

CHITRAKATHI - THE TRADITIONAL FOLK ART OF PINGULI.

Ms. Pradnya Abhyankar

Assistant professor,
SMRK-BK-AK Mahila Mahavidyalaya,
Nashik

Dr. Anjali Kaware

Professor & H.O.D. Department
of Home Science,
Shri Shivaji College of Arts,
Commerce & Science College, Akola.



Abstract : India has a long legacy of artistic expressions from prehistoric to current era. With the transforming art forms and their shifts from places to places, many important of them are unsung, one of which is the Chittrakathi Folk art. Current paper focuses on the Chittrakathi folk art, its types, composition, history, and the thakar tribe who kept chittrakathi alive. The paper also provides and suggests means to conserve this art.

Key words : Chittrakathi, painting, artform, thakar tribe.

The Chittrakathi Folk Art : India has a rich cultural and traditional heritage, which is expressed by means of various arts involving painting, embroidery, costumes, performance, literature, etc. These can roughly be parted into three modalities, as the oral art form conveyed through songs, the visual art form conveyed through paintings, and scroll paintings, and the audiovisual art involving both oral and visual artforms. Particularly speaking about audiovisual art form, in the developing world, they are diminishing with time and could be seen rarely. One of these fading audiovisual arts is a folk art of storytelling referred to as 'Chittrakathi' (Verma, 2017).

Folk art of Chittrakathi is identified in three forms, viz., leather puppet (shadow puppet), wooden string puppets (kalsutri Bahuli), and picture stories (Chittrakathi). Chittrakathi word itself depicts its meaning where *Chitra* means pictures and *katha* means story. Based on the art, the people exhibiting this art were eventually called 'Chittrakathi', a community of artists, migrating all over Maharashtra and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, whose traditional occupation for livelihood was to narrate stories with a sequence of pictures (Jadhav, 1993). Presently, Chittrakathi is performed mainly in the Konkan region in its four districts namely, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Raigad, and Thane.

Chittrakathi is primarily a male dominated art form. It used be carried out at temples at night for around 3-4 hours, consistently. Artists used to show the paintings are recite the story. Chittrakathi stories are basically

.....★★★.....
painted on sheets or handmade papers, size of which is standardised based on the visual preferences of the audience. Single story may have 50-60 sheets, collectively referred to as *pothi* (Jadhav, 1993). The Theme of Chittrakathi paintings include representation of local versions of Ramayana, Mahabharata, and myths (Gangawne, 2017). Story narration is done by showing pictures in series and is supported with background songs and music using instruments like hiroba, taal, veena and huduk (Walwalkar, 2019).

Chittrakathi paintings consist of images of trees, animals, humans, gods and goddesses with wide forehead, pointed nose, round and large eyes with visible eyeballs, double curved lines of ears. Females are represented with different ornaments. All the illustrations are drawn with a smooth and rhythmic line and bold outline. Natural colours are used to paint illustrations, where Brownish colours are majorly used with some use of green, blue and yellow colour. Flat colour spreading is used along with vertical and horizontal lines, design of leaves and flowers. Depending on the imagination and skill of the painter, changes in painting and color composition can be seen (Walwalkar, 2019).

For many decades, chittrakathi was the primary source of entertainment for entire villages. It's a visual and auditory delight was its special performance at night, and the music, and performance, used to help in attracting spectators.



Chittrakathi

Second form of Chitrakathi folk art is Leather puppet show also known as Shadow puppet show. As the name stands, the show utilises puppets made up of leather and is played in the form of colorful shadows on thin cloth. Perforated leather is beaten to make it paper thin, and then cut in the shape of story designs and paintings to create two dimensional puppets. Vibrant natural hues are used to colour these puppets. Then using a back lit huge oil lamp, suspended behind the puppets, puppet shadow is created on a thin cloth to perform a shadow puppet show. The lap is generally located around 2ft behind the screen, to create ample shadow. Similar to chitrakathi, shadow puppet shows are usually performed at night along with singing and playing instruments. The puppeteer modulates his voice to fit the character's personality. Up to 50 different roles may be involved in a single performance. Backstage, the assistant of the leader puppeteer provides vocal support and blows the conch shell according to the story's nature. The conversation between the puppeteer's leader and the musicians is typically interesting. The narrator delivers the language of the actors on the screen on the spot.

