



CHITRAKATHI

Prof. Bhalerao Sanjay J.

Assistant Professor, B.V. College Of Fine Arts, Pune.

PREFACE

According to Indian literature Kamasutra and Shani there are 64 types of art forms including dance. But painting, sculpture, drama, music and literature are collectively called Lalitkala. Remaining art forms merge from these five and hence they get their importance.

Amongst this, poetry and painting comes under audio - visual art, whereas sculpture comes under visual and touch, drama comes under performance art and music under audio. To enjoy visual and performance art one has to use the sensory organs like eyes, ears and touch (skin). When more than one sensory organ is used to appreciate a particular art, it is noticeably seen that the artist as well as the viewers enjoy the art to the fullest. If the idea or thought put forth by the artist reaches the spectator then one can say that the task or the art is accomplished.

“Chitrakathi” is one of the traditional art form which includes art, music and performance, this is the reason it appeals the viewers, where the art, artist and the viewers interact with each other at the same time.

In this new media or contemporary art period, where new experiments are being evolved or invented, traditional art should not be neglected. Because of this traditional art our culture and art is preserved. This reflects our society and history. This is why we should focus on this subject.



ABSTRACT

India possesses a huge tradition of diversified art forms. Cave paintings, Ajintha painting, Pal-jain, Miniature, Kalighat, Madhubani, Tanjavar painting styles similarly among Tribal Art forms Saora, Gaud, Paura, Pradhan, Warali and Chtrakathi are some to mention. Some art forms are famous but some in spite of their superior styles have not reached out to people. Chitrakathi is one of those arts!

Chitrakathi.. In spite of being tribal art form; is developed in skills and in thought process to great extent. Special efforts can be taken to be preserved and to make it reachable for coming generations to study.

KEY WORLD : *Chitrakathi, Kathi or Katha Pothi, Puranas, Pinguli, Thakkar tribe, Paithan, Leather shadow puppets.*

WHAT IS CHITRAKATHI :

Chitrakathi Paintings (Maharashtra) These paintings which are around 300- 400 years old are called Chitra(picture)-Kathi or Katha (story) in which stories of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and **Puran** are depicted on handmade paper using natural colours. It's an almost extinct art form practiced by the Thakkar tribal community of Maharashtra. Chitrakathi artists are a community of migrating story tellers found all

over Maharashtra and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. They made a series of single sheets of paintings. All paintings belonging to one story were kept in a bundle called pothi.

This practice played a very significant and interesting role during the period between the 17th and 18th centuries. A time when neither cinema nor theatre was known, Chitrakathi was a famous form of art. Chitrakathi is usually performed on festive occasions in the village temples of the Konkan region in Maharashtra. The oral narratives of Chitrakathi, inspired from texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas, are performed in a keertan-like style using folk instruments like the dholki and the veena, accompanied by hand-made paintings portraying characters and events from the texts. The Naayak, or the lead performer, is assisted in the performance by two to three co-artists. Chitrakathi is unique combination of performing and painting complements each other.

HISTORY :

Pinguli was an area designated by the rulers of Sawantwadi for the Thakkar tribe who were nomads by origin and believed that they were the "secret service agents" to the ruler of Sawantwadi almost 300 years ago as well to Shivaji Maharaj. This seems the only logical reason for the Thakkars to be allotted a permanent area to settle down in Pinguli.

R.V. Russel in his book "The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India" mentions these nomads. The book was commissioned by the British in the year 1916," explaining that research also shows that when Shivaji Maharaj and his entourage went on a hunting trip deep in the jungle, he heard some people singing. On further enquiry, it came to be known that a nomadic tribe was reciting stories of the Ramayana. On his return Shivaji ordered the chief of that tribe to be brought into court to enquire about these people. The leader of this tribe informed the court that they were Thakkars, a nomadic tribe and painted pictures on leaves with lime and soot from oil lamps that tell tales of the Ramayana. This was a way to familiarise the tribe with the epic and also provide a source of entertainment, after a hectic day of travel. The pictures were accompanied by songs and music, from rustic instruments to keep a captive audience and impart stories with morals.

