

# A Study Of Kalamkari Scroll Paintings In Particular And Temple Murals In Andhra Pradesh- A Structural Analysis

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## Abstract

The Kalamkari scroll narratives originated from Andhra Pradesh, the southern part of India, and they bear the characteristics of traditional mural renditions as evident in the temples of the region. The study objective was to comprehend the history and artistic evolution of hand-painted Kalamkari from mural art. The Kalamkari scroll narratives are known as the wall hangings or the backdrops of temples, and they present the Hindu mythological renderings of the primary deities. The probe focuses on the analysis of the artistic and narrative styles of Kalamkari scrolls and temple murals. The similarities are assessed through formalistic analysis and structural features are ascertained to cement the hypothesis that Kalamkari scroll painting is a direct offshoot of the temple mural tradition of southern India's Andhra Pradesh. The study treads on the plasticity of the imagery, narratives, iconography, and didactic text that accompany the art forms.

**Key Words** Kalamkari; Scroll Narratives; Srikalahasti; Andhra Pradesh; Structural Analysis; Formalistic Analysis; Painting; Mythology; Murals.

## Introduction

India has always been quintessentially known for its vibrant cultures, religions, monuments and crafts that represent them holistically. Andhra Pradesh has been synonymous for its ancient temples, colorful murals that adorn the temple walls and the Kalamkari scroll narratives. The Kalamkari is a craft practiced on textile with the application of natural dyes and mordant. Kalamkari artworks predominantly feature religious thematic renditions and are didactic in nature. The hand painted Kalamkari textile, that which has a mythological rendering, is deemed to be a scroll narrative and is often considered as having apotropaic properties. Kalamkari is believed to be in constant practice since 1000 years and was valued in Persia for its finesse.<sup>1</sup> The religious attribution, coalescence of tradition and continuous augmentation with worship techniques has ensued longevity of the craft through the many periods. Though the scroll narrative craft was prevalent in many parts of Andhra Pradesh, the Srikalahasti style was prominent due to the constant

<sup>1</sup> Divakala, Malini. "(PDF) Kalamkari-The Painted Temple Cloths Kalamkari-The Painted Temple Cloths | Malini Divakala - Academia.edu." (PDF) Kalamkari-The Painted Temple Cloths Kalamkari-The Painted Temple Cloths | Malini Divakala - Academia.edu, [www.academia.edu/5448860/Kalamkari\\_The\\_painted\\_temple\\_cloths\\_Kalamkari\\_The\\_painted\\_temple\\_cloths](http://www.academia.edu/5448860/Kalamkari_The_painted_temple_cloths_Kalamkari_The_painted_temple_cloths). Accessed 26 Oct. 2022.

patronage from temples around. This religious association ensued that the Kalamkari from the Srikalahasti area is synonymous for its mythological themes and iconographic depiction of the Hindu gods.

The etymology Kalamkari is an amalgamation of the word ‘Kalam’ (Qualam), which means reed, and ‘Kari’ meaning craft. The Kalamkari scrolls were also known as pat chitra; the British termed them as ‘Chintz’, the Portuguese knew the craft as ‘Pintadoes’ and Kalamkari by the Moguls.<sup>2</sup> The craft had a continuous patronage from various ruler clans that ranged from Vijayanagara Empire to the Moguls and the Europeans in India. More often than not, the basis for the extinction of a particular art form would be attributed to the non availability of resources, market limitations, and unpopularity. However, Kalamkari art form has transcended age barriers, traversed the length and breadth of the globe, and it has been popularly adapted from being a religious Hindu art to motif-based Islamic art. This transmogrification has kept the craft in a constant mode of renaissance; and the craft was passed on over generations in a continuous fashion. Kalamkari artworks were created in the temple hamlets of Srikalahasti, Masulipatnam and the many other regions of Andhra Pradesh where the men and women of the soil practiced the occupation as cottage industry.

