



## **ART OF KALAMKARI: AN OVERVIEW** **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Introduction:**

India's handloom and colour dyed garments have been plundering the hearts of people since ancient times. India is known as the "Sindu Desham" because in the Greek language "Sindan" means cotton. The India has been considered as cotton producing country by the Greeks and the production was exported to Western countries and respective landmarks were found in Egypt Pyramids. Today's Machilipatnam known as "Masulipatam" a cloth called as maslin cloth woven from the same "Masula" area which was also called as "ravasella". These thin cloths and the dead bodies of Egyptian Pharaoh Kings were coated with natural chemicals and the mummies were kept in "maslin" clothes duly covered in twenty four layers to place in the Pyramids. The historical investigations ascertained that the said rolled cloth belongs to this area which was produced in Machilipatnam called as Northern Coromandel and reached the coast of Africa duly taken by the traders beyond the Red Sea. The importance of these garments is that these thin garments which are naturally free of chemicals are used to preserve mummies that last for years.

Let us examine the reigns in respect Kalamkari garments which occupied a prominent place in Indian garments. In 9, 10 centuries, the Persians monopolized the textile trade. The people who buy handlooms from Masulipatnam and its surrounding areas earn 100% profits for the investment of one Deenar (our rupee.) Some merchants having intimacy with the locals migrated here to earn more profits and simultaneously their migration introduced "Persian Kalamkari" method.



"Kalam" means a writing instrument as stated in the languages of Persian, Arabic, Urdu. In olden days it was called "kalam" in Telugu Language and "Kaari" means designing a shape & decorating. The articlespecially made as pen duly dipping in various colours has been used to paint landscapes such as leaves, trees, and vines, peacocks, parrots beautifully on the cloth and the same became famous as Kalamkari art.

The colours used to paint beautiful pictures on the cloths were also made of locally available leaves, flowers, nuts and tree bark. Thus imported from the Persian country to the East Coast, the delicate local handloom plain garments could also be dyed natural colours and rose to the level of industry. The costumes of blankets, balisas, pillows, Chandins, curtains and other garments were adorned the art of the Kalamankari and have made unimaginable profits. The harbour of "Masula" was lauded as "Bandar-e-Mubarak" and gradually the coastal area of "Masulipatnam" settled as "Bandaru" which means harbour in Persian language.

### **Historical Perspective:**

"Kalamkari Art" was esteemed during the period of Kakathiyaas. All the red coloured shadows such as *Chandanakavalu*, *Pattedakavalu*, *Kadambakalalu* were placed in the literature. The birds and animals pictures such as Peacock Pincham, Royal Swans, Parrot series, Leaves, Horses, Ambari, Elephants, Tiger, Lions, Twisted Peacocks were being printed as borders of clothes. This art never be through schools but Passed down from one generation to another. This art includes spirituality so that the pictures of Hindu Gods Sri Krishan, Sri Rama, Hanuman, Venkateswera Swamy, Lord Budda and Matha Laxmi Devi were depicted on the clothes with beautiful colours.

The process of colouring the clothes and making ready takes place in ten stages. The ordinary cloth is measured 10% more to the size of proposed cloth to be prepared. The cloth proposed to be coloured for Lungees, blankets, curtains are cropped to the desired size and kept in a clay pot filled with water & cow dung and these clothes are kept all the



night without drying and next day they are taken to a tank and strongly beaten on the stone and placed on the grass ground and pour heat water in order to avoid drying the clothes by sun rays. All these would be put together in the evening and in order to make the cloth ready to be dyeing, next day the cloth would be washed with clean water of tank or canal.

The chemicals are never used at any stage in the process. The roots of Cheeri plant, raw turmeric, Casinda plant nuts, Pomegranate, Amikariya, Pomegranate flowers, Sesame wood, cloves, gingerbread, clover, blue, antler, etc according to the necessity and basing on the need of colours.

The powder of Raspberry seeds is preserved in water for one day and filtered on second day. The raw material needed for colouring is preserved in clay pots and bury them six inches above in the earth for a period of twenty one days without moving. After twenty one days, the cloth which is ready make dyeing with colours and cleaned in the water after drying. Then first stage of process is over. Thereafter, the leaves, bark and roots for the proposed colour are boiled with water in copper bowl with cloth. After required boiling, the cloth is taken out and washed in flowing water. In order to get the cloth gum, the cloth is given Porridge to process the cloth to stick to the colour without leakage. In the process, the proposed colours are dyed duly mixed with crystal in order to stick the colours on the cloth. After drying the cloth is cleaned in the water. The wax is used in order to save the border designs and white colour on the border. After this long process even the fabric worn, the "Kalamkari Art" does not disappear on the cloth.

