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7. Painted Textiles of India

After studying about printed textiles in the previous unit, now we will study about painted textiles of India. The art of painting cloth, palm leaf, leather and wood for ritual as well as for leisure, was popular in India since ancient times. Some were religious painted cloths meant for temple backdrops like the Pichhavais of Rajasthan; some cloths were made for trade like the cottons of Mauzipatnam which were exported in large numbers, while some were meant for narrative purposes like the brilliant red scrolls of the Pabuji Ka Phad of Rajasthan.

In the first lesson of this unit we will take an overview of the various traditions of painted textiles of India. In the second and the third lessons, we will cover in some detail about two types of painted textiles, namely, Kalamkari and Pichhavai, respectively.

7.0 Objectives

After going through this lesson you will:

- Gain an appreciation of some of the important traditions of painted textiles of India.

- Provide an introduction to some of the painted Textiles like Jain Patas, Phadas, Kalamkari and Pichhavai.

7.1 Introduction

The art of painting enjoyed an important place in the Indian society. It was practiced for pleasure, artistic beauty, religion and, at times, for academic purposes. In the olden times, caves, palm-leaves, wall, ivory, wood, leather and some times cloth were the popular surfaces to show one’s artistic skill (Fig. 7.1).
Jain patas are the oldest known scroll paintings done on cloth, and Phadas of Rajasthan showed the continuity of the ancient pata chitra tradition (Fig. 7.2). Pata chitra were the paintings on cloth. There was a practice of long painted scrolls illustrating mythological episodes. These long patas were rolled and wrapped while storing, only to be unrolled on special occasions.

Among the most beautiful examples of painting on cloth today are the Kalamkari textiles of South India (Fig. 7.3a) and Pichhavai (Fig. 7.3b), the temple hangings of Vallabhacharya Sampradaya.

Of late, Madhubani wall paintings of Mithila in Bihar are also being used for decorating textiles. Various textiles like saris, skirts, dupattas, and wall panels can be seen with this rich art (Fig. 7.4).

7.2 Jain Patas

Jain Patas are the oldest among the Indian painting on cloth. The colours used for these were very vibrant and the style was far from naturalistic. It was more stylised and artistic.
The jain patas may be divided into two categories tantric (Fig. 7.4a) and non-tantric (Fig. 7.4b). Among the tantric works are the diagrams of mantras, called the yantras, and scenes drawn from descriptions found in tantric texts. The non-tantric works are more like chitra patas and do not necessarily conform to any tantric vidhi. Among these, picture paintings are the tirtha patas which are drawings of pilgrimage sites and the cosmic diagrams, depicting sketches of the Jain concept of the universe.

7.3 Phadas

Rajasthan has a rich tradition of folk painting. A part of this heritage is the Phada (Fig. 7.5a), a large painting on cloth, which marks the deeds of a hero from Rajasthan’s colourful past. These hangings are used by story tellers to illustrate their tales about a famous celebrity. The phada is suspended between two bamboo poles and, as legends about the hero are sung in khyal style, the appropriate section of the hanging is illuminated.

The stories of phada are chanted by the members of the bhopa caste (Fig. 7.5b) who specialize in singing different tales. The bhopas never recite the tales of phada in the month of phalguna nor do they leave the stories incomplete once the singing has started. Because these recitations are considered to be very auspicious, it was believed that one could avoid diseases and bad luck by listening to the bhopas tales.

Self-check Questions

1. Who recites the tales of Phadas?

2. Fill in the blanks:
Jain Patas are the oldest among the Indian _________ on cloth. The colours used for these were very _________ and the style was far from _______________. It was more ___________ and ____________.

7.4 Kalamkari

Kalamkari is the ancient art of decorating cloth with the aid of a Kalam or pen. A term mainly used to describe cotton fabrics patterned through the medium of Vegetable dyes by free-hand painting and block-printing, this category of fabric now covers a wide range of textiles produced in many regions of India. The term Kalamkari is, however, applied to the fabrics produced in the Southern India only because the ancient tradition of patterning with the Kalam is only practiced there. Even where the fabric is block printed the Kalam is used to draw finer details and for application of colours. The Mughal who patronized this craft in the Coromandel and Golconda province called the workers of this craft as “Qua-lamkars”, and from this, a distinctive term “Kalamkari” is derived.
In olden times, Kalamkari work used to be hand-painted. During the British rule, Kalamkari prints became very popular in Europe. To meet the growing demand and working fast to meet the targets, the artists started using block prints. With blocks, the artists were able to print the outline much faster than drawing with hand.

