

## A STUDY ON HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF KALAMKARI IN ANDHRA PRADESH

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### Abstract:

Kalamkari is a traditional Indian art form that holds a significant place in the country's rich cultural heritage. This research paper aims to explore the historical evolution, significance, and regional variations of Kalamkari. The paper begins with an introduction that provides background information about the art form, outlines the objective of the study, and defines the scope and limitations. It then delves into the historical origins of Kalamkari, tracing its roots back to ancient times and examining its journey through the centuries, that has links to Kalamkaris evolution that has been intertwined with the India's diverse heritage and artistic Legacy of Andhra Pradesh.

**Key Words:** Kalamkari, Evolution, Andhra Pradesh, Origins,

### Introduction:

The Influence of Satavahanas, Ikshvakus, Chalukyas, Kakatiya and Vijayanagara dynasty in Kalamkari, a traditional art form renowned for its exquisite hand-painted designs on fabric, holds deep historical roots in the region of Andhra Pradesh, India. The art form's ancient origins can be traced back to the influences of various dynasties and empires that once thrived in the region and created foreign trade between India and other nations. This chapter delves into the historical context focusing on the contributions of the Satavahanas, Ikshvakus, Chalukyas, and Kakatiyas. Additionally, it explores how Kalamkari gained fame during the Vijayanagara Empire (craftindia, 2022)<sup>1</sup>.

### Review of Literature:

The art of Kalamkari flourished in temple towns along the eastern coast of Andhra Pradesh. With the decline of temples and patronage from royal families the art declined as well. It was in the temple town of Kalahasti near Tirupathi that, during the 1950s, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya discovered the dying art of Kalamkari with the help of Jonnalagadda Laxamaiah and Kalappa. There were only two artists left who knew the Kalamkari tradition. But there was no one to pass it down to. With the help of Avani Kalappa, Chattopadhyaya started a training school in the village. The present generation of artists and students has recovered the tradition of Kalamkari and are infusing the art with individual styles. 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 (Kotcherlakota L. N. 2011). Even the ancient Buddhist Chaitya Viharas were decorated with Kalamkari cloth. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Kalamkari paintings were exported to Iran, Burma, the Persian Gulf, Maldives and Malacca. The craft gained immense popularity in the 18th century throughout Europe, with the fabric being used as draperies and bedspreads. The Kalamkari floral and vegetable designs were in great demand, in particular the motif known as the 'Tree of Life'. These fabrics were made into dresses, skirts and jackets and were also used as large wall hangings.<sup>2</sup>

Kalamkari is an ancient textile craft of India. It is traditionally hand painted or block printed on cotton fabric with vegetable dyes. The painted style grew around the Hindu temples and depicted images of deities and scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata (mythological epics). The practice of hand painted kalamkari is currently concentrated in a village called Sri Kalahasti in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. The printed style flowered under the patronage of the Mughals. The widely seen motifs are those inspired from nature of interlaced leaves, flowers etc. This style is mostly practiced in and around Machilipatnam in today's times (Chisti R. & Jain R. 2000).<sup>3</sup>

### Objectives:

- To know the Origins of Kalamkari in Andhra Pradesh.
- Historical evolution of Kalamkari art in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

### Origins of Kalamkari in Andhra Pradesh:

Claudius Ptolemy, an important figure in ancient Greek studies, is thought to have penned "Geography" in the 150's AD. The book, which is a significant work on geography and cartography, helped lay the groundwork for centuries of Western geographic research (Ptolemy, 1991)<sup>3</sup>. Cartography, helped lay the groundwork for centuries of Western geographic research (Ptolemy, 1991)<sup>2</sup>. In "Geography," Ptolemy provides a thorough and in-depth account of the world at the time. He offers information about the geographical characteristics, climate, and inhabitants of the various parts of the Earth, including Europe, Asia, and Africa (Claudius, 2000)<sup>3</sup>. Claudius Ptolemy in his book mentions about River Krishna: He called the river Krishna "Krishna Ophis" as one of India's largest rivers, the Krishna, passes through the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. In his writings, Ptolemy referred to the Godavari River as

