

Change of the Technic of Kalamkari under Handcrafts Promotion Policy - Case Study of Temple Cloth in South India -

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I Introduction

This study presents a case study of *kalamkari*, a kind of hand-painted cotton textile produced in South India. The purpose of this study is to examine the change and the process of the *kalamkari* technique under the influence out of handicrafts promotion policy by Indian government.

Kalamkari is produced in *Sri Kalahasti* (SKHT), a town located in Andhra Pradesh State and is famous for its sacred Hindu temple *Sri Kalahasti* Temple deified *Sri Kalahasteswara* (= Hindu god Siva). And it is also near Venkateswara Temple deified Venkateswara (=Hindu god Vishunu) in Tirumala, so many pilgrims come to SKHT all year around. *Kalamkari* is originally hanged as a decoration on temple buildings on religious days. It is said that this kind of temple cloth production was introduced from Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh State in the middle of the nineteenth century [Sekhar 1961 : 39] , but now its ritual role is lost.

The word *kalamkari* derives from the words '*kalam*' (Fig.1) meaning "pen" and '*kari*' meaning "work". It is also characterized by the use of vegetable dyes on a cotton cloth and hand-painting. Besides *Sri Kalahasti*, *kalamkari* is also produced in other various places in

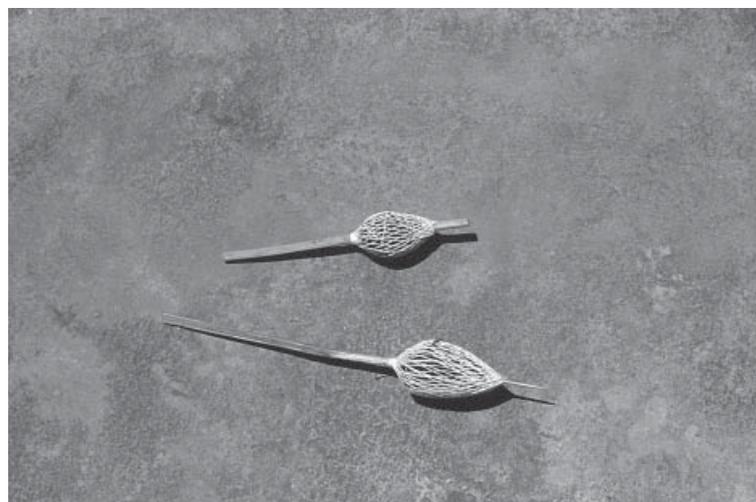


Fig. 1 kalam



Fig. 2 ‘epic type’ kalamkari



Fig. 3 ‘god-picture type’ kalamkari

India [Irwin & Hall (1971)、 Barnes, Cohen & Crill (2002)、 Crill (2008)、 Ranjan, A & Ranjan, M (2007)、 Singh (2005)] 1). As the traditional dyeing technique is time-consuming and involves lots of complicated proceedings as well as special skills, many contemporary *kalamkari* makers have changed their techniques and opted for block-printing technique and chemical dyes or colorants. *Kalamkari* produced in *Sri Kalahasti* is unique as it still uses and preserves the original dyeing techniques while Machilipatnam technique has also adopted chemical dyeing.

There are two kinds of designs to make a temple cloth 2) type *kalamkari*, one of them is an ‘epic type’ *kalamkari* (Fig. 2) depicted Indian epic, especially “Ramayana”, with text of the story below pictures and the other is a ‘god-picture type’ *kalamkari* (Fig. 3) depicted Hindu gods and scene of god-tale without text of the story. Despite its attempt to preserve the traditional technique, *kalamkari* in *Sri Kalahasiti* has nevertheless lost its ceremonial function in temples and it is now mostly used as decorativegarments or souvenirs.

II Traditional technique to make kalamkari cloth

They say that it is more difficult to dye a cotton fabric by vegetable dye than a silk fabric. But it is characteristic for *kalamkari* in SKHT to be made by this distinctive technique. Speaking about vegetable dyes, *karukai* (Telugu) (myrobalan in English) with iron liquid as mordant 3) is used for preparation the cloth to dyeing and for painting the black colour. *Chevallikodi & suruduchakka* (Telugu) with alum as mordant is used for red. *Karukai poovvu* (Telugu) (myrobalan flower in English) with alum as mordant is used for yellow and bengal indigo that is soluble chemical dye substituted for real indigo is used for blue. The painting pen *Kalam* is made by craftsman using bamboo stick wool-rug piece and cotton thread. Sharp tip is used for black and thick tip is used for yellow & blue.