The perennial patronage from temples has ensured the continuous and consistent stylistic developments in Kalamkari scrolls as a prominent section of the artisans were congregated in and around the temple region. This resulted in a unique religious attribution towards the thematic renditions as the scrolls portrayed Indian mythological narratives and godly characters. The leading themes were inspired from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Dashaavatara, Gita Updesh, and epics based on Lord Shiva. Illustration techniques and narrative construction have been attributed to the temple murals. The mural traditions of the Southern temples play a vital role in the physical attribution of the scrolls and the Vijayanagara tradition is solely evident in the painted Kalamkari scroll narrative depictions.

## Hypothesis

The probe is conducted on the basis of stylistic features in Kalamkari scrolls and is analysed to prove if the current Kalamkari visual appropriations are stemmed from the illustrations and narrative styles of temple mural traditions.

## Methodology

The probe takes into account the few famous temple murals and compares the stylistic and artistic renditions with the Kalamkari scroll narrative samples. The selection of Kalamkari samples is based upon their mythological theme and artistic rendition. As the investigation on narrative artistic styles continues, thematic and structural analyses are performed using specific formalistic methods. Two samples of contemporary Kalamkari scroll narratives were analyzed with themes: The Gita and Ramayana along with the murals of Lepakshi and Kanchi belonging to the Vijayanagara and Nayakar periods respectively.

## Scroll Narratives

Indian scroll narratives are created with a multitude of methods, artistic enablement, and narrative tabulations. The techniques by themselves have been the result of a constant state of evolution spanning over hundreds of years where the religious messaging are encapsulated into an elaborate and visually captivating narrative artworks. There are many scroll narrative formats prevalent in various parts of India where each region portrays its unique tradition, history, and culture with a varying range of styles, materials, and themes. Painted scrolls are known as Cheriyal in the Telangana area, Patachitra in Orissa, Prasasti Patra in Gujarat and Chitrakathi in Maharashtra. Narratives are a sequential arrangement of one or more situation that arises to encompass an alteration to the primary character over the passage

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<sup>2</sup> Sharad Chandra, “Kalamkari, the Art of Painting With Natural Dyes.” *Chitrolekha International Magazine on Art and Design*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2015, pp. 82–88. [www.chitrolekha.com/V5/n2/08\\_Kalamkari.pdf](http://www.chitrolekha.com/V5/n2/08_Kalamkari.pdf).

of time.<sup>3</sup> The scroll narratives are similar to temple murals in that they depict epic and mythological depictions found within temple complexes. They provide illumination to the various episodic narratives and propagate religious messaging to the discerning audience. The Bhakti cult has positively impacted the artisans as the many itihahas had to be documented on the temple walls in the format of pictorial and graphical representations. The illustrated medium acted as an unmanned educational system since it did not require a conduit or a narrator to elaborate upon the details unlike dramas, songs, and dances where the narrator disseminates the religious texts to the devotees as prose narratives. Scroll narratives constitute the synergistic procedure of many assembled and interconnected noted strategies of deliberation and transmission.<sup>4</sup> Kalamkari scroll narratives are widely acclaimed for their pictorial representations and are known to cater to both the elite and commoners alike. In India the patrons and benefactors ranged from the emperors, feudal kings, local lords, chieftains, businessmen and merchants of nearby and far flung areas.

The scroll narratives performed the tasks of documenting, constructing religious fervor, liberation, illumination, and effectively enthralling the onlookers. The painted scroll narratives provide perceivers with a fantastical visual as well as insights into the epic and mythological contexts. The Kalamkari scroll narratives consist of earthy colours, diagrammatic drawings, along with mythological narrative models encompassed inside panels, and consist of captions that act as didactic texts that throw illumination on the background story. The narrative interrelations and then exclusivity of illustrations are often accentuated towards epitomizing the mythological context as represented. Kalamkari scroll narratives are often the result of the artist's particular field of knowledge in the medium: puranic mediation and the design as developed with accordance to relativity in religious textual accounts. The semantics and semiotics aim at achieving the ethos and pathos as the divine subject demands, and the determinations are deemed to be appropriate and devise an approximated apotropaic value for the Kalamkari scroll narratives. The scroll narratives and their specific appearance in particular formulations influence the popular perception of the content portrayal by itself in Kalamkari artworks.

