

Folk and Minor Art in India
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Lecture - 09
Mythical Associations

A lot segment of practice in the category of folk painting is still ephemeral in nature, which is created on mud walls and floors with removable paints. The paintings done on textile base or on paper are also not of great permanence in terms of the method and materials that are used traditionally. The reason is not the unavailability of the more permanent medium, but the prevalent principle of keeping the practice fleeting and to pass on the trend by repeating and reproducing folk paintings, in body creative freedom in it is execution being disassociated with the political commissioning or any kind of political imposition on them that holds obligation of reaching out the common people and to also proliferate the knowledge of social causes to them.

Ephemeral drawings are made within the bounce of specific rules and guidelines for color and form delineations. The authors skillfully and wisely combine their experiments to the existing iconography. The guidelines related to the meets and legions are not always written, but passed on through generations as canons of the strictly followed tacit knowledge.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:01)

Mythical Association

Kalam eluttu in Kerala, is part of a ritualistic performance conducted by the drummer community, combining drumbeats, dance and chanting, using anthropomorphic depiction of the deities.

Ground paintings are formulated on folk foundation but often feature images close to classical dance performance of *Kathakali*.

Use of colour in spite of being aesthetically impeccable, are mandatory that represent conceptuality and emotion.

The five colours are corresponded to the attribute of each deity.

They use rice powder for white colour, pounded curcuma roots for yellow, extracts of acacia leaf for green, mixture of curcuma and soaked lime for the colour red and burnt paddy for black.

The *Ambalavasis* (meaning temple inhabitants) perform the main worship of *Ayyappan* as the prime deity.

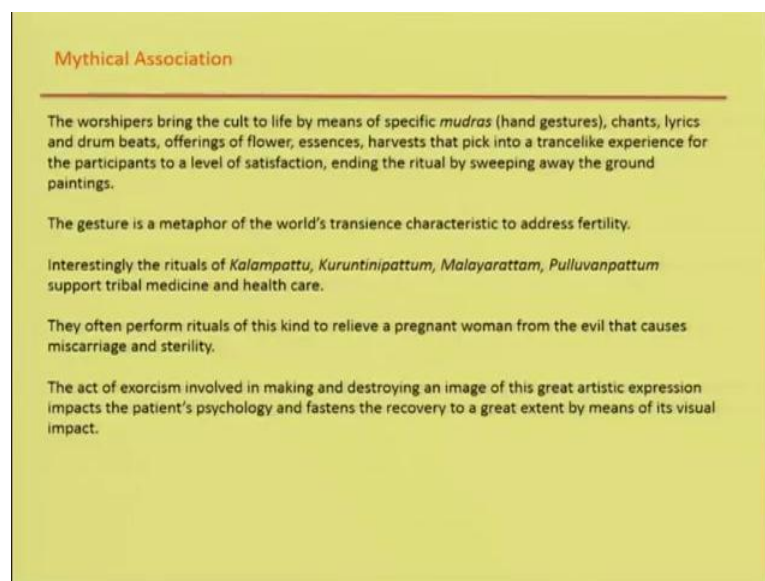
Pulluvans are offered to the *Naga* cult.

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The five colors are corresponded to the attribute of each deity. They use rice powder for white color, pounded curcuma roots for yellow, extracts of acacia leaf for green, mixture of curcuma and soaked lime for the color red and burnt paddy for black. The ambalavasis meaning temple inhabitants performs the main worship of Ayyappan as the prime deity. Pulluvans are offered to the Naga cult. The parayans known to be the awful enchanters worship local deities that probably do not belong to Hindu pantheon.

