

Retracing Kalamkari's journey: from classic to a contemporary textile art

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Abstract

This article traces the history of painted and printed textile tradition of the 'Kalamkari' technique of India, using mordants and natural dyes. The backdrop of the tradition and its development through the centuries up to the current times has been elucidated. Kalamkari started in the 17th century; originated as a religious tapestry and later became a secular craft under Muslim rule. The kingdom of Golconda in the South of India was a trading centre for diamonds, gems and textiles. The word Kalamkari or working with the pen evolved when the Golconda Sultans called the craftsmen as 'kalamkars'. 'Kalamkari' thus literally means, art work done using a pen. The story is conveyed by examining the centres where this was/is practised, showcasing older classic and later contemporary images, the artists, the techniques used and exploring the 21st century scenario of this textile art.

Keywords: Kalamkari, painted textiles, Golconda, Masulipatnam, Kalahasti, mordant dyed textiles, block-printing.

Introduction

A walk down any populous street in Andhra Pradesh or Telangana State in south India will give you a glimpse of a Kalamkari product. Somebody will either be wearing or maybe carrying it ! Maybe their homes will have a panel, 'dhurrie' or a bedspread. Kalamkari is an ancient textile tradition mainly from South India where designs are block-printed or drawn by hand using vegetable dye. This art started in the environs of the Hindu temple. The art consists of a combination of dyeing and block printing with vegetable dyes applied by means of blocks or a bamboo pen. Sources mention wandering minstrels painted mythological figures on cloth; bards sang ballads going through villages narrating mythological stories using painted cloth as illustration.

Though it originated as a religious tapestry it became a secular craft under Muslim rule. The kingdom of Golconda in the South of India was a trading centre for diamonds, gems and textiles. 'Kalamkari' started in the 17th century. The word 'Kalamkari' evolved when the Golconda Sultans called the craftsmen as 'kalamkars'. The pen or brush was the 'kalam'. 'Kalamkari' thus literally means, art work done using a pen. In Masulipatnam hand-carved block prints were used. Finer details were made with 'kalam'. In the nineteenth century, the art of sacred cloth painting was practised at a number of places like Madurai, Salem, Kalahasti, Palakollu and Masulipatnam. Large Kalamkari panels were made for temples with Indian mythological themes.

The rulers at Golconda patronised Kalamkari of Masulipatnam (Now called Machilipatnam), during the 16th and 17th centuries. The textiles were made for the Sultanate of Golconda and Persia/Iran. The designs were customised to the Islamic taste. This art flourished in Kalahasti (now Srikalahasti) too where temple hangings were made. The English called it *chintz*, the Dutch called it *sitz*, the Portugese *pintado*. With time all cloth with patterns came to be known as *chintz*. The Kalahasti kalamkaris had an almost religious character; scenes from the Hindu epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata were made for scrolls and chariot banners. These were completely hand-worked. Later under the British it became a flourishing item of trade and was much sought after abroad.

Traditionally the Kalamkari technique used the 'kalam' the brush or pen to trace patterns on the cloth. Mordant material was applied on the entire fabric or textile piece uniformly or selectively by brush, by which different colours would emerge once the dyeing process was completed. Vegetable and natural dyes extracted from parts of plants like roots, leaves and mineral salts of iron, tin and copper were used to create the final product. Blocks made of wood, engraved with design, were also used for application of mordant, initially only in Gujarat but by 19th century it was used in the East coast of India as well. Kalamkari was used for hangings, as covers or used for dress-making. Two important centres worldwide using Kalamkari technique was India and Persia. Though the definition of Kalamkari given by Lotika Vardarajan, art historian terms it as a 'fabric patterned through the medium of dye rather than loom', relating exclusively to the cotton fabric, over time it is being used not just for a technique but for many traditional motifs including figurative, floral and geometric patterns.



Figure 1: View of Masulipatnam, 1676. Illustration from 'A true and exact description of the most celebrated East India coasts of Malabar and Coromandel' by Philip Baldaeus.