Third Chitrakathi folk art is a Stringed Wooden puppet show known as kalsutri Bahuli. These dolls are carved of wood and have a body structure only up to the waist, with size around 1.5ft. These dolls are clothed colourfully and their faces are painted representing mythological heroes, queens, demons and humble servants. A few strings are attached to the upper body part of these dolls and the puppeteer takes these strings in their fingers to move the dolls around the stage as per the story plot. The lively movement of fingers of Artist along with the singers and drum players create a fantastic three-dimensional drama full of spirit. Dialogue, action, and music are used to tell the story



Stringed Wooden puppet show known as kalsutri Bahuli.

Conveyors and conservators of Chitrakathi - The Thakar Tribe

The only conveyors and conservators of Chitrakathi are the people belonging to the Thakkar tribal community. Thakkar tribes are nomads by birth and were thought to be "secret service agents" to the monarchs of Sawantwadi and Shivaji Maharaj about 300 years ago. This appears to be the reason for the Thakkars being given a permanent home in the region called Pinguli, a small village near kudal, in Sindhudurg district, for their living set by the rulers of Sawantwadi.

It is thought that the Thakar community did not originate in Maharashtra, but rather moved from Rajasthan or through the Ghats and settled in the Konkan region (Ransing M. , 2007). Thakkars have their own language, ceremonies, and traditions, despite being able to speak in Marathi and Malvani. The honour of giving Chitrakathi in various temples on key days such as Navratri, Diwali, and so on was bestowed on these families by Kings and temples in the 17th or 18th century, currently endemic to Ganpati mandir, Pinguli. This was the only time they weren't regarded as untouchables and could access the temple grounds, where they were honoured and given offerings, which constituted one of the means of subsistence. After the Chitrakathi storytelling events, the performer would go from house to house collecting alms. Their revenue came from these offerings. During colonial time, however, these artists were labelled as beggars on the streets. (Dallapiccola, 1998). These nomads are mentioned by R.V. Russel in his book "The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India." The book was commissioned by the British in 1916," says the author, adding that during a hunting excursion deep in the jungle, Shivaji Maharaj and his entourage heard some individuals singing, which led to the discovery that a nomadic tribe was reciting stories. Shivaji Maharaj was so fascinated with them that he published a public notice announcing that the Thakkars would perform at the Hindu temples' outside areas during Dussehra. To avoid upsetting the community's erudite Brahmins and priests, he ordered that the performance take place after the temple closes, till it reopens the next day. All night, the Thakkars were the centre of attention. (Bhosale, 2018)

In the current 21st century, Chitrakathi is survived by the descendents of its pioneers, the thakar tribe, particularly at Pinguli.



Current scenario of Chitrakathi folk art and its conservation efforts : In Maharashtra, the evidence of Chitrakathi goes back approximately to the 17th to 19th century (Gaonkar, 2018). Even with historic origin, there is immense scarcity of chitrakathi painters and currently only a handful of performers exist (Srinivasan, 2002). Thakkar tribal community is one of the major contributors in keeping chitrakathi alive in Maharashtra. But, even these communities are finding it inconvenient to keep the traditional chitrakathi alive due to unavailability of patronage (Verma, 2017). Such difficulties rose from lifestyle upgrades demanding solutions matching with current lifestyles to keep these fading arts thriving. One of the popular and easily adaptable solutions is integration of old arts with current trends. Warli painting which was on verge of extinction a few years back, is now popularly adapted via apparels and handicraft items. Also their designs are easily available through digital platforms. Such efforts are highly appreciated by both consumers as well as the artists (Grover and Paul et al., 2014). The similar efforts are seen in Madhubani paintings which has popularised it on global platforms mainly in the fashion industry involving clothing and accessories for interior enrichment (Gupta and Gangwar, 2016; Sharma and Bains, 2018).

