


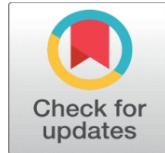
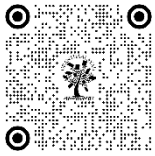


EXPLORING THE KALAMKARI THROUGH HAND-PAINTED TEXTILE ART

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ABSTRACT

Indian calligraphy, or kalamkari, is a highly regarded traditional art form whose elaborate hand-painted motifs on textiles have attracted art fans for years. This paper delves into the intricate world of Kalamkari, a traditional Indian art form celebrated for its hand-painted textile artworks. The study aims to uncover Kalamkari's historical evolution, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance through a multidimensional exploration. The methodology combines a thorough literature review, field study, visual analysis of artworks, and comparative examination across regions and historical periods. The literature review provides insights into Kalamkari's origins, techniques, and socio-cultural contexts, while field study involves interactions with artisans and documentation of their techniques and processes. Visual analysis scrutinizes motifs, colours, and narrative elements in Kalamkari textiles, illuminating their aesthetic and symbolic dimensions.

Keywords: Kalamkari, Indian Textile Art, Hand-Painted, Cultural Heritage, Traditional Craftsmanship

1. INTRODUCTION

India's artistic heritage is embodied in the beloved symbol of kalamkari, an age-old craft known for its painstaking hand-painting and printing methods on cloth. Born out of the ancient domains of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Kalamkari has been appreciated for generations for its depictions of stories from sacred texts like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Bhagavatam. The title "Kalamkari," which is derived from the word "kalam," which means pen, emphasizes how detailed this art form is and how each stroke on fabric conveys a tale. This is a laborious technique that requires 23 different procedures, starting with the fabric's initial softening and sun-drying and continuing with the careful preparation of natural

pigments, layer-by-layer application of colours, and thorough rinsing in between layers. Two primary styles within the Kalamkari domain are Machilipatnam, which is distinguished by its block-printing techniques, and Srikalahasti, which is marked by its freehand drawing skills. Reptiles, tigers, graceful deer, the Tree of Life, and other themes inspired by nature's abundance are among the motifs that frequently adorn Kalamkari sculptures. Hand-washing cotton to remove starch and then sun-drying it to make sure the canvas is ready for painting or printing are the careful steps involved in preparing cloth for Kalamkari [Sonia \(2024\)](#).

Kalamkari faces modern difficulties, primarily related to the declining number of artists passing on the trade to future generations, despite its rich cultural legacy and distinguished past. The practice is now only carried out by a small group of knowledgeable practitioners. That being said, there are deliberate efforts afoot to revitalize and preserve this singular art form, guaranteeing its survival for posterity to treasure and honour. When it comes to creating everlasting masterpieces that speak to the deep stories and customs of the country, Kalamkari is essentially a moving testament to India's rich artistic legacy. It accomplishes this by skillfully weaving intricate motifs and natural colours into textiles [Shelar \(2021\)](#).

2. OBJECTIVE

The major objective of this research study is to explore the traditional art of Kalamkari through a detailed examination of hand-painted textile artworks. This involves analyzing the historical context, techniques, materials, and motifs used in Kalamkari, and understanding its cultural significance and evolution over time.

3. SIGNIFICANCE

This research is significant as it aims to preserve and promote the rich heritage of Kalamkari, a traditional Indian art form. The study contributes to the appreciation and understanding of this cultural practice by documenting and analysing the intricate details of hand-painted textile art. It also provides valuable insights for contemporary artists and designers, encouraging the integration of traditional techniques into modern textile design and fostering cultural continuity.

4. REVIEW AND LITERATURE

Kalamkari, a unique and captivating form of hand-painted textile art, has long been a source of fascination for scholars, artists, and enthusiasts alike. The intricate designs, vibrant colours, and rich cultural significance of this ancient craft have made it an integral part of India's textile heritage.