Historical backdrop: *Kalamkari* of yore

The tradition of painting on cloth is very ancient and samples of dyed cloth have been found at Harappa. Indian madder-dyed cloth with typical motifs have been found at Fustat or Old Cairo in Egypt in the tombs suggesting export of the item. Indian textiles were imported to Arabia, Africa and Persia since yore, being an important part of the spice trade. Quality Indian textiles were manufactured in Gujarat, the Coromandel coast under Golconda and Bengal. Bengal became prominent in the late 17th century and 18th century. Gujarat has been a vibrant textile centre for a long time, samples found at Fustat, Egypt are evidence of this. Depicted below in Figure 2 is an un-bleached cotton cloth which has been dyed using the technique of resist printing in two shades of blue. The textile fragment seems to be made of circular motifs with a vine pattern curved inwards to act as a frame for inner foliage. The design shows a fan shaped leaf, lighter blue circular band and an outer foliate border band.



Figure 2 : Indian textile Fragment, 12th-13th century, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York, U.S.A



Figure 3 : Indian textile fragment, cotton, plain weave, dyed, stamped, painted 1545-1645 found in Fustat, Egypt, The Textile Museum, U.K.

A small fragment of textile depicted in Figure 3 was found at Fustat, well preserved in the Egyptian climate. The fragment is of Indian origin. The technique used to dye was both by use of block and brush. The brown design has been made by application of mordant with a single coated block pressed on the cloth. The fabric is dyed by immersing in dye which the mordant helps to fix. The mordant of the red areas are most probably painted with a brush.

Indian textiles were much sought after and were an important part of international trade of yore. They were exported to many countries including Egypt. The Indian craftsman used dyes from natural sources like plants; seeds, flowers, roots and minerals and became adept in the art. Since the Mughal and Golconda Sultans patronised the art, there is considerable Persian influence. In modern times the term Kalamkari has got slightly diluted. Nowadays any cotton fabric where vegetable dye is used, this term is used.

Hand painted cloth of Masulipatnam was popular in Greece too. Resist dye material has been in use from the 8th century as per archaeological findings. Travellers like Francois Bernier have described the painted fabrics of Golconda. India was a major exporter of textiles between 1600

and 1800 A.D to countries all across the civilised world. During early 17th century Kalamkari or Golconda cotton paintings came from Madras and Golconda with Masulipatnam as a major centre for the craft. At this centre many took to this work whereas at Kalahasti artists and craftsmen were from a caste called "Balojas". The designs of Masulipatnam were more Persian as it was under the Golconda Sultanate. Masulipatnam was the main centre for trade with the west. The Pulicat centre was established by the Dutch.



Figure 4 : Kalamkari rumal, 1640-50, Golconda, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

From the 17th century onwards the figurative has been the prominent motif in Srikalahasti kalamkari. The temples, rulers and rich landlords were patrons. As mentioned traditional Hindu motifs and themes were more popular. The Vijayanagara rulers of South India patronised the craft upto 1565. The Kalamkari painted textiles were also used to make 'qanats' or tent hangings for the Mughal camps. They were mostly made at Masulipatnam under Golconda and Burhanpur, Khandesh, North Deccan under the Mughals. In Khandesh painted and printed textiles were made with motifs like the flower heads block-printed and the other items drawn by hand. It had become an important centre by the end of 16th century.

Later after the advent of the Europeans into India there was a demand for exotic motifs. The products sold in Asia were similar catering to either Indian taste or any specific motifs as per the Asian country which they were exported to, like a kalamkari for Japan could have symbols of Buddhist iconography; whereas the designs were customised for Europeans to include floral crewel embroidery type patterns. There was a famine in 1646 when many Kalamkari craftsmen died and trade with Europe suffered, which was however revived in 1660. The chief supplier to Europe after 1700 was from the Coromandel coast. There was a decrease in the demand in the 18th century for painted-printed fabrics as machine-made cloth was being encouraged. However the Persians patronised the craft throughout the 18th century.

An exhibition was held called Colonial Exhibition in 1886 at South Kensington, London and Kalamkari regained prominence. It started being used for apparel and furnishings. The

bedspreads were called 'Palampores', originated from the term 'palang posh', meaning bedcover. In England and France the rich preferred Kalamkari.