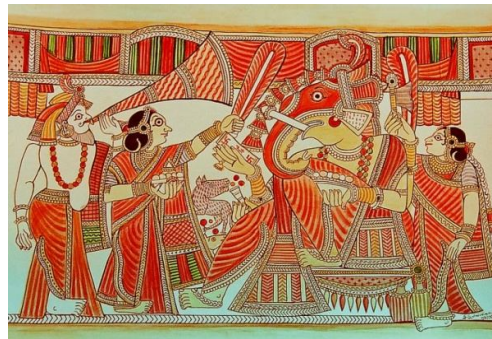
Shivaji Maharaj was enchanted with them and issued a public notice stating that during the time of Dussehra, the Thakkars will perform in the outer area of the Hindu temples. Not to cause any outrage among the learned Brahmins and priests of the community, he ordered that the performance be held after the temple closes, until it reopens the following day. The Thakkars held centre stage all night. They showed pictures that they painted and recited relevant stories, often breaking into song. Thus the format of combining "Chitra" — the picture and "Katha" — the story was born.

Since the Thakkars were also bards, they visited the nooks and corners of the villages. They were officially appointed as official spies Shivaji and later by the Sawant Bhonsales of Sawantwadi who even allotted them some land in Pinguli near Kudal village — a reward for having supplied information for a major battle that the Bhonsales fought in that period. Later these very bards were shunned as beggars.

STYLE OF PAINTING OR TECHNIQUE:

Pinguli and Paithan are two different streams in Chitrakathi which hold completely different styles of painting. In Pinguli style paintings are hand painted on handmade paper. The Chitrakathi paintings were done on handmade or mill made paper of dimension approximate 22cms X 42cms to cater the need of storytelling to a small audience of around 20 to 30 people. But the real demand of the style being extinct we chose to stretch our canvass a little further to a dimension of 53 cms X 73 cms and all the artists worked on their stories displaying them in six to eight paintings each. Being an experimental project the fragments of the stories were done.

PINGULI PAINTING



The Chithrakathi paintings of Paithan resemble the structures of the leather shadow puppets and were done using natural pigments. However they opted to go in for the market available watercolour or gouache paints.

The 'Chithrakathi' is a picture of storytelling tradition and as a complimentary to the visual, narration and singing goes on to elaborate the story to give a complete form. Even after the pictures were painted the narration part of the tradition had to be completed for which we approached.

PAITHAN LATHER PAINTING



These paintings deal with 74 stories and are in typical size (30x40 cms), mainly covering the two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata along with the popular tales from the Vetala-Panchavishi and Chhalchandru Akhyana. Paithan in the 17th century was the main place of a peculiar folk style of painting, with remarkable originality and boldness of brush-work. The paintings very likely originated as mementos for pilgrims. The large sizes of pictures were usually used to depict a visual story to the pilgrims. The style in any case is a fusion of the art of the miniaturist with that of the temple muralist and the angularities of the drawing indicate a relationship with not too distant Ellora. The pictures are drawn on hand-made paper and the backside of one picture is stuck to another in such a way that two seem to be front and back.

About the Performers and the Speakers Mr. Ganpat Masge

Mr. Ganpat Masge is a prominent Chithrakathi artist from village Pinguli in Sindhudurg district and belongs to the sixth generation of the Masge family of tribal artist struggling to keep this art form alive. He owns 15 of the 78 surviving sets of hand-painted narratives available in the state of Maharashtra.



CONCLUSION-

Pinguli Chitrakathi though recognized as tribal art form it is quite distinct from regular tribal art. It is not traditionally developed but shows Maratha Dakhkan and Mughal impact on it. Rather it is noticeable that Thakar Tribe has adapted this style so we need to look at this style with different perspective than trying to put it into tribal art characteristics.

The reason behind the distinct style seems to be the contact of this Thakar tribe with Shivaji Maharaj for some special purpose.

Paithan style reflects bright colours and rhythumatic lines of Ajantha. That shows any art form develops from social, political and religious influences. That is why For any art form to survive it needs some Royal or local patronage or it takes no time to extinct. The conservation of art should be observed from all levels of society. To help Chitrakathi to survive we need to arrange workshops in school, College, Art college, Government organization, Malls, Art mela, Introduce in art fair, kala mela, shoping mall, yatra jatra etc. to make more and more people aware, make documentary Films, Encourage to people to visit the Pingule If we preserve this art we can hand it over to the next generation.

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