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An attempt to record the awareness of *Kalamkari* craft among the design scholars

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Abstract

Kalamkari is traditional hand painted and printed textiles from South Indian region of India and reserve a story of art manifestation and rich culture in the traditional method of practice. The craft was initially used as temple art which was praised by the pilgrims and eventually flourished by the rulers with great patronage. *Kalamkari* is true example of design scholars for uplifting and polishing their knowledge through the Elements of design of *Kalamkari* and its traditional process of producing the articles. This age old craft has been continuously gaining attention by the national and internal designers. This research is an attempt to record the awareness of *Kalamkari* craft among the design scholars with reference to its production process. The information about the craft was collected through secondary and primary resources and presented in an order to achieve the objective.

Keywords: *Kalamkari*, traditional textiles, natural dyeing, hand crafted

1. Introduction

Gupta (2008, p 101 &102) ^[2] has mentioned that painted and block printed scrolls on fabric are the localized tradition in Andhra Pradesh. “*Kalam*” is a Persian word (quill) meaning pen, while “*kari*” means art. Therefore, this work is the art of the pen, which is used with finesse by the artists (Gupta, 2008, p 101 &102) ^[2].

The Mughal who patronized this craft in the Coromandel and Golconda province called the practitioners of this craft “*Oua-lamkars*” and the distinctive term “*Kalamkari*”, for goods produced in this region persists even to this day (Bhatnagar, 2004, p 84, 85, 86) ^[1].

The *Kalamkari* tradition is more than three thousand years old. The earliest fabric samples of this craft found in “Mohenjodaro” excavations date back to 3000 B.C. Some samples of Madder dyed cloth with traditional Indian motifs have also been discovered in Egyptian tombs during excavation at *Al Fustat* near Cairo. These bear testimony not only to the antiquity of the craft but also prove that it was well developed and formed part of a flourishing export in ancient times (Bhatnagar, 2004, p 84, 85, 86) ^[1].

The art of *Kalamkari* belongs to two distinct schools-Masulipatnam, which was patronised by the Muslim rulers and Sri Kalahasti which was patronised in medieval times by Hindu temples. The clothes from the former school were influenced by Persian paintings and the tenets of Islam and the Kalahasti School reproduced scenes from Hindu mythology (Yadav & Malik, 2013, p 75) ^[3].

The SriKalahasti style of *Kalamkari* where the *Kalam* or pen is used for freehand drawing of the subject and filling of the colours is entirely hand worked. Whereas Machilipatnam style of *Kalamkari* define the expertise of block print along with amalgamation of natural dyeing and pen drawing.

Designers always seek for the inspiration to satisfy their inner urge and market demand. The expertise required to analysis, observe and interpret the information which is surrounded to them. Tradition is always being an attractive way to connect with ancient knowledge. *Kalamkari* is one of the true example which is definitely fruitful to the design scholars for uplifting and polishing their knowledge through the ancient art of *Kalamkari* and hidden recipes of producing artefacts. This age old craft has been continuously gaining attention by the national and internal designers. The objective of the study is to record the awareness of *Kalamkari* craft with reference to its production process among the design scholars.

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2. Methodology

Mixed method approach was adopted to collect the data. Interview scheduled was conducted and quantitative data has also been generated to present data numerically wherever possible. Primary data was collected from the design scholars and secondary data was collected from print sources. Random sampling technique was used for selection of the design scholars.

3. Results and Discussions

This research work has been carried out with the objective to “An attempt to record the awareness of *Kalamkari* Craft among the design scholars”. As mentioned in methodology, two main sources of information have been used in this study: secondary source i.e. published literature which includes books, magazine journals and net; primary sources include information gathered from design scholars. To record the awareness of *Kalamkari* Craft among the design scholars, 15 design scholars were selected from design discipline. Content analysis technique was used to analyze the primary source of information. An attempt was also made to quantify the data in numerical form wherever possible. The findings of the study have been discussed in accordance with the objective under the following heads

- 1 Profile of the Respondents
- 2 Specific Information related to the awareness of the *Kalamkari* craft

3.1 Profile of the Respondents

Under this section, the profile of the respondents who are the design scholars and gaining the knowledge of crafts under the design field from the prestigious institute. The information obtained by interviewing the research scholars is discussed in the following section.

3.1.1 Distribution of Respondents

All the respondents are from the different design discipline of the Bachelor programme under the second year of the course. The distribution of the respondents indicated in Figure 1, which reveals that majority of the respondents (34%) belong to the Fashion Design Department, followed by 33% from the Fashion Communication Department, 20% were from Textile Design Department, and 13% were from Accessory Design Department.