In Holland the farmers wore it both daily and for occasions. The story of trade of Kalamkari is closely related to its development. Due to the Industrial Revolution European demand reduced for over 200 years. Persia continued to patronise Kalamkari for prayer mats, quilts, *patkas* (waist belts), upholstery and curtains with Mughal motifs, floral designs, *mihrab* (prayer niche) of a mosque, *tree of life*, the cypress and animals mentioned in Islamic writings. The trade status affected the craftsmen. However, the wall hangings had continued to flourish at Pulicat and Pallakolu; important centres in the 19th century. Kalamkari was patronised by the Maratha rulers at Tanjore (now Thanjavur) as 'Karrupur' wherein the woven cloth had a golden brocade motif. Used mostly as sarees and *dhotis* worn by royals of Raja Serfoji in the early 19th century. The tradition of cloth painting and printing developed in Gujarat too; example for *mata ne pachedi and devi ne parde*. This was a textile piece for an enclosure for the Mother Goddess made by the 'Vaghri' community in Ahmedabad.

The painted Coromandel cotton was much in demand up to early 20th century and well used by people of all classes in general. The output from Masulipatnam was majorly exported to Persia and the designs catered to the Persian taste. The Dutch and English too had influenced the design when European demand for the cloth had taken place. Slowly the shift from 'kalam' to the block happened as the designs were repetitive. This continues till this date. Floral patterns were much in use for many creations made for both the Europeans, for Persia and the Golconda kingdom. Human figures were also depicted. Though the trade with Persia/Iran is not there at present, the motifs continue.

The scene depicted in Figure 5 is from a large Kalamkari hanging from the Indian epic Mahabharata where Lord Krishna is the charioteer of the Pandava prince Arjuna in the battle against the Kurus. The Kurus are the cousins of the Pandava princes and Arjuna is going through an internal conflict about the impending combat. Lord Krishna is advising him to fight as his cause is justified.



Figure 5 : Kalamkari wall hanging, scene from Mahabharata with Lord Krishna and Arjuna, Kalahasti, early 20th century, Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, India.

Technique of Kalamkari : *modus operandi*

The process of printing of Kalamkari patterns is a bit complex and has the following steps; the fabric is soaked in a solution made of buffalo milk and cow dung for a few hours, then washed in the pond or in running water. After this the fabric is treated in Myrobalan (*Terminalia chebula*) solution to remove buffalo milk odour. Iron acetate solution is filled in with a 'kalam', a wooden block can also be used. Areas to be red are painted with alum solution as a mordant. The cloth or fabric is kept aside for a day and the cloth is later washed under running water. Red colour dyeing is done by boiling with red colouring materials. Areas not to be covered with blue colour are covered with wax, dipped in indigo solution. Wax is then removed by boiling in water. Yellow is painted on the cloth (if part of the design) which is then washed. In historical times indigo dye was used for blue obtained from *Indigofera tinctoria*. Cotton would easily take on ochre but for other colours the fabric would have to be treated with mordants which set off the required chemical reaction to the dye. Resist was used to protect colours from going into other parts, made from substances like gum and mud, wax etc. For use of madder for the red dye, the cotton would have to be dipped in a solution with tannin. Following this, mordants would be applied. The mordant for red was alum. Madder would combine with alum to become red. Painted and printed textiles from Gujarat have been found in Fustat, Egypt 12th to 16th centuries. The designs were repetitive and blocks were used printing of mordant. Narrative panels made for temples used the brush on fine cotton cloth woven in Andhra areas, both for mordant as well as for resist. Resist used was mostly beeswax. The design and motif influenced the choice of brush or block technique.

Alizarin is used today instead of organic matter. The 'kalam' is no longer used to apply wax resist. Indigo dye is no longer used, instead a synthetic one is used which is lighter in shade. Kalamkari cottons are made in different colours, to fill in the design or to be used as backdrop. Black, red, blue, yellow and green. The colouring technique is very interesting. For the colour black, small iron pieces are soaked in jaggery/starch/coconut water and left to ferment for a few days. Outlines are drawn by charcoal pencils made out of tamarind twigs. A sharp tip is used for outlining, and a broad tip for filling mordant.



Figure 6: Wooden textile block.



Figure 7: A Kalamkari artisan, Pedana, 21st century.

The history of block making dates to 100 A.D in China for use on silk. Blocks are generally made of teak-wood and designs are etched on them. The 'kalam' or brush-pen can also be made

from a thick bamboo stick with a thick felt of goat's hair at the end. Yellow dye is made from dried flowers of myrobalan. Block printing was widely done at the Madras Presidency of British India. The practice declined by the 2nd quarter of the 20th century. There was seen a revival during 1950s by entrepreneurs using blocks and synthetic dye. The Kalamkari unit at the Kalakshetra Craft Research and Education Centre at Madras, started in 1978. There printing was done with vegetable dyes.

