

Kalamkari of Andhra Pradesh



Contents

- Introduction
- Origin of Kalamkari
- Main Centres of Kalamkari
- Essentials of Kalamkari
- Method Employed
- Types of Kalamkari
- End Products
- Plates
- Conclusion
- References



Introduction

- The Coromandal coast of INDIA, stretching from Masulipatnam in the north to Nagapatnam in the south was historically the source of some most beautifully coloured and delicately worked cotton fabrics produced and exported by India. These cotton fabrics were called “PINTADO” meaning painted by the Portugese and “CHINTZ” by the English.
- The king of Golconda [near Hyderabad] had links with the PERSIAN king and these fabrics were exported to IRAN. A lot of Persian influence is seen in the art of Kalamkari. Motifs used were the Persian derived butti, paisely, cone and the mehrab. Kalam is a Persian word where Kalam means pen and Kari means work, hence KALAMKARI.
- The tradition of cloth painting known as Kalamkari, flourished throughout India long before chemical colours and dyes were discovered. The dyes used in Kalamkari even today follow mostly the old tradition of extracting from plants roots, trees and similar natural growths and also from minerals like iron, coal and compounds like alum, vegetable dyes and earth colours. The most important places producing Kalamkari are Masulipatnam and Srikalahasti in Andhara Pradesh. The art is also alive in Tanjore district in Tamilnadu.

Origin

- The discovery of a resist dyed piece of cloth on a silver vase at the ancient site of Harappa confirms that the tradition of Kalamkari is very old . Even the ancient Buddhist Chaitya Viharas were decorated with Kalamkari cloth. The great Alexander is also supposed to have acquired this Kalamkari cloth.
- With their roots in temple rituals Kalamkari cloth also followed the old tradition of mural paintings. Craftsman painted the narratives of religious legends from which people learn the stories of their Gods. Temples were the major inspiration. The art flourished under the patronage of the temples with their demands for hangings with strong figurative and narrative components. This specialisation in figurative work continues till today. Richly displayed episodes from the Puranas and other mythological material form the themes.

Main Centers Of Kalamkari

- **Sri kalahasti** : Sri kalahasti has been ruled by the Hindu rulers. Kalamkari here was done on wall hangings for temples and shrines..There is a total reliance on the kalam/brush for the application of mordants of resist. Scenes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana were depicted. Gods ,mainly Lord Krishna was done in blue, women in yellow, and the demons in deep red/black. Telegu script was written in between the lines to describe the painting.
- **Masulipatnam** : The Muslim rulers ruled this place; hence they were forbidden to use any human or animal designs. They used exotic flowers from the kashmiri shawls and carpets. Mythical flowers and geometrical motifs were also used. Tree of life ,a very popular motif, which originates from one point or a pot, is proportionate and symmetrical and has exotic birds and flowers. Block printing procedures are being practiced in Masulipatnam.

Essential of Kalamkari

- **Charcoal pencils** : tamarind twigs are collected and burnt evenly in the open. When the twigs are half burnt the fire is put off by enough sand to cover all the twigs. The twigs thus cooled have been converted into charcoal which is used for outline purposes.
- **Kalam** : The kalam is made out of a bamboo reed, which is hollow and 6-8 inch long. This is pointed at one end with fibrous edge at a distance of 2.5 cm from the tip. On this fibrous edge a felt pad is placed which holds the dye stuff. Pressure applied by the finger releases the dyestuff, which travels down to the point of the kalam. More the pressure applied, more dyestuff is released.
- **Myrobalam Paste** : Dry myrobalam soaked in water for a night followed by grinding process and a thick paste is made. For 10 m of cloth, 1 ½ liters buffalo milk, 3 liters water and 250 g dry myrobalam are required.

- **Mordants** : For a fabric to accept natural dyes, mordanting has to be done, or else the fabric is unable to absorb dye. Mordants are intermediary substances which help the fabric to accept the dye and ensure fast dyeing. It is derived from the Latin word “mordere” which means ‘to bite’. The mordant bites the fiber in combination with the dyestuff to fix the colour.

Mordants are metallic salts like aluminum, tin, copper, alum, chrome, salt, vinegar, and caustic soda. By using different salt with the same dye, one can achieve different colours e.g. iron gives black with alizarin and alum gives red. Mordant for black colour is made by fermenting iron scraps and jaggery in an earthen pot for 15 days. This yields a substance called iron acetate. For red colour alum and water are used.