Kerala, a state renowned for its diverse artistic traditions, has been a significant contributor to the preservation and promotion of Kalamkari. The state's handicraft industry, which employs over 1.7 lakh artisans, is a testament to the creative spirit and skilled craftsmanship of its people [Devaraj \(2021\)](#). Kerala's textile art forms, including Kalamkari, are celebrated for their precise craftsmanship, distinct creative features, and unrivaled sense of colour.

The history of Kalamkari in Kerala can be traced back to the influence of Tamil Nadu weavers who settled in the region, bringing with them the knowledge and techniques of this captivating art form. [Painted Textile Depicting Celestial Musicians. \(2009\)](#) Over time, Kerala's Kalamkari has developed its own unique aesthetic, characterized by its vibrant hues and intricate patterns.

The diversification of Kalamkari into various applications, from home decor to apparel and accessories, has further expanded its reach and appreciation. The use of Kalamkari motifs in Kerala's renowned mural paintings, with their distinct color application techniques, has also contributed to the art form's cultural significance. [Akshaya et al. \(2020\)](#)

5. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND ARTISTIC PROCESS OF KALAMKARI

Kalamkari has a more than three millennium-old history, and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it had a revolutionary effect on the Indian textile trade. The art form known as Kalamkari, which dates back to the 16th century, became well-known in South India as a mural addition in temples, especially in the Vijayanagar Kingdom. After a while, the Sultans of Golconda gave the art form a new name: Kalamkari. The word "kalam" means pen, and the word "kari" implies art. With its vivid colours and elaborate designs becoming popular throughout Europe in the 17th century, Kalamkari became more and more in demand from the Mughals, Persians, Dutch, English, and French. Problems for Kalamkari included English weavers' complaints, which in the early eighteenth century led to import prohibitions [Chandra \(2015\)](#).

Figure 1

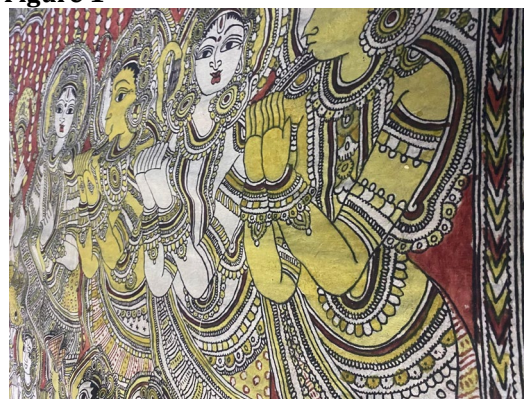


Figure 1 Kalamkari Fabric

The development of the Indonesian batik industry and the European cotton industry also had an impact on its downfall. There aren't many documented processes or dye recipes because the craft, which is rooted in superstition and tradition, was once only practised by a small number of people. The All India Handicrafts Board, together with the support of local enthusiasts, helped bring the industry back to life in locations like Masulipatnam and Kalahasti, where it had almost completely vanished by the mid-20th century. Currently, millions of people are employed by Kalamkari, which plays a vital role in India's textile sector and makes a substantial economic contribution. With more than 1,200 artisan families specializing in different Kalamkari fabrics, the little Andhra Pradesh village of Pedana has become a centre for Kalamkari block printing. The eco-friendly and sustainable processes of Kalamkari are highlighted by the materials used in its creation, which include cotton fabric and natural colours derived from plants such as tamarind, indigo, alum, and Indian madder root [Baral \(2015\)](#). Kalamkari, which means "pen-work," has a centuries-old and rich history. Despite its traditional origins, Kalamkari has embraced contemporary technology, enabling artists to

improve and digitize their designs with unmatched accuracy and efficiency [Sengupta \(2016\)](#).

This fusion of innovation and tradition makes sure that Kalamkari respects its legacy while being relevant in the modern era. Using natural dyes derived from fruits and plants and recycling water throughout the dying process, Kalamkari artists place a high value on sustainability. Green practices are encouraged by the use of handlooms that are powered by human energy. Encouraging these craftspeople not only helps to maintain ancient crafts but also encourages ethical and sustainable fashion methods, which is why Kalamkari has become a fashion industry emblem for sustainability [Shelar \(2021\)](#).