In creating a Kalamkari product at Kalahasti, all the family members are involved in the work. The pen is made by burning tamarind twigs, sharp ones are used for outlines, broad ones for filling mordant. Bamboo sticks are made with the chosen tip, a small piece of wool is wound and kept in place with a thread. Myrobalan for dyeing is made from the unripe fruit soaked overnight in water and ground the following morning. For the red and yellow dye; the substance is from the following plants: *Pobakka*, *Suruduchakka* and *Chevalikodi* (local Telugu names). For blue dye; since indigo is not used anymore, a chemical blue is used, mixed in water in a clay pot. There has been innovation in Kalamkari from Kalahasti with the passage of time. Black backgrounds have been introduced, the *Raslila* theme on circular cloths, themes from Buddhist stories, Ajanta motifs and figures among others.

Trade and commerce : *past and present*

Kalamkari from Masulipatnam was being exported to Persia since 17th century onwards and Kalahasti was an important centre after the second half of the 19th century. However in 1924, the link with Persia/Iran was broken. There were marketing outlets in Madras upto 1935 like Chellarams. The industry suffered till 1952. However due to the efforts of Shri Venkataswamy Naidu, Shri B.Pattabhi Seetaramayya, the All India Handicrafts Board under Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay revived the craft in 1952. In 1958, The All India Handicrafts Board opened a centre at Panagal, Kalahasti which after a brief closure was with the Government for providing training only. Sales were made through export and the domestic market through Govt emporia and private retail. Nelly H. Sethana, textile designer transformed the static designs of Machilipatnam in the 1970s. She brought out old block designs and rearranged many motifs to create new patterns. She also stopped the bleaching of the cloth in the final stage leading to an off-white background which lent a pleasing and warm effect overall. There also exist Welfare associations of the artisans like the Vegetable Dye Hand Block Kalamkari Printers' Welfare Association, Pedana, near Machilipatnam. The South India Producers Association which is a member of World Fair Trade Organization or WFTO, Asia Fair Trade Forum, and Fair Trade Forum-India also protect the interest of the artisans of various crafts including *Kalamkari* since 1986. The craft of Kalamkari has seen ups and downs and has needed revival efforts regularly. There have been contributions from NGOs and others. The Srikalahasti Kalamkari has seen revival efforts through the efforts of Anita Reddy, a Padmashree awardee social worker who founded DWARAKA, Development of Rural Weavers and Rural Artisans in Kalamkari art in 1998. She brought people together so they could work under one umbrella at Srikalahasti. The products reached the markets and shared on Whatsapp groups. Their business model is labour centric and community based. The artisans make trays, wallets, handbags, pouches for mobiles and spectacles, jewellery boxes and pens using the textile craft. DWARAKA holds exhibitions through the NGO 'Dastkar' and stores like FabIndia. The efforts of a Kuchipudi dancer, a Sangeet Natak Akademi awardee in increasing the trade of the textile in recent times is noteworthy. Banasree Rao brought the artisans work to focus through ANGIKAM, a label founded by her. The products which include *dupattas*, sarees are sold at exhibitions, retail outlets and online through portals like jaypore.com.

Motifs and design: *beauty in variety*

The art of Kalamkari has existed for centuries as noted and often the designs were customised for the country that they were being exported to. The textile in figure 8 is that of an intricately designed hanging made for the Siamese royal court. The design is customised to the Thai taste and is in lattice patterns. Figures of the Hindu deity Lord Brahma are seen in the pattern of nymphs and rosettes. The textile design depicted in The quilt depicted in Figure 9 is lined with Chinese silk and is done using vibrant colours like red, yellow, pink and blue. This is inspired by early 18th century European design.



Figure 8: Cotton hanging, (painted resist and mordant, dyed), 18th century, India (Coromandel Coast), for the Thai market, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 9 : Quilt, painted cloth, early 18th century (drawn and painted resist and mordant, dyed, silk lining and cotton filling (Coromandel Coast), for the European market, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The designs and patterns made for home use had Indian traditional motifs which continue to this day and find expression in the overall design, generated for the end product which could be a panel, bag, apparel or item of upholstery. As already mentioned, Nelly H. Sethna revitalised the designs in the 1970s. Though the motifs and designs can be broadly classified into figurative, floral,

animal and geometric they have evolved with time and creativity of the artisans. The preferences of the clientele have influenced the designs. Today the work is customised and cater more to contemporary taste, yet retaining the classic signature of Kalamkari. The use of Kalamkari in the 21st century can be understood by reflecting on the use of the art in contemporary fashion. The most commonly used motifs are the paisley, floral, Buddha-face, creepers, peacock among others. The theme of Radha-Krishna is well used in figurative Kalamkari for panels and on sarees too. The recent trends show use of embellishments with gold 'booti' on the sarees as well.