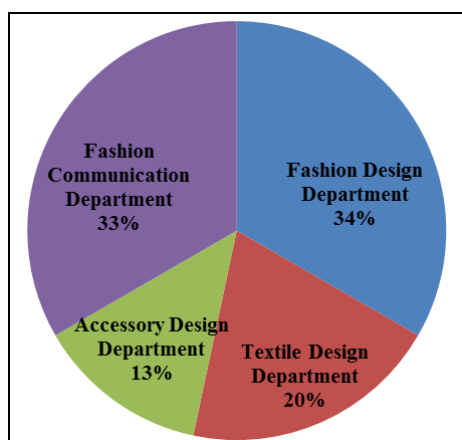


Fig 1: Distribution of Respondents

3.1.2 General Information of the Respondents

All the respondents are female belong to the Hindu religion and aged between 18 to 25 years and were dependent on their guardians for their all expenditures. All the respondents are

resident to the different geographical region and perusing their education in Jodhpur District of Rajasthan State of India. 87% respondents were willing to share their permanent residence, where as 13% showed unwillingness to share their permanent residence. Out of 87% of the respondent, Figure 2 reveals that majority (31%) respondents are from Rajasthan, followed by 23% are from Uttar Pradesh, 15% are from New Delhi, 8% are from Telangana, Jharkhand & Haryana respectively and 7% are from Bihar.

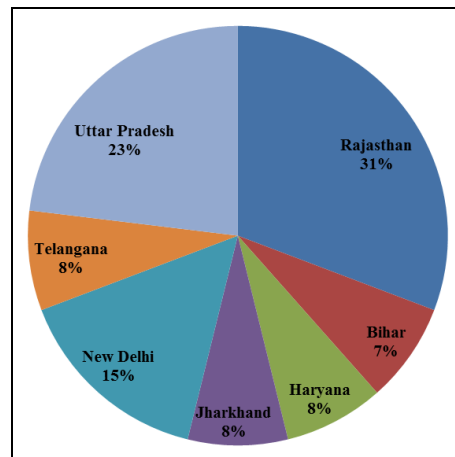


Fig 2: Permanent Residence of Research Scholars

3.2 Specific Information related to the awareness of the *Kalamkari* craft

This section includes in-depth information related to the craft and record the awareness among the design scholars about the *Kalamkari* craft. All the scholars were aware about the *kalamkari* as an ancient textile craft.

It was reported that 40% respondents are sensitized about the craft through their faculty members, 33% are from their friends and 27% are from the internet. None of the respondent reported to sensitized about the craft through their Family members. These 40% respondents also indicated about the craft as a part of their course curriculum.

This section is discussed as per the below sub-sections-

3.2.1 Colours and Ingredients: Only natural dyes are used to produce the scrolls. This has given it its unique distinction, not only for the beauty of the tapestry produced but also for the expertise gained by these craftsmen in the use of vegetable dyes. Indeed so clothed in ritual and superstition was this craft that for many years it was restricted to only a handful of practitioners and the technique was a closely guarded secret. Unfortunately, many traditional craftsmen have taken this jealously guarded secret with him to his grave and no written records are available of the techniques employed and the color yielding plants used by him in his work. This has been mainly responsible for the decline of this beautiful art form and we have now barely a dozen dye recipes in the place of over a hundred which existed before. The influx of cheap chemical dyes drove the final nail in the coffin and *Kalamkari* craftsmen these days are only too eager to reach out to the readily available artificial dyes for quick and easy production of temple clothes (Bhatnagar, 2004, p 84, 85, 86)^[1].

3.2.2 Process: The technique in modern textile is known as “mordanting” is used. This is a process by mineral salt like alum, tin or chrome is applied to the cloth, which “bites” the fibres and makes it receptive to the dye. By this method a fugitive dye is fixed and forms a colour lake in the fabric