Such adaptations of traditional arts into current fashion have shown immense benefit to the art itself at the same time it has provided a financial benefit to associated people and related communities. These efforts have led into developing entrepreneurs by altering or combining different traditional designs thereby preserving the Indian heritage and providing economic empowerment for the rural artisans. Madhubani motifs have indeed helped in preserving the richness of Indian handicrafts and also enriched the modern interiors. Hence, use of innovative approaches by alteration and application of traditional designs can be the focus for the budding entrepreneurs (Chacko and Garg, 2009; Jotsana , 2002).

On a similar note, a Thakkar Aadiwasi Kala Dalan, Museum and Art gallery is established at, Pinguli Village, Kudal, Maharashtra, with an exquisite collection of Chitrakathi paintings as well as a collection of puppets. This museum is run by the descendants of the thakkar tribe and they have transformed chitrakathi into a current trending business platform by selling the art (Gangawane). The museum handlers also conduct several seminars, workshops, training and orientation programmes to raise awareness about chitrakathi (Bhalerao, 2018).

Though the efforts are admirable, they are not the least. With all the fast growing innovations in the fashion industry, textiles can become an extraordinary means to reintroduce Chitrakathi on a global platform. It would present an antique approach in the fashion industry through different types of weaving and block printings of Chitrakathi motifs. This effort would provide Chitrakathi its lost fame and at the same time it would deliver the deserving global attention to its artists, providing them rightful earnings.

Conclusion : Chitrakathi is a distinct and conventional tribal art form. The Thakar tribe's meeting with Shivaji Maharaj for whatever reason appears to be the source of the peculiar style. Any creative expression that wants to survive needs royal or local backing; otherwise, it will swiftly go away. The importance of art conservation should be recognised by all segments of society. This art style can be used not only in painting but in any other art and craft form to reach a large number of people. We may pass on the art to the next generation if we preserve it.

Reference:

- Jadhav, A. (1993), *An Aesthetic Evaluation of Chitrakathi a traditional Maharashtrian Folk art* , SNTD Womens University.
- Amita, J. (2002), *Development of Designs from Madhubani Painting on Kameez Sets*, Acharya N. G. Rangana Agricultural University.
- Chako, N. and Grag S. (2009), *Development of Products for Interior Enrichment Using Madhubani Painting for Budding Entrepreneurs*, *Asian Journal of Home Science* 4(2), 278-280.
- Das, N. (2013), *Madhubani Paintings: Its Existence and Possibility*, *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 3(2).
- Deka, A. and Bhadoria, B. S. (2018), *Warli Art and Artisans of Maharashtra- An Indication in Contemporary Tribal*

- Cultural Development, International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Management studies*, 4(3), 55-57.
- Gaonkarn, M. (2018), *Contemporary Practices of Chitrakathi in the Twenty-first Century Art Market*, *The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design*, 2(2).
 - Grover, V. E. and Paul, S. (2014), *Adaptation of Warli Art for The Development of Blocks for Printing of Apparels*. *Asian Journal of Home Science*, 9 (2), 417-421.
 - Gupta, M. and Gangwar, S. (2016), *Adaptation of Designs for Textile Products Inspired From Madhubani Painting*, *International Journal of Research -Granthaalayah*, 4(5).
 - Sharma, A. and Bains, S. (2018), *Development of cotton kurtis using Madhubani motifs*, *International Journal of Home Science*, 4(1), 145-150.
 - Bhalerao S.J. (2018), *Chitrakathi, Review of Research* , 7(10).
 - Shrinivasan B. (2002). *Mahabharata in Chitrakathi*. Inner Flow collective, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum.
 - Verma M. (2017), *Chitakathi Painting*. Remek
 - Wakwalkar, M. (2019), *Chitrakathi: A Study of its Evolution and its Role in the Modern Art Market*. *International Journal of Research -Granthaalayah*, 7(5).
 - Ransing M. (2007), *Sindhudurg Jilhyatil Adivasi: Thakar*. Mumbai : Lokvangmay griha.
 - Ransing N. B. (1994), *Thakarwadi*. Mumbai: Granthali.