"Sabarmatês". The Godavari is an important river in the Indian subcontinent and the second-longest river in India. It passes across Odisha, Telangana, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> In Claudius Ptolemy's book "Geographia," he mentions a place called "Maisaka" or "Maisolia." However, the exact location and identity of this place are not entirely clear. Ptolemy's geographical descriptions have been subject to interpretations and debates over the centuries, and some of the ancient place names have changed or have not been positively identified (Tsorlini, June 2011)<sup>4</sup>. It is believed that "Maisaka" or "Maisolia" may have been in the Indian subcontinent between the rivers Krishna and Godavari and has become a trade sea route between India and other continents.<sup>5</sup> Maslin the finest cotton is said to be produced in the Maisaka area between Krishna and Godavari rivers. Maslin is typically a blend of different fibers, such as a mixture of wool and linen, which gives it a unique texture and appearance. Fabric was widely used in various cultures and regions throughout history for making clothing, particularly for common people due to its affordability compared to more luxurious textiles. Maslin cloth was enormously used by the Egyptians to wrap the mummies. People used small boats for transportation between the harbor and the pickup point and earned the name "Boat People" who played a significant role in foreign trade. The trade continued from the 2nd century to 7th century till the decline of the Roman Empire (Ray, 2006)<sup>6</sup>. This is the same period where Satavahanas have ruled from the 1st century BCE till 3rd Century, later Ikshvakus took over from 3rd Century to 6th century later followed the Chalukyas to rule from 6th till 12th century CE, which portrays that all these dynasties had great ties with the European Roman Empire in trade (Saeed, 2022)<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Historical Evolution of Kalamkari in Andhra Pradesh the Influence of Satavahanas:**

The Satavahanas, an ancient Indian dynasty, played a pivotal role in the development and patronage of art and culture in Andhra Pradesh. Their reign, spanning from the 1st century BCE to the 3rd century CE, saw the flourishing of trade, architecture, and artistic endeavors. The Satavahanas made significant contributions to the decoration of the Buddhist stupa at Sanchi. Under King Satakarni II, it underwent extensive restoration. The railing and the entrances were constructed after 70 BCE and seem to have been ordered by the Satavahanas. The royal architect Ananda of Satakarni II is credited with creating the Southern Gateway in writing on the structure.

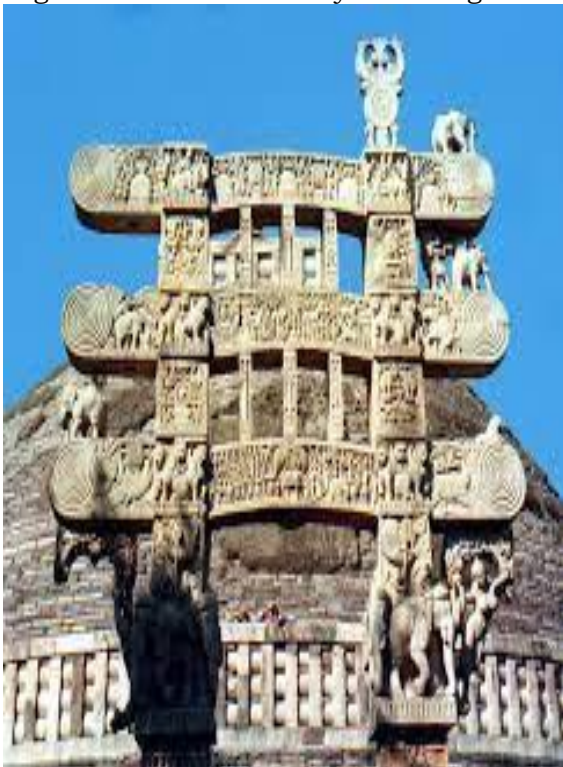


Figure 1: The Great Stupa at Sanchi Bc and AD(Brown, 1959)<sup>8</sup> One of the finest architraves of the Southern Gateway given as a gift by the Satavahana Emperor Satakarni's craftsmen, according to an inscription.(Source)<sup>9</sup>. It is believed that Satavahana dynasty laid the foundations and gave inspiration to Kalamkari art.

