

**Folk and Minor Art in India**  
**Prof. Shatarupa Thakurta Roy**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Lecture - 15**  
**Aesthetic Perspective**

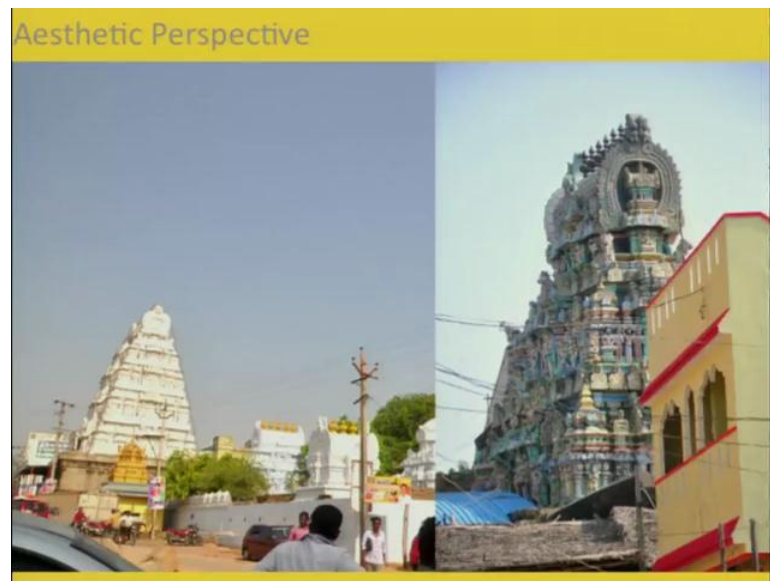
In the formative years, of folk art and minor art practice, in India, started with a different purpose. It was meant for the ritualistic and customary performances, as a mass behavior of a society. So, the practice was commonly known as a community practice, though the images, had some decorative quality into it, but it was not made for a purely aesthetic purpose. Self expression was the secondary factor that worked; they had the mind of its creators for a very long time.

Having said that, I must also mention, that its very recently, that, maybe a 50 years of a span, that we may consider, when this aesthetic, and utility this two things, are separated, and the aesthetic purpose is taken out, and right now, we are giving a serious thought about its, its aesthetic aspect, we are finding out, the need, the new need, of this particular art practice, purely from its aesthetic qualities. It is true that the variant of stylistic aspects that are involved with this art practice gives us new direction. There are contemporary artists, who are trained in purely academic manner, in the mainstream practice. They are also realizing the richness of this folk and minor art, and their aesthetics, and they are picking up many of their virtues their own artistic practices.

So, there lies its significance, and perhaps we have discussed, and mentioned it quite a few times in our earlier lectures, and we need to say that repeatedly, to emphasize on this point, because from this particular point onwards, we are going to take a different perspective, towards the aesthetic components, of this art works, and we will also connect it with the regular visual culture, that we are living with, and with that reference, we are going to assess the aesthetic virtues, that can have some modern qualities into it, and with that modernity and the contemporary means, it can go long, and survive for more time, with some paradigm shift, it can also face the new challenges of the new time.

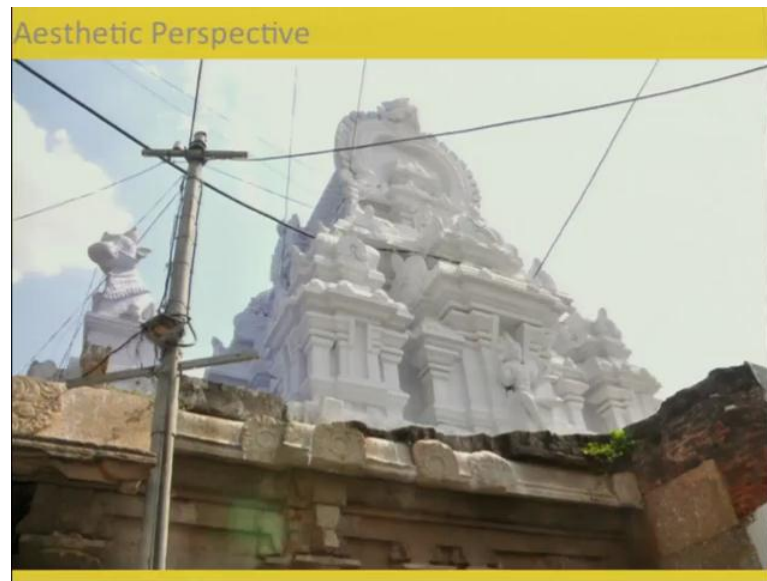
So, let us look at it from a purely aesthetic perspective, and try to understand, the nature of the practice, from the aesthetic perspective. So, I am going to show you a few images, and through the images, we will try to see, how they are, in today's time. So, I am showing you some very recent photographs, as the documentation, that I have done, to make this topic more clear to you.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:08)