21st century scenario and marketplace: *on to the future*

Kalamkari still lives and thrives! The Machilipatnam style of art was registered in the Geographical Indications Registry (GIR) of the Government of India under the Geographical Identification of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, in 2013. Thus the art thrives and its products are available in India and abroad. In recent times not only do the State run emporia; Lepkashi and Golconda at Hyderabad and private retail outlets sell Kalamkari, it is available online through e-commerce sites like jaypore.com, kalamkaridesigns.in, Amazon, tradeindia, indiamart, etsy, swadesi, gocoop among others. These online stores represent many suppliers and have an awesome range which cater to the discerning modern taste. The suppliers from traditional Kalamkari stronghold Srikalahasti are 'Srikalahasti Hand Crafted Sarees', 'Kalamkari Research and Training Centre', 'Chakri Kalamkari', 'Bhanodaya Kalamkari' among a few others. There have been constant revival efforts to keep the art alive. As already mentioned Banasree Rao, Sangeet Natak Academy awardee who was impressed with the art, founded 'Angikam' through which a variety of apparel is sold. She brought the art to sharper focus through her special efforts by interaction with the artisans directly and has launched her own innovative designs. 'Angikam' combines Kalamkari with *zari*, prints and threadwork from other parts of India. 'Angikam' sells online and through 'Kamala' in Kolkata and 'Santushti', New Delhi. The Kalamkari art needs to be saved in this era of mass production is her firm stance. Luckily, Kalamkari textiles being sold are still very popular among fashionable Indians who crave for 'ethnic' and foreigners who love India. Kalamkari outlets in Chennai include Matkatus and Jullaaha. FabIndia outlets sell Kalamkari across the country. In Bengaluru The Chalk Boutique and Sakshi Fashions sell Kalamkari products in addition to the DWARAKA Plus store. Delhi has Nanki Boutique and Fabrics among others. Online stores like mystique.in, Ajo.com, weaversmart.com, fabriclore.com, mirraw.com, redbrickshop.com and glowroad.com also cater to Kalamkari admirers. Sree Lakshmi Kalamakari Works at Secunderabad, Telangana State sells and manufactures Kalamkari products like sarees and *dupattas*.



Figure 10: Kalamkari saree, ANGIKAM creation, 21st century.

Mamata Reddy has founded 'Kalam Creations' with branches at Hyderabad and Tiruchahnur, Tirupati to save this glorious art. Her outlets help in taking this craft to the fashionable elite who crave ethnic. Through Kalam Creations many artisan families are supported. The products like sarees and *dupattas* are sought after in India and foreign markets. Collections by lifestyle store 'Good Earth' who launched special Kalamkari series in 2012, 2013 and 2015 got good success. In 2016 an exhibition cum sale was held of traditional Indian crafts including Kalamkari, by Hast Karigar Society at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalay, Mumbai. Award winning artists took part showcasing and selling their work. The creations of state awardees from Srikalahasti, D. Lakshamma and Gunasekhar was part of this successful event in recent times.

Another trend in Kalamkari happening in the 21st century is the experimentation and innovation in design. Ikat weaves and Kalamkari patterns have been brought together in *dupattas* and sarees; weavers from Pochampally, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district, Telangana State (where Ikat is made) and artists from Kalamkari have joined hands, the fabrics are sent from Pochampally to Srikalahasti for printing. Artist Gudimetti Divya has started this process of fusion. Another very interesting initiative was from the Dutch Government. Since Kalamkaris had been made for the

Dutch market in the 17th and 18th centuries which were being exported during the Dutch stint with the East India Company and later stopped when the Company weakened, the old textile pieces available are only found in their museums. A team was sent to study about this lost heritage which had become part of their clothing. The team comprising of Rudolf Lanfermiejer and Lily Lanfermiejer, artists and Jenne Sipman, film-maker toured Pedana, Srikalahasti and Ahmedabad. They learnt the art of Kalamkari from Gangadhar Kondru and Pitchuka Srinivas who are block maker and Kalamakari printer respectively. They hope to incorporate Dutch designs in Kalamkari!