#### **Ikshvaks and the Continuation of Kalamkari:**

The Ikshvakus, a dynasty that succeeded the Satavahanas, played a crucial role in the evolution and patronage of Kalamkari art in Andhra Pradesh during their reign from the 3rd to the 6th century CE. The Ikshvakus continued the rich tradition of using textiles as a means of artistic expression, and their influence on the cultural landscape of the region left a lasting impact on the development of Kalamkari. Historical evidence suggests that the Ikshvakus were avid patrons of art and culture, promoting various

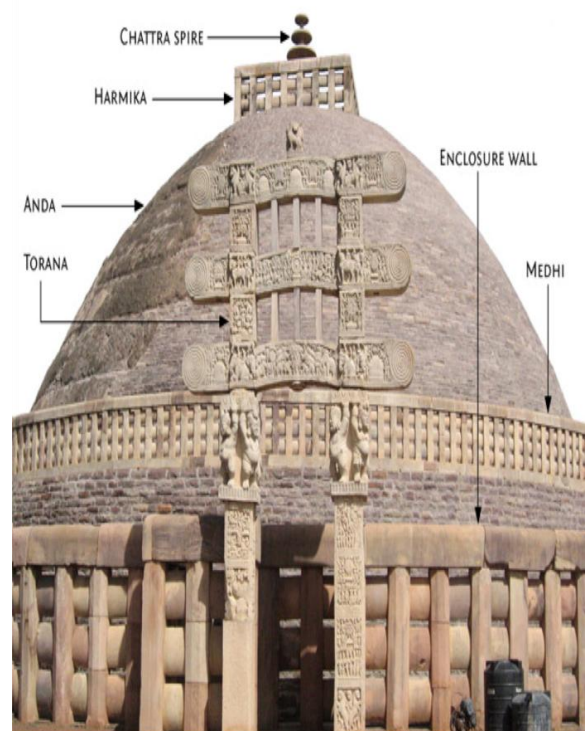


Figure 2: Illustrates the latest images of Sanchi under the Satavahanas (Wiki.P)<sup>10</sup>

art forms and architectural marvels during their rule (Malothu, June 2020)<sup>11</sup>. As part of their patronage, the Ikshvakus encouraged the creation of intricate artworks, including Kalamkari paintings, to adorn the walls of their temples and palaces. These Kalamkari-like paintings on the walls of Ikshvaku temples showcase the continuity and preservation of this traditional art form, emphasizing its importance in the cultural and religious context of the time (George Michell, 1995)<sup>12</sup>. Kalamkari, with its exquisite detailing and vibrant colors, found a perfect medium of expression in the religious and architectural spaces created by the Ikshvakus. The art form was well-suited to depict religious narratives, mythological stories, and cultural motifs, enhancing the visual splendor of the temples and providing a medium for communicating spiritual teachings to the masses. The existence of Kalamkari-like paintings on the walls of Ikshvaku temples reflects the close relationship between art and religion in ancient Indian society (Venkataramanayya, 1915)<sup>13</sup>. Temples served as centers of learning, spiritual practices, and artistic expression. Kalamkari, with its ability to narrate stories through intricate brushwork, complemented the religious and cultural practices of the time, making it an integral part of temple architecture and decoration. One significant aspect of Kalamkari art during the Ikshvaku period was its use of natural dyes derived from plant-based sources. Artists meticulously prepared these dyes and applied them to the fabric, ensuring the longevity and vividness of the colors over time. The skill and expertise of Kalamkari artists during the Ikshvaku dynasty are evident in the level of detailing and finesse found in these ancient paintings (Coomaraswamy, 1909)<sup>14</sup>.

#### **The Chalukyas and the Spread of Kalamkari:**

During the 6th to the 12th century CE, the Chalukya dynasty reigned over parts of Andhra Pradesh, leaving a significant impact on the promotion and growth of Kalamkari (Kushwaha)<sup>15</sup>. The Chalukyas were renowned for their patronage of art, architecture, and craftsmanship, creating a flourishing environment for the development of various artistic endeavors, including Kalamkari. Their support and encouragement of Kalamkari artists played a crucial role in the art form's popularity and spread beyond the borders of Andhra Pradesh (Brown, 1959)<sup>16</sup>. As patrons of the arts, the Chalukyas provided valuable opportunities for artists to hone their skills and create intricate Kalamkari textiles that were admired by both the ruling elite and the common people. The Chalukyan courts became centers of artistic excellence, attracting talented artists from diverse backgrounds to collaborate and produce masterpieces in Kalamkari. One of the distinctive aspects of Chalukyan patronage was the integration of Kalamkari into the architectural marvels they commissioned, such as temples, palaces, and other monumental structures. Kalamkari adorned the walls, ceilings, and pillars of these grand edifices, adding to their beauty and cultural significance. The Kalamkari textiles from the Chalukya period showcased intricate patterns, vibrant colors, and captivating designs that were inspired by mythology, folklore, and nature. Themes from Hindu epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as stories of gods and goddesses, were often depicted in these artworks. The Chalukyan era witnessed Kalamkari's transformation from a local craft to a celebrated art form that garnered admiration beyond the region. The skillful craftsmanship and the exquisite beauty of Kalamkari textiles attracted patrons and art enthusiasts from distant lands, contributing to the art form's spread across various parts of India. The popularity of Kalamkari during the Chalukyan reign continued to grow, and its influence extended to other dynasties and regions, shaping the evolution of this traditional Indian art form. The legacy of the Chalukyan patronage played a pivotal role in preserving the heritage of Kalamkari and ensuring its prominence in the rich cultural tapestry of India<sup>17</sup>.