Seen in the pictures, are the temples, of the place, named Sri Kalahasti. This is near Chennai, in southern part of India. This is the place, which is mostly very famous for its traditional art work known as, Kalamkari painting. The Kalamkari tradition here, are the hand painted one, there is another variation of this Kalamkari, which are meant as printing, where the block painting done on textile surfaces, but that gives practiced in a different location, named Machilipattanam, but this is Shri Kalahasti, where the practitioner use a different technique, and they make a pen of their own, and create images, that acts as a souvenir and the back drops, and they are connected to the temple tradition, that meant to the purpose of worship, and that way it got popularized many years back, and the practice is still on. So, this is the temple, and as we can see that, the motifs of the temples, are also having lots of intricate details in it.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:40)



But overall it has a structure, a shrine like temple top that unites the entire thing. So, it is like a combination of symmetry, and asymmetry, throughout. It has impasses on symmetry, but the intricacy of the images, inside, are also quite distinctive. So, overall it gives us the complicated structure, its not very simple and easily readable design at all.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:16)



So, that is the temple top. A detail of that image, which is a very freshly painted, although the temple is almost 900 years old, as they say its not a authentic data, but nearly authentic.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:34)



Seen here, is a practitioner of the Kalamkari technique, which is done on a fabric, either cotton, or silk, they will also use crepe these days. So, the person, the painter, is holding a pen in his hand, with is handmade pen, that holds a lot of vegetable dye at one time, and it flows from here. So, the images are made with continuous line drawings, the documentation is done from a nearby place, in a artist workshop, the workshop is guided by a master artisan, whose name is M Nagaraja, and this person, who is shown in the picture, he is one apprentice, who is also quite a senior apprentice, who is working under some guru, or the master painter, and he has also expertise in the technique, and he working as per the need of the of the customers.

ere he is making a part of a sari, which is partially block printed, that comes from a different place, and there is one empty space, where he is using his own vegetable dyes, and executing the image. And in the detail, in the inset, you can see how he is pressing the one part of the brush, and the ink is flowing from there. He is dipping it into the

vegetable dyed black ink, and we are going to discuss all these method and material, in some later module, in some lectures, in detail.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:33)



Now, let us see the stylistic variation that it gives us. So, this is one cloth, which is made as a backdrop, and what we see in the picture, is a scene from Mahabharath; however, what we see in the picture is, a very interesting space division, which has a horizontal emphases throughout, to tell stories. So, it is all about the narrative, that is taking place there, and there are images, which are telling us the story of the creators. They also make images, for commercial purposes, seen in the picture is a motif of a bird, that is repeated in a cloth, and they are hand painted, they are not printed, they are almost identical.



(Refer Slide Time: 09:15)



These particular motifs, are often sold separately, and then embroidered in different artifacts, but these are purely hand painted images that are still in practice and this is documentation that is done very recently.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:55)



Another one, before filling up the colors, so what they do is, they again make the line drawings, and then they fill up certain areas with color. Often they leave it just like this; they do not fill up the areas with color. Here they have used certain other colors also, which is light brown here. So, when you go out of this workshop, where people are working with some customers need, they supplied to the government emporiums, and they have a fixed market. They also knew how to make imageries, and its like, there are different households, where they have workshops, which are approved by the government of India, and also, it is a cluster of artists who live there.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:57)



And they have been practicing for very long time. This is right outside the household, in the roadside areas, where we also see that there is this customary ritual that is being practiced everyday. So, we see the floor decorations with rice powder that they do as part of their daily life, every morning on the floor. No matter how wealthy the life styles are, but this is for sure, that they make it.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:27).