First, to make *kalamkari*, it is needed to prepare the cotton cloth by dipping in *karukai* & buffalo milk liquid and dry it on strong sun. If there is lack of sunshine, it is difficult to prevent the line drawn by *kalam* from spreading onto areas of the fabric. After charcoal drawing process is finished, the picture outline is drawn by freehand technique using *kalam* with iron liquid (Fig. 4). Then, the cloth is dipped and boiled in the red liquid after alum painting for the red part, next, it is dipped in the goat (or cow) dung liquid for one night and washed for bleached white. Dipping process is used only for red dyeing, so after this red process, the parts supposed to be white need to be bleached by using goat dung (or cow dung) 4). But now this process is almost lost. For yellow and blue painting process, alum is mixed to yellow liquid 5), then drawn on the cloth using *kalam* and, at last, bengal indigo is dissolved



Fig. 4 freehand technique

into water, then drawn on the cloth using *kalam*, too. Because it is difficult to make natural fermented indigo liquid and to preserve it 6), now the mainstream tends to use artificial indigo.

III About handicrafts promotion policies for *kalamkari*

These present-day characteristics of *kalamkari* are results of the establishment of *Kalamkari* Training Center (KTC). All India Handicraft Board (AIHB) was established in 1952, then several training centers to train handicrafts left among many parts of India were founded in 1950's [Nanda 129:2002] . In south India, Koduru Ramamurthy was instructed by AIHB to look for hand-painting made *kalamkari* and he started the research. Thus KTC was established in 1957 under handicrafts promotion policies run by the Indian government. KTC served as an organization to revive and manage the production of *kalamkari* until its shutdown in 1995. KTC attracted the people who wanted to learn the technique of *kalamkari* from a *master craftsman* 7) who is instructor of KTC. But ladies could not enter there, at this time.

Some of these people or apprentices who completed their training at KTC later passed on the technique to their family members or took on apprentices included ladies as well. Therefore, the technique and style of making *kalamkari* were succeeded through apprenticeship from the masters to their apprentices from different caste background. The role of KTC is thus not only to inherit the dyeing technique and to train young *kalamkari* craftsmen, but also to function as a mediator to intermingle people from different castes and to create an intercaste master-apprentice relationship which had not existed in Indian society.

After KTC was closed down, there are two big movements, one of them is *Karuna* Project, the other is *Kala Srusti* as NGO. Through *Karuna* Project started in 2004 and



Fig. 5 ladies in Kala Srusti

Kala Srusti started as NGO in 2008, the situation of techniques and craftsmen has changed considerably. *Karuna* Project is called 3crores Project, too. (3crores = about \$ 700,000) Central government (Ministry of Textile) loans craftsmen 50,000Rs (about \$ 1,150) but craftsmen have to make a unit to borrow the money. Then they started to make not only temple cloth type but also practical cloth like dress material. On the other hand, *Kala Srusti* started as voluntary organization to support woodwork, *kalamkari*, applique, lacquerwork, bamboowork etc. [*Kala Srusti* 2006:5] . Afterward it launched the production to make *kalamkari* for practical purpose as NGO registered in government and participates in government's development project for handicrafts 8). By these big movements, 'traditional' techniques have diversified to efficient techniques, craftsmen's training terms have varied, and women as craftsmen have increased (Fig. 5).

IV Change of the situation of kalamkari in SKHT

The big characteristics of 'traditional' techniques are the use of cotton fabric, the use of vegetable dye, hand-painting technique using *kalam* and depicting motifs of Hindu god or epic for *templecloth type* design. But the two above-mentioned movements have caused the changes of 'traditional'*kalamkari* production. Since the use of *kalamkari* are varied from *templecloth type* as an impractical material to dress materials for practical purpose (Fig. 6.7). The use of silk is increased rapidly, the use of vegetable dye in practical way and use of chemical dye have become general. Furthermore the bleach process using animal dung



Fig. 6 dress materials (dupatta)



Fig. 7 dress materials (appliqué)



Fig. 8 tracing sheet



Fig. 9 trace of charcoal

is missed and tracing sheets 9) are used for mass production. Thus the craftsmen's training terms are different, only 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and more than 2 years depending on each workshop.