Sources of Natural dye stuff

- Red : The substance which gives a red dye is called alizarin. The common source of alizarin lies in the :
 1. roots of the madder plant, *Rubia tinctoria* and its relative *Rubia munjista*.
 2. roots of plants of madder species known as 'ai', 'ach' and surangi.
 3. roots of *Oldenlandia umbellata* commonly known as chay.
- Yellow :
 1. Rhizomes of a well known condiment turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) yields a substance called curcumin which gives a sharp yellow colour
 2. Flowers of the myrobalan tree known as Harar
 3. Flowers of the safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*) yields a bright yellow dye most suitable for silk.
- Blue : Leaves of indigo plant "*Indigofera tinctoria*"
- Green : Achieved by coating blue on yellow dyed fabric
- Black : alizarin (red dye) is mixed with iron fillings and molasses – this ferments and gives a dark shade of Blackish Maroon.

Method Employed

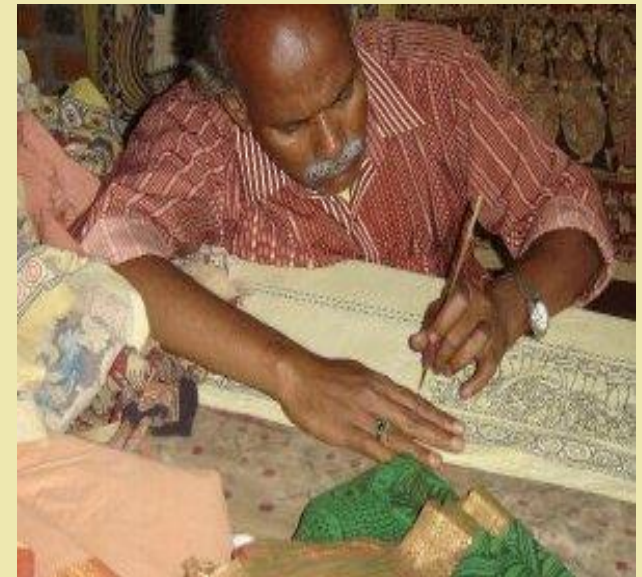
Preparation of the fabric :

- Cotton fabric in plain weave is used for printing of Kalamkari.
- Cotton fabric is dipped in goat or buffalo dung and repeatedly washed in the river or canal water
- It is dipped in Myrobalam Solution to which buffalo milk is added. This makes the fabrics soft and prevents the ink from spearing.
- The fabric is then dried and is ready for painting.



Methods employed in Kalamkari of Sri Kalahasti

- Outlines are first drawn free hand with charcoal. The black outline is painted by putting iron acetate into the hollow area of the kalam. If certain lines in the design are red, Alum and water are filled in the kalam to draw them. Filling of the design is done by applying the mordant with a brush. The brush is prepared by flattening and softening a bamboo stick at one end.
- After the application of mordants the fabric is dipped in alizarin. The red and black colours develop. The fabric is thoroughly washed and dried. At this stage, red designs with black outlines are seen on white fabric.
- Myrobalam solution with alum gives a yellow dye.
- This is then applied with a brush wherever yellow is desired in the design.
- The blue areas are painted with indigo white and left to oxidized.
- In the above procedure no blocks are used.



Methods employed in Kalamkari of Masulipatnam

- Blocks are used to print the mordants for black and red colours. The fabric is dipped in the alizarin for the red and black designs to develop.
- The yellow designs are printed with myrobalam and alum solution
- These red black and yellow designs are resisted by wax applied using a brush. When the wax dries it is dipped in indigo white and kept for oxidation for 12-13 days.
- The fabric is then washed to remove the wax.
- This produces black, yellow and red designs on a blue background.



Types of Kalamkari

KALAHASTI

- Kalahasti has been ruled by Hindu rulers. The art of kalahasti was an extension of Mural Paintings.
- Only bamboo kalam is used for painting.
- Kalamkari is done on wall hangings and canopies for temples and shrines.



MASULIPATNAM

- Masulipatnam is ruled by Muslim rulers. It is a mordant resist style of printing.
- Wooden Blocks, brush or pen are used.
- Kalamkari is done on prayer mats, bedsheets, canopies, pillow covers and tablecloths.



- Mythological themes of Ramayana and Mahabharata are depicted on these wall panels with figurative and narrative components with all the Gods and Goddesses and accompanying figures.
- Colors used consist of blue, buff, red and yellow and have the appearance of brilliantly coloured paintings.
- Motifs of Masulipatnam are of Persian origin such as tree of life, panels in the shape of mihrab, arches, paisleys and floral patterns.
- Colour used are blue (indigo), red (madder) with green, yellow and black on an ivory white background.