5.1. PROCEDURES AND TECHNIQUE IN KALAMKARI

The precise use of natural dyes to hand-paint elaborate designs on cotton cloth is the hallmark of the ancient Indian art form known as kalamkari. There are 23 phases in this procedure, which include preparing the fabric, drawing an outline with charcoal and a bamboo pen, and layering on bright colours. To create the desired look, these colours are rinsed in between applications. Religious stories, the natural world, folklore, and mythology are some of the sources of inspiration for Kalamkari art's themes and motifs. Buddhist art forms, peacocks, tigers, deer, floral patterns, mihrab motifs, the Tree of Life, and images from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are common motifs. Hindu mythology, Buddhism, and Persian art have all been incorporated into Kalamkari over time, giving it a very special and individual look. These days, kalamkari is utilized for a variety of items, including furniture, clothes, and sarees, which helps to maintain this ancient art form and support Andhra Pradesh artists [Gandham \(2022\)](#).

The complex hand painting of cotton fabrics using natural dyes and a resist technique is known as kalamkari, an old Indian art form. There are two primary Kalamkari traditional processes, each with a distinct methodology:

To give cotton material an off-white colour and smooth texture, the Srikalahasti Technique first treats it with a solution of buffalo milk, myrobalan buds, and flower paste. After that, they sketch initially with charcoal pencils made from burned tamarind branches and then create detailed drawings with a bamboo pen dipped in black dye. The fabric is mordanted with alum to give it a crimson colour, and a particular mixture known as Kasim Kaaram is employed to achieve darker tones. In contrast, the Machilipatnam Technique is a printing method wherein artists print design contours and leading lines using hand-carved blocks. After the outline is printed, the saree is coloured using wooden blocks, and each colour application is allowed to dry for two to three days. These operations involve several steps, such as treating the cloth, drawing on it, dying it, printing it, washing it, and even working with gold or silver. To create vivid colours and intricate designs on fabrics, Kalamkari artisans use natural materials like as buffalo milk, myrobalan, alum, and numerous plant extracts. This art style, which has been passed down through the generations in Andhra Pradesh's Srikalahasti and Machilipatnam, demonstrates a rich cultural legacy that goes back thousands of years [Ahuja \(2023\)](#).

5.2. RAW MATERIAL

- Mayrabolan forms light yellow
- Kassim kaaram (Jaggery + Rusted iron filings + water) black outlines for the fabric

- Natural Indigo produces Blue
- Pomegranate produces Golden yellow
- Catechu (Suryadu chakka) produces Rosemary
- Algerian produces Red
- Alum mixed with water gives out Gray [Gupta & Rambabu \(n.d.\)](#)

5.3. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Diagram 1

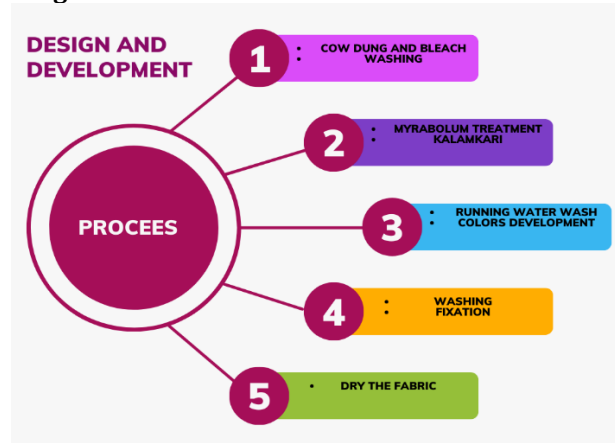


Diagram 1 [Gupta & Rambabu \(n.d.\)](#)