Figure 11: Dutch team with Kalamkari artisans at Pedana, Andhra Pradesh.

The outlets at another stronghold Masulipatnam, now Machilipatnam include 'Machilipatnam Kalamkari' and 'Naaz Kalamkari Works'. 'Surya Kalamkari', 'Sumedha Handloom Kalamkari' operate at Pedana, in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. Pedana has a Kalamkari Museum which showcases the craft. The Sri Venkateshwara Institute of Traditional Sculpture and Architecture at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh have introduced an exclusive course on 'Kalamkari painting' since 2012-13 designed by artist P.M Munitratnam.

Artisans and craftsmen: *masters at work*

Srikalahasti has well known artist Padmashri J. Gurappa Chetty who is from a family of traditional Kalamkari craftsmen and learnt the art from his father when he was quite young. He won a National award in 1976 and Shilpguru award in 2002. He has held exhibitions not only in India but also Austria, Canada and United Kingdom. Artist Niranjan Jonnalagadda is a fourth generation artist from Srikalahasti. He is the son of J. Gurappa Chetty. Between the 19th and 20th centuries the craft had declined. His grandfather was artist J. Laxmaiah Chetty with whose help Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay had opened a training unit at Kalahasti to save the textile art. The students of this centre went on to become masters of their craft. Artist Niranjan's work was showcased at Chennai's Apparao Gallery in 2016. He has received a state award in 1997 and Shilpjan award in

2002. Patalam Ramachandraiah is a state awardee from Srikalahasti and has produced the biggest Kalamkari painting in the world of 180 metres on the Ramayana theme along with Inakollu Geetha and M. Saraswati, Kalamkari painters.



Figure 12: J. Gurappa Chetty.

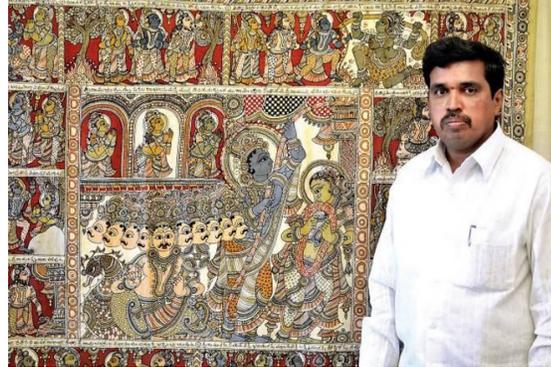


Figure 12a: P. Ramachandraiah.

The Kalamkari of Srikalahasti also got a new filip due to the efforts of Padmashree Anita Reddy, social worker who founded DWARAKA, Development of weavers and Rural artisans in Kalamkari Art in 1998. She brought people under one umbrella so that they could work well as a team at Srikalahasti. Through her efforts the products reached the markets and are shared on Whatsapp groups. Initially only large panels were made but now the artisans make trays, wallets, handbags, pouches, for spectacles and mobiles, jewellery boxes and pens using the Kalamkari motifs and fabric. DWARAKA is not just about revival but also about the total well-being of the artisan community, so that the art survives. Corporates at Bengaluru have also shown interest in their products. The outlets for Kalamkari at Machilipatnam include 'Machilipatnam Kalamkari' and Naaz Kalamkari Works among others. Surya Kalamkari, Sumedha Handloom Kalamkari operate at Pedana in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 13: Srikalahasti, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh.

Three artists of Kalamkari from Kalahasti have held an exclusive exhibition of their craft at Museum in the Park, Stroud, Gloucestershire in the United Kingdom in 2010 titled 'The art of Kalamkari' to an appreciative audience.



Figure 14: Artists from DWARAKA.

At Thanjavur's Sickkalnayakenpet there were originally 300 families practising the 'Karrupur' style of Kalamkari but now only R. Emberumal and his son E. Rhajmohan with their team of workers trained by them, make not only panels with traditional motifs but items of apparel like sarees, stoles, shirts and home-ware like table-cloths, mats, bedspreads, cushion-covers and curtains. R. Emberumal is a National Award winner of 2002 and Shilpguru award in 2005; his work has been on display across the world in museums and galleries.