(Refer Slide Time: 11:34)



On the road, these are the common features there. This is one image that is clicked in a museum. As we discussed about the contextualization and decontextualization, this is perhaps, another very interesting example of there, where, in a museum, the household space is artificially created, and the ritual and the practice is preserved for public viewing.



(Refer Slide Time: 12:07)



Another image clicked in the museum, Dakshinchitra. So, with these images, we get a fair amount of idea, about the clusters of folk art and minor art practices that is still alive, and thriving. So, its there, that we are not basically creating a cultural community, who are living in isolation but they are well blended in a community place, this is the small town where the temple and tradition was connected to the temple; it is still on, in a different form, they are catering to a different market, there are different stake holders, who are patronizing and helping to carry it further, but this is also for sure, that its not happening in the way it used to happen, when it had a regular use.

So, we will see more photographs from the museum, where some old specimens are also preserved, and we will try to match that with a recent documentation that is done. And we will see how the mixed culture, is nurturing the tradition which are existing, and this is also true, that in Kalamkari Shrikalhasti, we do not see much changes. There are quite a few variations, that are there, and we are going to discuss that in detail, in some other lecture. But the changes are very limited, but it its more like, they are not creating changes, or they are not bringing new subject matters, in their creation. Quite intentionally, they might fear for the market. At the same time, I will share some experience from one of the interview that I conducted with M Nagarajam.

In his interview, he replied, for one of my questions, where I wanted to know that, how happy he is, with the kind of earning, that he is able to manage with this his creations. He mentioned quite a few things to me, that is a quite eye opener, and I feel I may also share that idea with you. In his statement, he said, that he creates for the sake of it, but there are many students, who are working under him, there are many people who work in the direction that is guided by him and for them, they only produce. So, there are certain hierarchies, where a person imagines and innovates, and the other people, they are skilled labors, they are artisans, and these are the terms that are not very well clarified in the modern society.

So, often this masterminds are known as artisans, only because they are not trained in an academic style, they have their own rules and regulations, but we are ignorant of it in many instances, and for that, we feel that this people they do it very intuitively, but this is for sure, that it's a community practice, and like any other community practice, people in the community, they are well equipped with the skill, that the traditional practice provides them with, but this is also true, that not all of them can think innovatively, or create new things everyday. It is also true, that to cope up with the market, sometimes, their works lose its soul, its expression, because of the repetition, because of the repeated market demand, and they need to reduce prices to sell it in a market.

Otherwise, if there are too many unsold things lying in one place, because of convenience of production, if you produce more than the demand, then they lie and do not get sold. So, this is just a very different way of looking at it, but the master painter Nagaraja, for him, he said that he gets something out of it, which is very precious, and he cannot tell me, materially, that how much satisfied he is, with the kind of earning that he has. Though his earning is secured, he has his award money, and it is also true that there are fixed markets for him, but it does not really matter to him, and he creates for the sake of it. This is one technique, that he has mastered from his ancestors, and he feels that he lives for this practice, and it does not really matter to him, whether Manjusha, or any other government emporium is helping him or not.

He is thankful that he is getting some support, but had their case, where nobody is helping him, he would have still continued with his creation. So, that is very positive to

know. Also upon asking, about the sustainability, or the longevity, the life of this practice, he gave me a very interesting answer. For him, he says, that it depends on your faith. If you feel something will survive, it will survive, if we say it will not survive, it will not survive. So, the answers are simply like that, which is much beyond the rationality, or the basic logic, but it has a deeper or greater understanding, that keeps it going. So, lets go back, and see the place, and try to understand the ethos, the values, that a intrinsically connected, to the practice to understand the subject better, and effectively.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:03)



These are the images, from the older practices, which I picked up from the museum, just to understand, whether the existing techniques, the aesthetics, that is there in the prevalent practices, in that particular zone, is reflective on the other works or not. So, what we see there is that, in the paintings in some of those furniture based wooden works; they are narrative in the quality. It has a central deity, which are taken from different religious cultures, of course, we can make out that the image at the right hand side of the picture, is a image from a Christianity based tradition, where the other one is the, is from Hindu tradition. They have that religion identity very distinctively connected to it, but both the works are not very typical, and they have some uniqueness into it, that made it very rare, and worth preserving into a museum space.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:25)



Some other works, here too we get to see two Kalamkari pieces, and one has a typical Andhra influence, that is part of the, because Shrikalahasti is situated in Andhra Pradesh though it is very close to Tamilnadu Andhra Pradesh border, but this is a tradition which belongs to Andrapradesh solely, but in the other picture we see there is a strong western Indian influence in it, but it done is the Kalamkari manner, in the picture.