The major centers of Kalamkari scrolls production have their own thematic and stylistic distinctiveness. In Machilipatnam, Kalamkari was employed to produce sunshade chuppahs with mythological motifs and sequences for Hindu patrons, prayer cloth mats for Muslims, and tent canopy with floral designs for the roofing of royal courts. Chintz was also considered to be a major export to the European markets. The Kalamkari was fabricated on rough ghada cotton cloth that was pigmented and dyed in the earthy colours – red and black. At Srikalahasti, which is a temple town located adjacent to Tirupati, the craft implementation stays active to date and it is highly probable that the history of Kalamkari work in the town dates further back than a thousand years, but due to the corrosive nature of the textile and lack of written records or material evidences, there are no ways to qualify the claim. The temple scroll narratives of Kalamkari were deemed living, hence when there were any minor hints of wear and tear, the painted scroll narratives were buried in deep earth. However, the parallels are noticed in temple murals the painted garments of divine beings, demigods and primary deities closely resemble Kalamkari motif designs. The local landlords patronised the craft, during the middle ages, most of which was carried out to make painted cloth for temple and religious purposes. By the early 1930s and late 40s, with the independence of India and banning of the zamindari system, the patronage gradually narrowed off. However, it was later rejuvenated by the All India Handicrafts Board, which instituted a production-cum-training centre at Panagal, on the environs of Srikalahasti. The Weavers' Service Centre also stimulated a global interest, recommended commissions and offered training to the dwindling artisan communities.

Currently, Kalamkari is principally non religious and secular in classification as it caters to both Indian and foreign markets. Textiles for apparel and home linens such as curtains and bedspreads are created to satiate the demands of the foreign and domestic markets. In providing to these markets, the textile has observed a metamorphosis,

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<sup>3</sup> Murray, J. K, *Buddhism and Early Narrative Illustration in China*. Archives of Asian Art , 48, Mumbai, Maharashtra, JSTOR, IIT Bombay Lib., 1995, p. 17-31.

<sup>4</sup> Hinchman, L.P. and Hinchman, S.K. (eds), *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, Albany NY, State University of NY Press, 1997, p. 161-184.

a change that lead to the usage of chemicals and synthetic dyes as the export market has stringent rules for organic production. Here floral motifs were homogenously blended instead of pictorial narratives from mythology and block-printing was assiduously employed for a speedier production indispensable to kalamkari products particularly when mass-produced. In 2006, Kalamkari Artisans Revival and Upsurge for National Acclaim (KARUNA), has registered Srikalahasti Kalamkari in Geographical Indication (GI) tag, and was certified with the tag along with a registration validity up to 2015. It was registered as one of the geographical indication from Andhra Pradesh, categorised under the handicraft goods by Geographical Indications of Goods Act, 1999.

### A Brief note on the Kalamkari process

Kalamkari scroll painting process has nearly 24 steps, which include, dyeing, bleaching, painting manually, drawing outlines, cloth washing and stretching. Chanderi or cotton cloth is procured from local market and cleansed in plain water to do away with starch and dried. The textile is then washed and rinsed in a solution of cow dung, milk and Chebulic myrobalan locally called karakha pindhi for roughly two hours and sun dried. Once this process is over the cloth is deemed is ready for the basic outline drawing. The outlines are created with burnt tamarind sticks, once the basic outline is finished; with the aid of a thin bamboo stick (Kalam) outlines are created in black colour. The spaces inside are then hand painted with a single colour using kalam, and again washed in plain running water. For obtaining red colour the cloth is soaked in boiling water for the colour to adhere onto the fabric. The washing process is repeated until all the colours are applied. At the final stage, the cloth is washed for one last time, sun dried and folded to be kept alongside the other works of Kalamkari scroll narratives.