Figure 2



Figure 2 Dye Preparation from Natural Source

Figure 3



Figure 3 Kalam

Figure 4



Figure 4 Outlining and Sketching

Figure 5

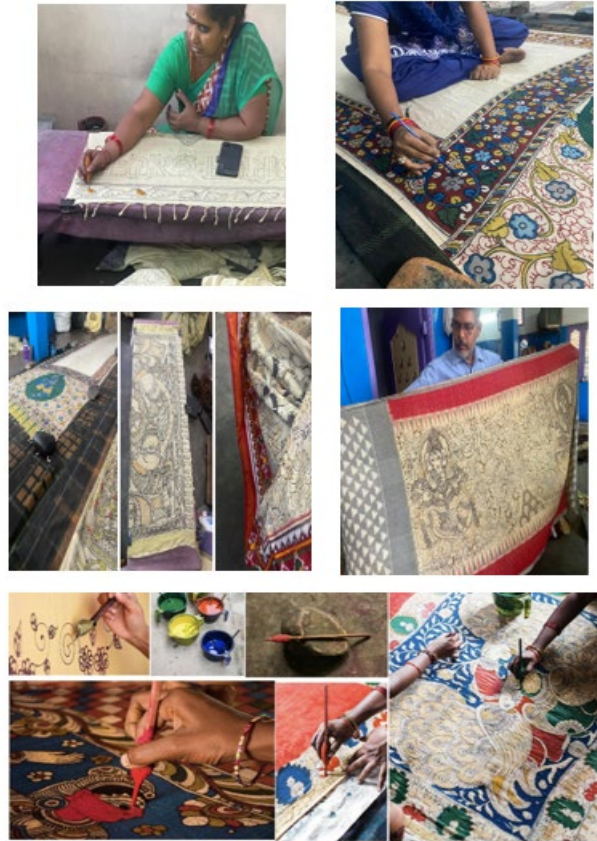


Figure 5 Colour Filling

6. GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT TO KALAMKARI UNITS

Governments have been extending their support to Kalamkari units through various forms of assistance, including finance, subsidies, exhibitions, trade shows, export promotion activities, and more. Notable schemes include:

- 1) Baba Saheb Ambedkar Hastshilp Vikas Yojana
- 2) S.V. Institute of Traditional Sculpture and Architecture, Tirupati

- 3) Marketing Support and Service Scheme
- 4) Design and Technology Upgradation Scheme
- 5) Export Promotion Scheme
- 6) Research and Development Scheme
- 7) Training and Extension Scheme
- 8) Bima Yojana for Handicrafts Artisans
- 9) Special Handicrafts Training Projects

These schemes are introduced and implemented for the entire handicraft segment. While these supporting schemes have benefitted Kalamkari artisans to a certain extent, they are insufficient to significantly improve their livelihoods. The niche sector is seeking further encouragement from the government to continue preserving and promoting this unique artistic textile culture. [Maddala & Chiruvuori \(2020\)](#)

7. SIGNIFICANT CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS AND KALAMKARI ENTREPRENEURS

1) Marketing Network of Kalamkari

The absence of a systematic marketing network has been a significant discouragement in the Kalamkari segment. Artisans should organize themselves under a cooperative umbrella to market their products directly. Developing more linkages with outside parties is crucial for this initiative.

2) Tourism-Centered Crafts

To propagate crafts culture and explore its commercial potential, tourism development should go hand in hand with crafts development. There is substantial scope for exploring craft-centered tourism possibilities.

3) Registration Norms for Authentic Kalamkari Work

Implementing strict registration norms for ancient Kalamkari work can help reduce the proliferation of imitated items.

4) Design Registration of Kalamkari

Design registration should be mandatory for Kalamkari. Any new design introduced by an artisan should be registered to prevent unauthorized copying.

5) Price Uniformity in Kalamkari

Prices of Kalamkari products are often erratic and inconsistent, leading to customer dissatisfaction and potential negative impacts on demand. Pricing should be standardized based on the categorization of art, skill level, and quality of raw materials.

