quality. Finally the cloth is soaked in luke-warm water to remove excess alum and colour, it is again washed in flowing water to remove impurities and then ironed which is ready to be sent to the customer. Kalamkari painting on sarees can take up to 50 days to complete depending on the design and pattern.



Drawing the design and painting with colours

V. BLOCK PRINTING

Once the cloth is washed and dried completely, the units of workers are divided into several sub-units and it involves a much more collaborative production. There are no drawings and sketches involved rather the workers use wooden blocks for printing. For both the textile; monochromatic and polychromatic, the wooden blocks shall be different.

The first sub-unit comprises of the skilled carpenters who are involved in the making of wooden blocks. They use the cross section of teakwood. The positive area of the wooden block is the one that features the design and has color to it and is outwardly situated as compared to the sunken negative area. This process is called as the relief process and for coloring process, it usually begins with the coloring and filling-in of inner portions the design.

For polychromatic design, red and black outlining are done first and then the cloth is boiled and dried out. Later, they are embellished by hand and finished with an impeccable weave.

VI. IMPORTANCE OF THE REGION - SRIKALAHASTI AND MACHILIPATNAM

The geography and social structure of an area play an important role in the nature of its art forms. The availability of materials, existence of skilful artisans and a consistent clientele are all important factors.

The fact that there was ample production of cotton fabric in southern India, ensured the supply of the raw materials to both Srikalahasti and Machilipatnam. Andhra Pradesh, along with neighbouring Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are well known for the production of quality cotton even today. The other materials needed- natural colours and different kinds of wood (for the blocks and pens) were all available easily.

One mandatory requirement is running water, as the process involves plenty of it. River Swarnamukhi, in Srikalahasti takes care of this requirement, whereas in Machilipatnam, the canal emptying into the Bay of Bengal acts as the source of water.

VII. KALAMKARI IN MODERN ERA

Kalamkari paintings have a blooming market in and outside of India. Today, the kalamkari art for sale is available in leading exhibitions that display and promote Indian handicrafts.

In modern times the handwork is replaced by digital. Kalamkari is an intricate art form and requires a tedious technique in its making; because of which the art of Kalamkari was losing its shine. With the emergence of high quality machine looms and acceptance for printed textiles; Kalamkari art came on the verge of extinction.

However, printed Kalamkari is a new craze among the current generation, as it is a combination of traditional and modern trends. Fashion industry came together to revive this art and helped artisans of Andhra Pradesh for practicing this art. Kalamkari sarees, dresses, scarves, bags, footwear etc. are a running trend now.

Kalamkari these days is not restricted to clothing; it is also widely used in interiors. Upholstery, photo frames, bed back panels, false ceiling, partition walls, lamp shades are namely a few ways in which Kalamkari is used to accentuate a space.



Usage of Kalamkari fabric in clothing, bags and lampshade

VIII. SANDWICH PANELS USING KALAMKARI

Wooden frames inserted with Kalamkari fabric and concealed with glass/acrylic can be made as readily available units in the market accessible to everyone. Since the Kalamkari paintings are made using vibrant colours, these panels can brighten up a space easily. They can be used in multiple ways for partition walls, false ceilings, bed back panels, or just as pieces of art on the wall. These panels can also be customized with different designs and sizes based on the customer need. Making them easily available increases the usage by customers, increases workmanship and is also a cost effective solution to revive the original craft.

IX. CONCLUSION

Kalamkari craft is losing its shine but re-inventing the craft to suit the modern day requirement is the need of the hour. Sandwich panels are an effective solution to keep the craft alive while brightening up an interior space in less cost and time. Since the fabric is concealed with glass/acrylic, the fabric also lasts for a longer duration.

X. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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