which is fast to washing and light. The basic black dye used by the *Kalamkari* craftsmen in an iron liquor preparation known as *Kaseem*. This is made by soaking hoop iron bits in a solution of jiggery (Molasses) and water in a mud pot. The solution takes about twenty days to mature when it is decanted and taken for printing and painting. The cloth to be printed is treated in a solution of *Kadukkai* (Myrobalan) ground to a fine paste on stone. The Myrobalan nut is rich in tannin and it not only serves to develop the black colour of *Kaseem* but also acts as an excellent fixing agent for the other natural dyes which are subsequently used. The printing method adopted is known as the "Dyed style". In this method the areas to be coloured are printed or painted with the mordant. The cloth is dried and washed in flowing water to remove the excess salt and then put in the dye bath with the requisite colouring herbs. Only the areas which have been printed with the mordant pick up the colour while the rest of the materials remain clear. Many shades are obtained from the same colouring matter by the use of different mordants. The mordant most commonly used is Alum (*Padikaram*) which is cheap and freely available. The printing paste is made of country gum, or powdered tamarind seed or even common flour. The only equipment the craftsmen needs for producing his master pieces of art are, a low wooden table padded with gunny, wooden trays for paste, mud pots for the black dye, and a copper vessel for the dye vat. All the operations in *Kalamkari* printing are carried out by hand. Village implements like the granite grinding stone, wooden mortar and pestle, and simple earthen pots to use as containers are mainly used. Charcoal pencils made by burning twigs of the Tamarind tree, and the *Kalam* made out of a sharpened sliver of Bamboo are all made by the craftsmen himself. Printing blocks for the Machilipatnam *Kalamkari* are more intricate, but this is also a cottage industry set alongside the printing houses (Bhatnagar, 2004, p 85, 86, 87) ^[1].

3.2.3 Motifs/Themes: Bhatnagar (2004, p 87) ^[1] has mentioned that some hangings and temple clothes depict court life and secular scenes and other depict scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas, which are *Kalamkari* examples from Srikalahasti.

3.2.4 Products/End Use: Bhatnagar (2004, p 87) ^[1] has written that these are used a religious hanging, often draped in temple and or on processional chariots or *ratha*. Purohit (2013) has mentions that the oldest use of *Kalamkari* is as wall hanging. But apart from that it has been adapted into traditional Indian clothing such as sarees, dupattas and kurtas. 67% respondents reported that they have seen the tactile *Kalamkari* products and they are well aware with the intricate process involved in *Kalamkari* traditional craft. Out of these 67% respondents, 60% have seen the process of Shrikalahasti style of *Kalamkari*, followed by 30% reported to have seen the process of Machilipatnam, whereas 10% respondents reported to have seen both (Shrikalahasti and Machilipatnam) style of *Kalamkari*. Out of 67% respondents, only 60% respondents reported that they had purchased the product of *Kalamkari* during their visit to the craft cluster, these 60% respondents also indicated story depiction and Handmade craft as a special feature of *Kalamkari* product. Whereas, 33% respondents denied have seeing tactile *kalamkari* products and agreeing upon to be well aware with the intricate process involved in *kalamkari* traditional craft. Out of these 30% respondents, none of them reported about to seen the *Kalamkari* of both the style forms.

Only 27% respondents were aware about the application of natural dyes in the traditional *Kalamkari* craft, rest of the 73% respondents reported as unaware.

73% respondents considered the reason of losing the *Kalamkari* craft importance in the market as a intervention of digital print techniques, where as 27% denied and reported that *Kalamkari* has its antique features which make this craft completely different and remarkable from the digital print market. These 73% respondents also reported that chemical industries are the cause of depletion of this craft which can be changed with the necessary support of NGOs and various government-non government agencies.

80% respondents were not aware about the designer involvement in the traditional craft, only 20% reported about the interventions of designers in the craft and mentioned about the designer Neeta Lula and Sashikant Naidu. This craft may be carry forwarded with the designers with the effort of evolving new designs developments in motifs/pattern along with extension of the contemporary of the product development.

4. Conclusion

Since all the respondents belong to the Design background, it was reported that all of them were well aware about the *Kalamkari* craft. Reason of this awareness may be considered as traditional craft has included in their course curriculum. Majority of the respondents were well aware with the intricate making process of the craft. Lack of information regarding the application of natural dyeing was reported and the reason was indicated as use of digital printed *Kalamkari* articles, which reflect to lose the importance of original *Kalamkari* craft products. According to the respondents, keeping the youngsters demand in the process of new design and product development will bring new life to the *Kalamkari*, as due to lack of available modern products in the craft, teenagers avoid to purchase the *Kalamkari* craft products. Development of geometrical and abstract patterns may also help the craft to promote. These design scholars also reported that due to the non-availability of government authentic retail store in the town, design scholars are unable to purchase the *Kalamkari* product, the local shopkeepers may or may not be selling the authentic *Kalamakri* products which may lead the disappointment in their trust-building, as craft products are expensive and these young design scholars are dependent on their guardians for livelihood.

5. Future scope of learning: As this research was carried out in Jodhpur city of Rajasthan state of India, the same may be conducted on larger level which can cover the other design colleges located in different parts of country.

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