Figure 15: Artists R. Emberumal and his son, E. Rhajmohan at work.



Figure 16: Artist at work, 21st century.



Figure 17: Banashree Rao, artist and Founder, ANGIKAM.



Figure 18: Gudimetti Divya, Kalamkari artist.

The art is definitely of ancient-medieval origin but yet very contemporary. There are the new chic Kalamkari sarees, *dhurries*, *rumals*, *kurtas*, scarves, stoles, *dupattas* and upholstery. The technique might have changed over the centuries but the designs are typical and adds beauty to any surrounding. Kalamkari creations add mystique and livens the look of the individual wearing it. Bags, wallets and satchels too are frequently decorated with the Kalamkari fabric and motifs. The Kalamkari *dupatta* in Figure 23 has both figurative detail and repetitive patterns to provide a frame to the figures. The backdrop colour used is red and the deities are depicted as blue-skinned.

The modern contemporary avatar of Kalamkari can be also seen in home accessories and utilities. The textile and its motifs are being used in making photo-frames, key holders, place-mats, umbrellas, Oxford-type footwear, on 'jutties' (footwear worn mostly by women) teacups, bowls, serving-spoons and even coasters. The innovation in the 21st century has even produced jewellery using the textile for making ear-hangings, neckpieces, anklets and bracelets. Bedspreads, cushion covers and panels for wall decoration including the *Mata de pachedi* from Gujarat, previously only used for ritual ceremonies are now available online which can enhance the décor of any home. The iconic work of National award winner Vasant Manubhai Chitara with his family (also awardees) being one of the just 5 families doing this artwork which began 300 years ago, is highly mentionable and available on jaypore.com. An exhibition 'Chandarvo : Painted shrines of the Mother Goddess' was held in Mumbai which exhibited *Mata ne pachedi* of artist Jagdish Chitara in 2016. The paintings are narrative scrolls divided into 7 or 9 parts with a story of the deity. The image of the Goddess is central and she is shown sitting on her mount or *vahana* and larger than the surrounding images. The paintings have a bold border.

Kalamkari fabric is sold by the metre for making apparel and other items in various colours and designs. The prints look warm, sombre but an element of freshness pervades.



Figure 19: Kalamkari fabric, 21st century.

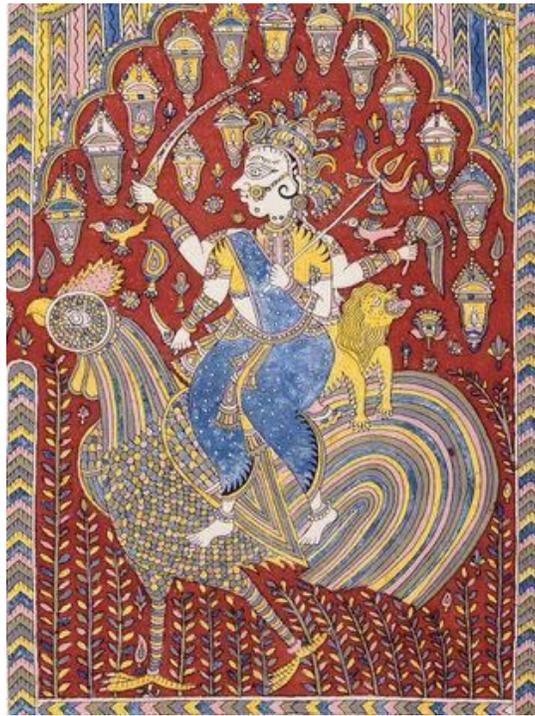


Figure 20: Detail from a *Mata ne pachedi* from Gujarat, 21st century.



Figure 21 : Kalamkari hand painted cloth, Srikalahasti, 21st century.



Figure 22: Kalamkari kurta, 21st century.



Figure 23: Kalamkari "dupatta", 21st century.

The 'pallu' detail depicted in Figure 24 celebrates the peacock motif, a favourite with Kalamkari craftsmen. The floral border at the end adds to the decorative appeal of the design. The rest of the saree has leafy designs in lighter shades which set it off on the maroon background. The design depicted in Figure 25 is figurative depicting two ornate parrots against a blue backdrop. This is from a 21st century stole. The space around the birds has been filled with flowering creepers and a floral decorative frame surrounds the composition.