Before these big movements, most of craftsmen consisted of men mainly and most of ladies just helped craftsmen as their family or apprentices. But for the change of the technique and training term, ladies have increased tremendously 10). Before these movements, it was usual to receive at least 2years training and master not only freehand technique of charcoal drawing and outline drawing using *kalam*, but also the technique of design. And now the diversity among the craftsmen's skills in SKHT have become wider, like below, the person mastered freehand technique of charcoal drawing and outline drawing using *kalam* but can't design, mastered freehand technique to draw only birds and plants, mastered to draw outline using tracing seat (Fig. 8.9).

V Conclusion

Under the influence of handicrafts promotion policies, the technique of *kalamkari* is maintained as national 'tradition' of India, despite of its regional origin. And now, it is also utilized to make Indian dress materials, so the *Kalamkari* production for practical purpose has increased and the craftsmen number has also increased very much. Therefore they tend to clarify their differentiation comparing with new persons who started practicing *kalamkari* lately. The development projects for handicrafts have not only changed the 'materials', but they have also changed the people who are involved in the production of *kalamkari*, causing

emergence of self-consciousness of *kalamkari* craftsmen. Besides the development projects for handicrafts seek the better way how the government utilizes the handicrafts as cultural-resource of India.

In this study, I have described the change of the situation in the place products *kalamkari* through the handicrafts promotion policies and development projects for handicrafts. But I need more data to discuss the present state of demand for 'traditional materials' and the comparison of the meaning of 'tradition' between the people who make the materials and the 'tradition' according to the people who purchase them or use.

Henceforth it is important to grasp the demand of Indian 'traditional' dress that is the background of increase of practical *kalamkari*, the supply by craftsmen and development project for handicrafts to make clear the term of the demand and supply. Moreover I want to refer to craftsmen 'making' behavior by comparing the Indian 'traditional' technique as 'national' handicrafts with 'traditional' technique as regional handicrafts.

Notes

- 1) Block print in Machilipatnam (Andhra Pradesh State), *Picchawāī* (Rajasthan), *Mātānī Pachēdī* (Gujarat) etc. are recognized as so-called '*kalamkari*' except the *kalamkari* in SKHT.
- 2) Generic term of the cloth hang in temples. The characteristic of the design is religious including moral rather than decorative wall-hanging.
- 3) Mordant is a dyeing method for vegetable dye to penetrate into fiber by combining of metal base and vegetable dye chemically. There are some kinds of metal base, aluminum, iron, copper, and tin.
- 4) It may be effect of agent of fermented-component and ammonia of goat (or cow dung), besides effect of ozone-bleaching by strong sun-ray and appropriate moisture.
- 5) It is a dye-color mixed color and mordant in a same container directly. It is practical and easy to paint using brush, but the degree of strong is weak comparatively.
- 6) On the fermentation process in SKHT, craftsmen do a complicated way using strong alkaline sand and special tool for filtration made by craftsmen, and so on. Now only one workshop carries out this method for blue.
- 7) Although '*master craftsman*' means skillful workman, in KTC the word was also used as chief instructor. There were two master craftsmen, in KTC, . One of them was '*first master craftsman*' who worked in KTC from first batch to second batch, the other was '*second master craftsman*' who worked in KTC from third batch to eighteenth batch.
- 8) *Kala Srusti* is registered in Khadi & Village Industries Commission, DC(H) (Development

Commissioner of Handicrafts) , and Youth Service of government. Moreover it participates in ‘Design Technology Development Workshop’ that is one of the handicrafts development project every year.

- 9) I described about the increase of women, their skills and consciousness as craftsman in ‘Area study’ vol.10-2 that will be published forward.
- 10) There are records that the trace technique was already used for block prints in 17-18 century [Ogasawara 31:1980] .

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