That is because this particular tradition was patronized, by the Maharastrian kings, and then if we go back to the story, we will understand the historical connections, but right now, we are purely concentrating on the aesthetics, and trying to understand the aesthetic idioms, that is, that, that creates the dialogue, between the identity, between the perspective, between the pleasure, that we get out of the out of the this kind of a view, viewing experience, and its all about the experience, that is that enriches us from this creations.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:48)



The next one is also another textile piece, which is preserved in the museum. It is done in applique technique, which is very close to the applique of Orissa, and these are the states which are very closely situated one after the other. So, if we go and see the map, we can figure out that Orissa, Tamilnadu, Andrapradesh, they had some connections.

So, there are, there had been, there are possible exchanges that took place there, or these are something, which can be hypothetically put here, there is no authentic documents, that can tell us the exact reason why these people tried this kind of appliques on cloth, and when they did it, under which circumstances, but these are for sure, some of the backdrops from a temple, where two birds are worshipping Shiva. We saw the same bird motifs, which is a peacock, in the textile that is, that I showed in the previous slides. So, the motif is very common, the technique is completely different; it gives us the aesthetic quality of a typical Kalamkari cloth, though the technique is different here.

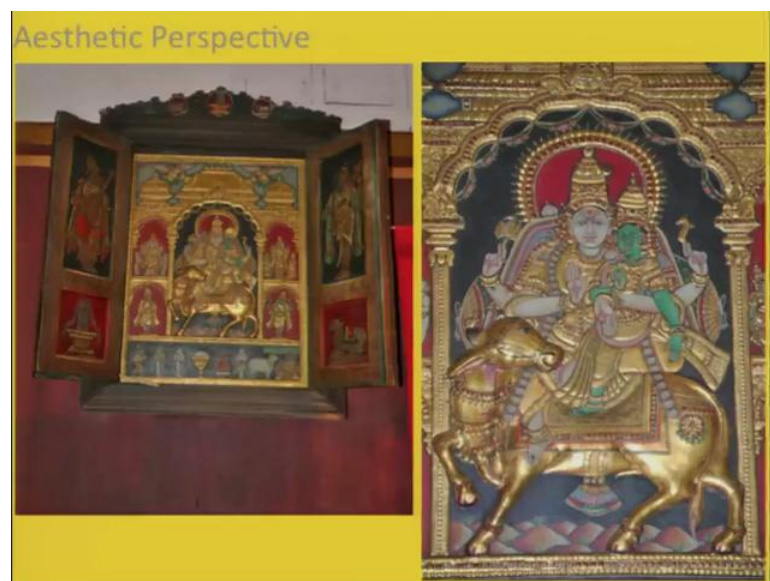


(Refer Slide Time: 23:19)



There are other images from another tradition, which is following the same kind of figuration, only, when we see the images here; they are made on a different surface. So, the material is different, it is done on a, these are leather puppets, done on leather, with vegetable dyes again, they are made for shadow puppetry tradition there, but when we look at it, we see that they are following same stylistic orientation throughout.

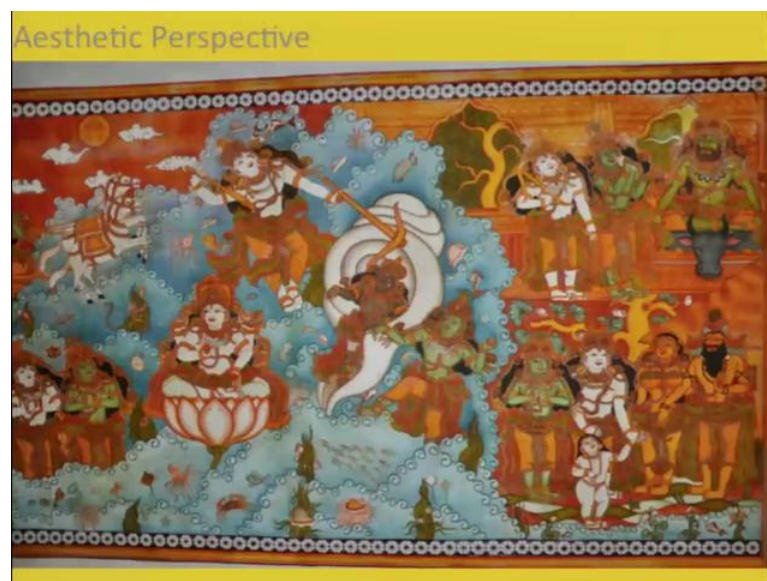
(Refer Slide Time: 23:56)