### Structural Analysis of Kalamkari

The Kalamkari is executed with the aid of a sharpened reed and this tool provides the required pressure application where inks fill in with the tool onto the cloth (Fig 1.a). There is no synthetic element as only all natural components are sourced to create these tools.



Fig. 1.a Kalamkari reed.



Fig. 1.b Kalamkari colours.

The colours are natural as the pigments are procured from the surrounding environment. The illustrations are the primary step where the outlines demarcate the figures and thereon progress towards colour applications. The colours of Kalamkari scrolls are specifically earthy tones what consists of red, blue, green, yellow and brown.

### Formalistic Analysis of Kalamkari



Fig. 1.c Kalamkari scroll narrative panels.

- The outline of the illustration in Kalamkari scrolls show the line thickness as being equal in thickness and is seen to possess a continuous ink flow. Pigment colour of the outline is prominently black, contours are absent and there are no thick and thin lines.
- The panels are monoscenic narrative artworks, the events are placed in panels spaced to accommodate the primary deity, and the narrative happenings are arranged towards either sides of the scroll painting.
- The layout of figure dominating the composition consists of a primary deity, in a large scale proportion, surrounded the secondary figures and the motifs forming a tertiary visual layer.
- Gutter space is employed to segregate panels from one another to prevent monotony and ambiguity.
- Usage of didactic texts is noticed. These didactic texts help the onlooker understand the sequence, however, this also demands the viewer to be a literate.
- Left to right eye movement is noticed to be employed on panels.
- Dots, lines, organic shapes for figures, motifs and inorganic shapes for panels and motifs are emphasized in the scroll narrative.
- Action based sequences are evident as each panel serves to narrate a part of epic.
- Background, foreground and mid-ground are shown on a planar ground and 3 dimensional aspects are eliminated.
- Earthen colours are utilized and they provide an eye pleasing appearance.
- Major sequences are culled out from mythological epics and are narrated in a linear fashion.

## Structural Analysis of Temple Murals

Murals are created on wet lime plasters and brush is the tool utilized to paint (Fig 1.b). The bristles are created with natural grass and there are also brushes made entirely out of reeds, where one end of the reed is pounded to create bristles.



Fig. 1.b Mural art brush.

The murals are also known as frescoes, as they are completely made on a wet to wet surface technique. Preparing a wall necessitates three stages of plastering the wall with non-identical materials. Plaster is made from a mixture of lime and clean sand in the ratio 1:2, and cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*). Cotton is employed to provide a gleaming white texture to the plastered wall.

The frescoes of Southern temples belong to a class known as fresco-secco, distinguished by the lime plaster walls as the primary medium technique. The frescoes of Southern temples, from those situated in Kancheepuram and Sittanavalai are categorized to this heterogeneity. The mural illustrations are painted only after the developed wall is thoroughly dried. Vishnu Dharmottara Purana (4th century A.D.), Abhilashitartha Chintamani (12th century A.D.) and Silparatna (16th century A.D.) are the three principal texts that disseminate Indian painting techniques. These three texts, to a large extent, agree on the four major conditions for the completion of a wall mural painting:

- Preparation of the ground.
- Sketching the outline for form delineations.
- Application of earthen wet colors.
- Addition of decorative details and embellishments.

The Silparatna's injunction that a picture should be painted in appropriate colors along with proper forms and sentiments, or rasas and moods, or bhavas and actions seems to have been the working guidelines for temple murals. White, yellow, red, black, and terreverte are dictated in the Silparatna as pure colors. Besides, the multitude tonal variations, shades and hues of these colors were also used. Ochre-red, ochre-yellow, white, bluish-green and pure green were the most frequently used colors as found in temple murals.