Gradually, so many changes have been taken place in "Kalamkari Art". After beginning of the Muslim rule and after securing sovereignty by Moghal Empires in Northern-Southern India, they placed



the “Kalamkaari Art” in the Industry Level and Moghal Empires only initiated to unite the experts together and initiated Kharkana tradition with new styles and gradually introduced wood moulds which made the process faster and made it possible to prepare the wood moulds with various arts and designs. During the period of Moghals, the “Kalamkari Art” mounted to highest stage. The designs and art prepared on the wood moulds have been depicted on the clothes. The Moghal Artists have introduced “Palampuri Art styles” in “Kalamkaari Art” rich and lavish human images were depicted on the clothes through wood moulds attracted the on-lookers and enabled the textile market for its extensive expansion.

The gradual arrival of Europeans to India has changed the appearance of “Kalamkari Industry” and Portuguese, Dutch, English and French competed for monopoly status on the “Kalamkari Industry”. The Masulipatnam was already being cultural and economical Capital of Golconda country at that time. As the Kalamkari clothes having durability and beautiful designs with cheaper rates, the European Traders competed for the same. In this business fight, the Dutch succeeded and started a Factory in Masulipatnam first time in the year 1615 and thereafter by French in the year 1665. With their involvement, European Market was drowned with “Kalamkaari” fabrics, Blankets, curtains Lungees, Handkerchiefs, sofa-covers, decorative clothes, children dresses, lady frocks in every sector the “Kalamkari” fabrics were penetrated.

The women in England have created many more fashions using these “Kalamkari” fabrics and especially, the farmers in Holland used to wear these clothes as they felt comfort to perform the works easily and conveniently. The “Kalamkari” fabrics demand became more and more in view of becoming of durability of clothes on their usage day-by-day. The trade of “Kalamkari” fabrics reached peak stage during the period 1600-1700 and the Artisan of “Kalamkari” fabrics shined in the



status of prince in the markets of European and Persian. These facts were ascertained by Thomas Bowry, Taverniyar Foreign pilgrims.

Golconda region became under the control of Moghals as the Kuthubshahee rule in the South was at the edge at the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century and in 18<sup>th</sup> Century after the historical war of "Boxar" the rule of Moghals was ended and Britisher's became rulers of the country. Hence, "Kalamkaari Industry" suffered monopoly of the Britishers. The Britishers started local production of fabrics such as ties, sacks, shirts, children and lady dresses imitating the "Kalamkari Art" to attract all the groups of public over the fabrics.

During this period, the "Kalamkari" methods were expanded to various places in India such as Kalahasthi, Pulikat, Madurai, Tanjavur, Agra, Barhanpur, Jodhpur, Surath, Ahmedabad and Paitan and all the local styles cultures, arts and pictures were taken place " Kalamkari Art" fabrics and such locally designed fabrics had much demand in the domestic market.

India too also suffered the negative results along with European countries affected from the recent times of Industrial Revolution during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The tremendous advanced modern development of technology involved in the textile industry crushed the markets and the handloom industry in India was spoiled and reached to dilapidated condition. We can understand the miserable situation of the Textile Industry in the words of Genl. Bentink who said that the "with the bones of Indian handloom Artisans Indian grounds became white". This miserable situation thrown the India for compulsory export of raw cotton and to import factory fabrics and the Kalamkari Industry was also suffered with same situation.



The British Rulers started transporting their country products heavily to India and made the India as their consumer centres by which the local industries and markets lost their existence. The British Rulers used to impose heavy taxes on the exports of India and nominal taxes on the imports and thus the impact made the people to purchase the cheap and durable goods. Our weavers also lost the Persian Markets link and existence. This is nothing but exemplary to that situation that during the period between 1990-27 there were no imports absolutely.

At the same time, Britain started exporting all the raw material from all corners of the country and the goods produced through modern machinery in their country were imported to India. As a result the Artisans and other workers were pushed into Agriculture sector and lived as agriculture labour.

After Independence, the disappeared handloom arts were resurrected by the Government and being relaxed gradually and considerable changes such as modern methods, adopting chemical colours have been taken place in "Kalamkari Industry" which had continental reputation and now reaching to meet the public needs duly mixed with advance technology.

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