These are some old examples of Thanjavur painting, which took place in Thanjavur and in Tanja painting, what we see that, as we said in the beginning of the lecture, that they were known to be the jewel embedded art works. So, they used a lot of precious, and semi precious stones, as well as gold, and other precious metals, in those paintings.

They were patronized, by the Maharastrain rulers of those times, who lived in the southern part of India. But what we see, is this similar kind of the linear figuration, and the quality, where the space division is almost symmetrical, and its all filled up with human figures, with some simplified, and roundish, voluminous, at the same time, flat, and two dimensional, decorative qualities, and they are very intricate, they have variation, in color, in style, in poses and postures, but there is a basic balance which is emphasized on the symmetric, because of its space division, and also there are shrines, the temple tops, which are taken from the temple structures of that particular region

(Refer Slide Time: 25:30)



In the contemporary murals of Kerala, we see that the figurations are partially taken from the same style, but it also has a lot of foreign influences into it, in terms of the, their figuration, their stylistic features, where we see that, it looks more like the art works from the far east, namely Java, Bonya, Sumathra, Indonesia, so on.

So, that is because they had a trade route, and their art work came here, the textile technique, of java batik and Kalamkari, they had some trade based connection, and Kalamkari was a technique, which is believed to be practiced from Iranian origin. And we also this kind of vegetable dyed cloth, there are evidences in Indus valley civilization, they used the same techniques. So, we do not really know its origin, but here, we are looking at the aesthetic aspects, purely, with some involvement. So, these are the details, and we can make out from its figuration, that it has a typical way of execution, with a lot of sophistication, and techniques are purely fresco based, which are done directly on the weight plaster, with vegetable colors, oxide based power colors, with some binder.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:15)



In this picture, we see a pure textile of Talia Rumal that is a woven Akat. It has the complex method of weaving, with lots of variation. And we also see in the murals, which are framed, and there are reflections because of the glass frame, glass frame that are there, but we can see the suggestion of this kind of textiles in their borders. So, textile and figures, and the textile techniques, and drawings, they were combined aesthetics that was there in the tradition and then I will show you another image, which is very recent.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:02)



And these are the kind of cloth, that they are selling in the local stationary shops, where the temple visitors now, are not into buying the real Kalamkari, because of this, like for the, ritualistic purposes, they need to buy things, but what we see here, there are handkerchiefs, which are getting sold, and they have some block printed, and often cell screen printed images, that has the Kalamkari aesthetics in it. So, they are often taken to the temple, to cover the offerings, and they are also used for many different purposes, and there the shops, are very close to the temple.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:57)



There are also shops close to the temples, where we see that the aesthetic is completely changed. So, they no longer adhere to the old Kalamkari technique, but the images have certain qualities, which are typical of that place. So, to look at them from a purely aesthetic perspective, it gives us some new direction, as, like, how where it stands, in the prevailing visual culture, and visual culture study, its very important to see how this cultural practices are living and growing into a common place.

Because this is also true, that it is not our aim to create a cultural pocket, which is confined, and there should be free flow of interactions, of this artisans, and art practitioners, it is reconnoiters, the patrons, and also the community at large. This is something that we can understand, that when place is known for its traditional art, the dwellers of that particular place, may choose some other profession, but they cannot be totally ignorant of the existence of that practice. So, by patronizing that practice, we contribute to the growth of the community, where the aesthetic sensibilities are strong. So, this is for sure, the aesthetic sensibility of a place, gets influenced by its artistic tradition, and the vice versa.