#### **Kakatiyas and the Golden Era of Kalamkari:**

During the 12th to the 14th century CE, the Kakatiya dynasty marked a golden era for Kalamkari art, leaving a profound impact on the cultural landscape of medieval India. The Kakatiyas were renowned patrons of art and literature, and they played a significant role in elevating Kalamkari to new heights of excellence (Sastry)<sup>18</sup>. The intricate craftsmanship and detailed motifs of Kalamkari textiles became highly sought after during this period. The Kakatiya rulers, particularly the queens and noblewomen, actively supported and nurtured Kalamkari artists, further enhancing the art form's reputation. The Kakatiya dynasty's unwavering support for the arts provided a conducive environment for Kalamkari artists to flourish, and their patronage contributed to the widespread popularity of the art form. Kalamkari textiles, adorned with intricate designs and captivating narratives, gained admiration not only within the Kakatiya kingdom but also beyond its borders. Historical accounts reveal the presence of Kalamkari-like paintings on the walls of Ikshvaku temples during the Kakatiya era, showcasing the continuity of this traditional art form. The Kakatiya queens and noblewomen played a significant role as patrons of Kalamkari, actively supporting and encouraging artists to produce exceptional artworks (Sai). Their appreciation for the art form not only elevated the status of Kalamkari but also contributed to its popularity beyond the boundaries of the Kakatiya kingdom. The influence of the Kakatiya dynasty on Kalamkari extended to the neighboring regions and beyond, leaving a lasting impact on the artistic landscape of medieval India (C Poornachand, 2022)<sup>19</sup>.

#### **The Vijayanagara Empire and the Fame of Kalamkari:**

The Vijayanagara Empire, which emerged in the 14th century CE, witnessed the zenith of Kalamkari's fame and popularity. The empire, known for its grandeur and patronage of art, provided fertile



ground for the flourishing of Kalamkari (C Poornachand, 2022)<sup>20</sup>. Vijayanagara served as a cultural hub, attracting artists, artisans, and scholars from various regions.



Figure 3: The Textile Manufactures and Costumes of the People of India (Watson, 1866)

The empire's rulers, such as King Krishna Devaraya, displayed a keen interest in art and encouraged the production of Kalamkari textiles. (George. Michell, 1995)<sup>21</sup> The royal court of Vijayanagara became a center of excellence for Kalamkari, attracting skilled artists who further refined their techniques and produced masterpieces, giving the World an opportunity to remember our ancestors and history through art.



Figure 4: The image is illustrating the pleasant appearance of the design and elegant look of the artist dressed in ancient attire of Indian textile (York), 1956)

The exquisite Kalamkari textiles became highly sought after, both for personal adornment and as valuable trade commodities. The fame of Vijayanagara as a vibrant cultural center and the exceptional quality of Kalamkari textiles contributed to the art form's enduring legacy. As ages passed on Kalamkari art started to change as per the taste of the invaders, the following images displays the Persian Influence depicting angles dancing and playing musical instruments. Interestingly, When Southern India was under medieval Islamic rule (Richards, 1995)<sup>22</sup>, the term Kalamkari was derived from the Persian words kalam, which means "pen", and kari, which means "craftsmanship". This term became popular under the patronage of the Golconda sultanate (Painting, 2012)<sup>23</sup>.

#### Conclusion:

The study of the history and evolution of kalamkari in AP reveals an amalgamation of a diverse set of influences. The two regions developed their designs not only in response to the visual traditions of the region but also to the needs of the market. A review of the two kalamkari traditions also reveals the similarities in their techniques. Today, many kalamkari artists continue to produce items of furnishings and fabrics for the modern market. While these industries cater to new markets with ever-changing innovations, at both Srikalahasti and Machalipatnam the traditional modes of production have survived and are gaining wider appreciation due to their vibrant designs, use of natural colours and as symbols of the region's heritage.

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