End Products

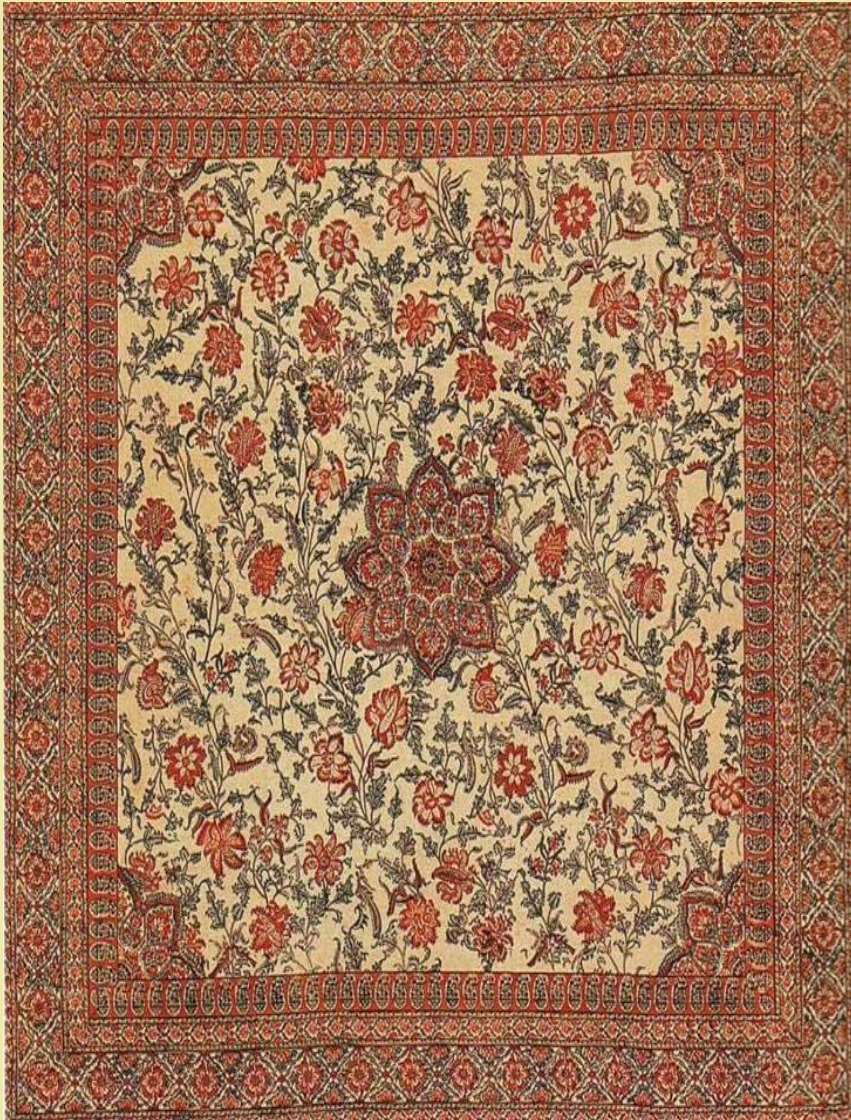
The end products made with kalamkari paintings includes

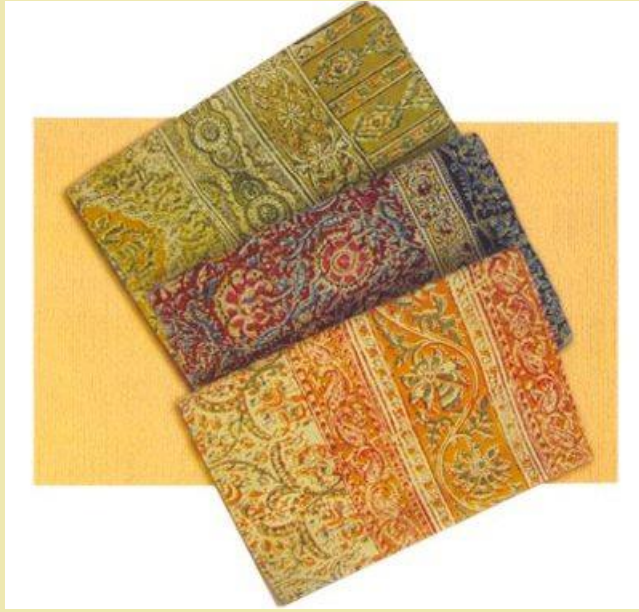
- Wall panels and wall hangings
- Dress materials such as suits dupattas and sarees
- Home Furnishings such as bedcovers, table covers, prayer mats, table lamps etc.
- Bags and Pouches.

Kalamkari of Kalahasti



Kalamkari of Masulipatnam







Conclusion

All India handicraft Board set up a training course and school for Kalamkari purpose, drawing on the skills of the few remaining workers. Production in Mausulipatnam is now aimed mainly at the domestic market and in Kalahasti at the foreign tourist market.



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