Temples are the inspiration for all craftsmen, including weavers, painters, printers, carvers or embroiderers. The Kalamkari work depicted stories of great moral value from the Mythological scenes of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The strength of Kalamkari designs was vibrant and rich in colours. The colours used were deep red, black, indigo, green, yellow, dusty pink, brown and off-white.

### Self-check Questions

3. How old is Kalamkari?

4. Fill in the blanks:

   The term Kalamkari is, however, applied to the fabrics produced in the ________ India only because the ancient tradition of patterning with the ________ is practiced only there.

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### 7.5 Pichhavai

The temple hangings of Vallabhacharya Sampradaya (a Krishna sect founded in the late 15th century) are among the most beautiful examples of pigment painting on cloth in India. These bright-coloured paintings adorned the walls and furnishings of the temple’s inner chamber where Lord Krishna resided. The paintings harmonized in themes and designed to create the appropriate atmosphere for a particular festival or season. The principle hanging which was set as a stage backdrop for the ceremony behind the image or idol was called the Pichhavai.
Paintings were done in permanent natural colours that did not lose brightness for years. These large hangings with colourful depictions of incidents in Krishna's childhood or interesting accounts of events in the history of the sect were extremely appealing and even today they are attracting attention.

These can be seen as decorative paintings for homes, adorning the walls of hotels on calendars etc. Of late, these beautiful paintings adore the saris, furnishings and skirts.

**Self-check Questions**

5. Name three types of painted textiles of India.

6. Fill in the blanks:

   The principle ________ which was set as a stage ________ for the ceremony behind the image or idol was called the __________.

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**7.6 Assignments**

**7.6.1 Class assignments**

i) Make a replica of any one painted textiles you have studied.

ii) Draw and sketch various motifs used in the different painted textiles and name them.

**7.6.2 Home assignments**

i) Collect samples, pictures or photos of various painted textiles of India. Paste them neatly on clear pages with labels under each.

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**7.7 Summing Up**

- In this lesson, four types of Indian Painted Textiles are described viz., Jain Patas, Phadas, Kalamkari and Picchavai.
- Of these Jain Patas are the oldest.
- Some of the most beautiful Indian Paintings on cloth are Phadas and Kalamkari.
- While Phadas and Picchavai belong to Rajasthan, Kalamkari belongs to Andhra Pradesh.
7.8 Possible to Answers the Self-check Questions

1. The stories of Phadas are recited by the members of the bhopa caste.

2. Jain Patas are the oldest among the Indian painting on cloth. The colours used for these were very vibrant and the style was far from naturalistic. It was more stylised and artistic.

3. Kalamkari is 3000 year old art form of decorating cloth with the aid of a Kalam or pen.

4. The term Kalamkari is, however, applied to the fabrics produced in the Southern India only because the ancient tradition of patterning with the Kalam is practised only there.

5. Kalamkari, Pichhavai and Phadas are painted textiles of India.

6. The principle hanging which was set as a stage backdrop for the ceremony behind the image or idol was called the Pichhavai.

7.9 Terminal Questions

1. What surface is used for Kalamkari Painting?

2. Fill in the blanks:
   i) Phadas is the traditional folk painting of _________________.
   ii) Kalamkari originated in the state of ____________________.
   iii) The main centre of Picchavai paintings is in the state of ________________.
   iv) The painted textile adored with the images of Lord Krishna is called _________________.

3. Write a short note on the principal characteristics of Jain Pata paintings.

7.10 References and Suggested Further Reading


7.11 Glossary

1. Mythological  Pertaining to ancient religious beliefs

2. Tantric Exorcist, who is supposed to call and talk spirits

3. Pilgrimage  Journey to a holy place

4. Heritage  Ancestral property

5. Chanted  Melodious rhythmic songs or slogans

6. Recitations  Saying musical prose and poetry