6) Research and Development in Kalamkari

Research and Development (R&D) are essential for improving product quality. New items and designs can be developed through R&D, and environmental concerns need to be addressed. Issues like the use of toxin substances (e.g., azo dyes), child labor, and environmental conservation should be converted into opportunities to enhance the acceptability of Indian products among affluent consumers.

7) Role of Technology

Product innovation and improvements in design and manufacturing technologies should be introduced in the informal sector to uplift the economy. Modern technologies can help bring necessary changes to the Kalamkari industry.

8) Value Addition in Kalamkari

Organizations like the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts and Textiles) should assist local units in producing value-added items. This will help penetrate the local market and boost exports.

9) Window Display of Kalamkari Products

Promotional and marketing organizations should display Kalamkari products in strategic locations such as airports, railway stations, bus stands, and commercial centers. Effective window displays can attract customers and encourage impulse buying, serving as a dynamic advertising tool.

10) Positioning of Kalamkari Products

Kalamkari products, created with traditional skills, are facing competition from machine-made products. However, there is little competition or substitutes for many Kalamkari items. Strategic positioning should highlight the uniqueness and traditional craftsmanship of Kalamkari to maintain its market presence against machine-made products. [Maddala & Chiruvoori \(2020\)](#)

8. A BLEND OF TRADITION AND COMMERCE WITH A SWOT PERSPECTIVE

Indian artisans have traditionally made their living by hand-painting or printing elaborate motifs onto cloth using natural dyes, a technique known as "Kalamkari." During the Vijayanagara Empire, Kalamkari flourished, painting Hindu mythology scenes on the interiors of temples. The main hub for Kalamkari craftsmen in Andhra Pradesh, especially in the towns of Machilipatnam and Srikalahasti, where the age-old art form is still practised and preserves traditional handicrafts while creating jobs. Global recognition has been bestowed upon Kalamkari for its inventive designs that fit in well with the creations of Indian designers and satisfy the increasing demand for its fabrics both at home and abroad [Mathur \(2020a\)](#).

The amalgamation of Kalamkari with contemporary technologies signifies a noteworthy progression in its cultural importance and worldwide accessibility. Kalamkari was once a labour-intensive technique that used block printing or hand painting, the incorporation of cutting-edge technology has transformed the art, enabling faster and more accurate manufacturing of elaborate designs while maintaining its cultural core. The seamless fusion of custom and technology preserves Kalamkari's cultural heritage while also encouraging cooperation between producers, designers, and artists, reviving the art form and guaranteeing its ongoing significance in the modern era. The development of Kalamkari essentially demonstrates the adaptability and tenacity of traditional art forms in a society that is always evolving [Kaur \(2022\)](#).

With a long tradition of conserving genuine handcrafted artwork made with natural dyes, Kalamkari is distinguished by its distinctive motifs. Because of the elaborate procedure involved in the craft, every design is unique, with variations in techniques found in styles such as Machilipatnam and Srikalahasti. Themes frequently reference epics of mythology, such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, which reflect a millennium-old tradition that peaked in the fifteenth century. Notwithstanding these advantages, the sector nevertheless has problems, such as being primarily cottage-based and deficient in infrastructure and innovation. Opportunities, however, are found in developing original goods using regional resources, providing a distinctive product range, and reaching out to other markets. Risks include competition from knockoff designs and problems with the availability

and quality of raw materials, highlighting the necessity of strategic development and adaptation T (2023).

9. KALAMKARI IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

The historical significance and unique nature of Kalamkari, an ancient Indian textile art that dates back to the fifth century BCE, have endured throughout millennia. This art form, which uses vivid colours and elaborate motifs to reflect Indian mythology, culture, and nature, is well-known for its exquisite designs and deep cultural origins. The motifs on Kalamkari fabrics are long-lasting, becoming more vibrant with each washing because of age-old techniques and organic colours like pomegranate, turmeric, and indigo. The intricate designs of Kalamkari fabrics are guaranteed to survive abrasion thanks to the use of block printing and hand painting techniques that further improve their durability. Colours are applied by artisans using a bamboo pen, or kalam, which gives each piece a distinctive look. Because of their durability, Kalamkari textiles are becoming a popular option for clothing, home décor, and textile art. Designers and craftspeople are striving to conserve and promote the age-old designs and techniques of Kalamkari, which has seen a resurgence of attention in recent years Garg (2023).