Color dyes were made ready from vegetable and mineral pigments as well as unprocessed chemicals. These were extracted using simple indigenous methods. White was extracted from lime, black was the accumulation of carbon soot of lamps, red and yellow dyes were substantially extracted from minerals, blue was obtained from plants like Indigo Ferra, locally known as neel-amari, and green was prepared from a mineral based concoction. Then binding agents were utilized to create a homogenous mixture for adherence to the prepared wall surface.

## Formalistic Analysis of Temple Murals



2.a Temple mural panels



2.b Temple mural with didactic text.

- The outline of the illustration in temple mural art shows the line thickness as being equal in thickness and is seen to possess a continuous ink flow. Pigment colour of the outline is prominently black, contours are absent and there are no thick and thin lines.
- The panels are monoscenic narrative artworks, the events are placed in panels spaced to accommodate the primary deity, and the narrative happenings are arranged towards either sides of the scroll painting.

- The layout of figure dominating the composition consists of a primary deity, in a large scale proportion, surrounded the secondary figures and the motifs forming a tertiary visual layer.
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- Left to right eye movement is noticed to be employed on panels.
- Dots, lines, organic shapes for figures, motifs and inorganic shapes for panels and motifs are emphasized in the scroll narrative.
- Action based sequences are evident as each panel serves to narrate a part of epic.
- Background, foreground and mid-ground are shown on a planar ground and 3 dimensional aspects are eliminated.
- Earthen colours are utilized and they provide an eye pleasing appearance.
- Major sequences are culled out from mythological epics and are narrated in a linear fashion.

### Kalamkari scroll narrative art and Temple mural art- A Compendium

Sl. No.	Kalamkari scrolls	Temple mural art
1.	Highly portable to various places.	Non portable as they are surface adhered.
2.	Equal and even line thickness is evident.	Equal and even line thickness is evident.
3.	No contours used.	No contours used.
4.	Employment of didactic texts is seen.	Employment of didactic texts is seen.
5.	Panels are utilized for narrative segregation.	Panels are utilized for narrative segregation.
6.	Primary character occupies the major space.	Primary character occupies the major space.
7.	Monoscenic panels are widely evident.	Monoscenic panels are widely evident.
8.	Wet paints are applied on dry surface.	Wet paint is applied on dry surface (fresco-seco).
9.	Diverse compositional and layout methods are employed. Emphasis, Balance and Alignment, Contrast, Repetition, Proportion, Movement and White Space.	Diverse compositional and layout methods are employed. Emphasis, Balance and Alignment, Contrast, Repetition, Proportion, Movement and White Space.
10.	Gutter space between panels is visible.	Gutter space between panels is visible.
11.	Mythological and secular subjects executed.	Mythological subjects alone are executed.
12.	Left to right eye movement is employed.	Left to right eye movement is employed.

### Conclusion

Kalamkari scroll narratives are stylistically associated with the temple mural illustration traditions of South India. The deep rooted historical amalgamation and the continued patronage provided by temples had paved way for artistic imbibing and illustrated duplication from a planar and linear surface of plastered walls to prepared cloths. The current probe clearly states that the illustrated styles of Kalamkari are burgeoned from the temple mural artistic renditions. The probe conclusively states that Kalamkari tradition is an offshoot from the temple mural traditions and is continuously retaining the original illustrated modalities and unique narrative stylistic aspects. There are many irrefutable similarities between the temple mural styles and the narrative styles of Kalamkari scrolls and they have been decisively put forth in this study. The reason is to facilitate religious viewing in every household and to create a portable living temple piece to perform daily rituals to. The Kalamkari scroll has been a continuously practiced tradition and has recently found traction with contemporary fashion markets. This however has changed the execution methods from being handmade to factory made and from being organic to chemical based. Kalamkari tradition still

remains strong to the current day as it has gained GI tag and is currently popular among the youth as a fashion statement and caters to a broad global podium.

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