Figure 24: Detail on 'pallu', Kalamkari saree, 21st century.



Figure 25: Detail on a stole, 21st century.

Another 21st century Kalamkari creation is showcased below in Figure 26 .The black-beige cotton saree has exquisite designs on the 'pallu' (end of the saree which is thrown over the shoulder) of Lord Krishna with 'gopis'(cowherd maidens) and musical instruments like the 'tabla' and 'veena'.

The 21st century is one for stylish accessories used by the modern woman. Also the unique jewellery made very creatively for the neckpiece and matching ear hangings in Figure 27 would lend an exclusive twist to the look of the wearer. The diamond shape has been used to create both the neck-piece and the hangings. Depicted in Figure 28 is a clutch with Kalamkari motif in blue and brown against a maroon backdrop. This completes any ethnic look.

The Kalamkari designs have inspired designers (figure 30-34) for use on plates, ceramic cups, place-mats, coasters, umbrellas, bags and other objects of utility. On plates the motifs used are varied, including the seamless ones which remind one of Persian patterns.



Figure 26 : Kalamkari saree, 21st century.



Figure 27: Kalamkari jewellery, 21st century.



Figure 28: Kalamkari clutch, 21st century.



Figure 29 : Kalamkari bangles, 21st century.



Figure 30: Plate with Kalamkari design, 21st century.

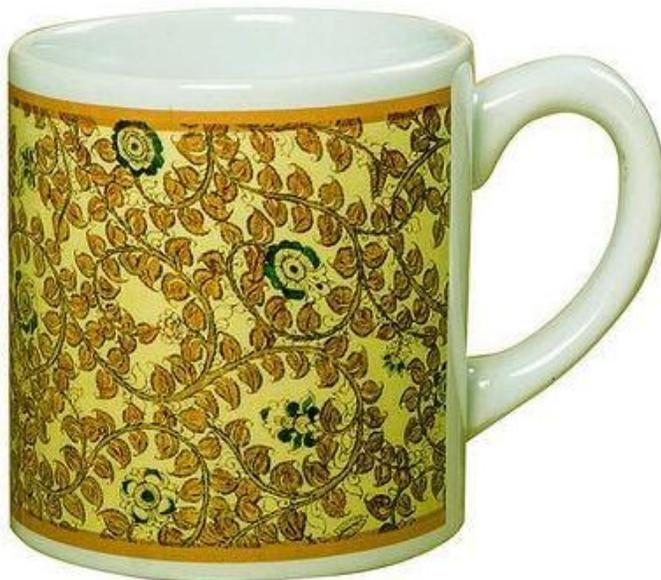


Figure 31: Ceramic tea mug with Kalamkari design, 21st century.



Figure 32: Kalamkari motif coasters, 21st century.



Figure 33: Placemat with Kalamkari motifs, 21st century.



Figure 34: Key holder, 21st century, Kalamakari motif.

As we trace the journey of Kalamkari with its long history, technique, its motifs and design we can glean that it is continuing to serve both religious, decorative and utilitarian purposes. Kalamkari faces challenging times ahead because machine printing, digital printing and mass production is on the increase. But hopefully the value of hand-made will continue eternally. Long live this muted yet splendid art !



Figure 35: Home decor idea using Kalamkari cushions and bedspread, 21st century.

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Figure 5 - Courtesy : Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad(with kind permission).

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Figure 10,19, 20,22 - 27, 29 to 34 : Courtesy : jaypore.com (with kind permission from CEO, Sri. Puneet Chawla)

Figure 11 : <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/lifestyle/books-and-art/291216/vijayawada-fusion-of-kalamkari-art.html>(newspaper image)

Figure 12:J.Gurappa Chetty <http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/art/The-pen-that-paints/article15906468.ece>(newspaper image)

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Figure 14 : <http://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/fashion/dwarakas-is-a-success-story-of-hand-painted-kalamkari-srikalahasti-is-known-for-and-of-its-women/article22404128.ece>,2009(newspaper image)

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Figure 28 : Courtesy: <http://www.kalamkaridesigns.in> (with kind permission)

Figure 35 : www.mid-day.com/articles/kalamkari-craft-of-the-matter/16478155(newspaper image)

Figure 4,8,9: www.metmuseum.org (public domain)

Figure 7: <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/368021/pedana-kalamkari-made-natural-colours.html>
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