In traditional Indian art, the Kalamkari symbolises perseverance and everlasting beauty, embracing technical innovations to thrive in the digital age. Known as the "artistry of the pen," this type of art entails the meticulous hand-rendered creation of elaborate motifs and narratives onto fabric with a tamarind pen. Weeks of careful labour are needed for the technique, which involves dying cotton cloth with hand-drawn patterns and natural colours derived from plants. Kalamkari has accepted contemporary technologies while retaining its identity in the face of modernization. By permitting the creation of more elaborate designs, faster production, and global accessibility, techniques such as digital printing have complimented conventional approaches. Kalamkari's reach has increased and new creative opportunities have been created by this fusion of tradition and contemporary. Along with the traditional sarees and scarves, Kalamkari now offers a wide range of products that combine modern aesthetics with timeless appeal, such as digitally printed lehengas, accessories, and home decor. Kalamkari is a beautiful treat that is also highly significant culturally, drawing visitors who want to interact with India's rich past in a modern setting Gupta (2020a).

Figure 6



Figure 6 Lakme Fashion Week Winter Festive 2017 Sonal (n.d.)

<https://in.pinterest.com/pin/390898442659004500/>

<https://pinkpeppercorn.in/top-5-favorites-from-the-lakme-fashion-week-winter-festive-2017/>

The elaborate hand-painted or block-printed designs on silk and cotton that are characteristic of the ancient Indian art style known as kalamkari have seen a resurgence in contemporary fashion. Together with craftspeople, designers and manufacturers are producing cutting-edge clothing that combines traditional themes and methods with modern flair. The fashion industry's increasing focus on sustainability is the driving force for this comeback, as Kalamkari provides a distinctive, handmade substitute for mass-produced apparel. A diverse strategy is advised by specialists to conserve and advance this trade. Campaigns for education and awareness, exhibitions, workshops, partnerships with designers and artists, integration into marketplaces for art and home décor, encouragement of fair-trade and artisan cooperatives, and the use of digital platforms for e-commerce and storytelling are all examples of this. The resurgence is mostly due to modern technology, which makes Kalamkari easily adaptable to contemporary style. For example, digital printing has completely changed how Kalamkari designs are created and reproduced on fabrics. It allows designers to explore a vast array of colours, patterns, and motifs while maintaining the genuine essence of the art form [Malini Divakala. \(2014\)](#).

Adding state-of-the-art technologies has also increased Kalamkari's sustainability. The fashion industry's transition to eco-friendly methods is in line with digital printing, which allows for accurate design execution, minimizes waste, and uses less water without sacrificing quality or innovation. Kalamkari's seamless integration of technology and tradition has made it well-known throughout the world. Through the use of online platforms and e-commerce networks, modern Kalamkari has become widely available, bridging cultural divides and exhibiting the ageless beauty and skill of this age-old art form [Rani \(n.d.-a\)](#).

10. CONCLUSION

This research study explored the traditional art of Kalamkari through an in-depth examination of hand-painted textile artworks. By analyzing its historical context, techniques, materials, and motifs, we gained a comprehensive understanding of Kalamkari's rich cultural significance and evolution over time. The study highlighted the intricate processes and traditional methods that distinguish Kalamkari, emphasizing the importance of preserving these practices amidst modern challenges. Furthermore, the insights into the cultural narratives and symbolic meanings embedded in the motifs underscored Kalamkari's role in sustaining regional heritage. Despite the pressures from mass production and market dynamics, the dedication to maintaining traditional techniques and the support from governmental and non-governmental organizations offer a promising future for this art form. The study concludes that continued education, innovation, and market development efforts are crucial for the sustained growth and appreciation of Kalamkari as a unique and valuable cultural legacy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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