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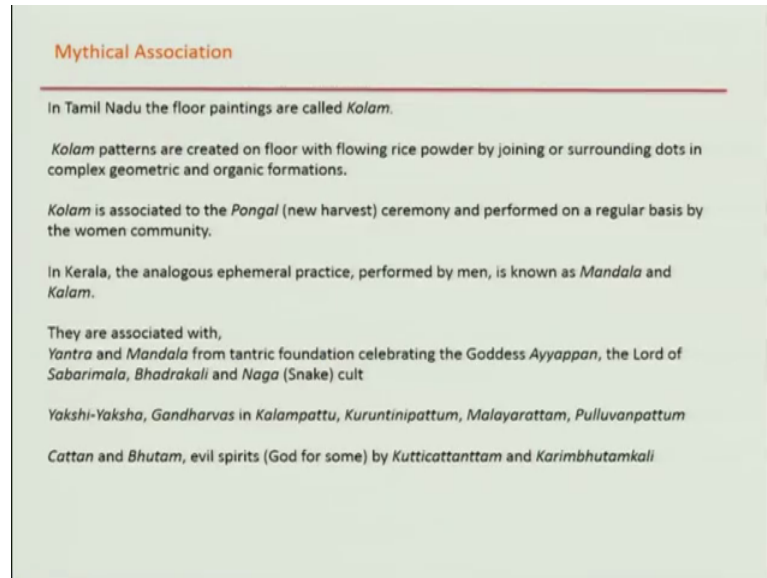


The worshipers bring the cult to life by means of specific mudras, which is hand gestures, chants, lyrics and drum beats, offering of flower, essences, harvests and pick into the trancelike experience for the participants to a level of satisfaction, ending the ritual by sweeping away the ground paintings. The gesture is a metaphor of the world's transience characteristic to address fertility.

Interestingly the rituals of Kalampattu, Kuruntinipattum, Malayarattam, Pulluvanpattum support tribal medicine and health care. They often perform rituals of this kind to relieve a pregnant woman from the evil that causes miscarriage and sterility. The act of exorcism

involves in making and destroying an image of the great artistic expression impacts the patient's psychology and fastens the recovery to a great extent by means of its visual impact.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:12)



In Tamil Nadu the floor paintings are called Kolam. Kolam patterns are created on floor with flowing rice powder by joining or surrounding dots in complex geometric and organic formations. Kolam is associated to the Pongal festival that is a new harvest ceremony and performed on a regular basis by the woman community. In Kerala, the analogous ephemeral practice, performed by men, is known as Mandala and Kalam. They are associated with, Yantra and Mandala from tantric foundation celebrating the Goddess Ayyappan, the Lord of Sabarimala, Bhadrakali and Naga cult. Yakshi-Yaksha, Gandharva in Kalampattu, Kurintinipattum, Malayarattam and Pulluvanpattum and then Cattan and Bhutam are the evil spirits, God for some by Kutticattanttam and Karimbhutamkali.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:46)

Mythical Association

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12th Century A.D. the central political powers of India underwent a decline, marking an obvious dearth in royal patronage for large-scale projects except for a few temple structures constructed in Rajasthan, Bengal and Orissa i.e. Dilwara temple of Mount Abu, Rajasthan and terracotta temples of Bengal and Orissa.

Though Muslim rulers did not support the initiatives of sculptural structures, but the period contributed gloriously to the Indian art with treasure of illustrated religious manuscripts from Hindu, Buddhist and Jain sects.

The illustrated *punthi* were created in Bihar and Bengal in Eastern India, under the tutelage of Pala style for Pala dynasty kings who were Buddhists and in Rajasthan and Gujarat of Western India in Jain miniature style. They are examples of beautiful calligraphy and illustration art done on palm leaves.



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The illustrated *punthi* were created in Bihar and Bengal in Eastern India under the tutelage for Pala dynasty kings who were Buddhists and in Rajasthan and Gujarat of Western India in Jain miniature style. They are examples of beautiful calligraphy and illustration art done on palm leaves. Seen in the picture are the two different categories one from the Pragy Paramita sutra text and these are the size of the palm leaves were the scripts were written and illustrated.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:29)

Mythical Association

Rajput Miniatures and Mughal Paintings reached their pinnacle during 16th to 19th Century A.D. Stylistically Rajput paintings are reminiscent of Ajanta murals combined with the sensibilities of folk painters, whereas, Mughal painting added Persian flavour to the Rajput miniatures. Folk artists pulled necessary influence from the illustrated texts and narrative panels on the temple relief sculptures. They exchanged the mainstream sensibilities as they wished.

It is also speculated that the folk painters were often outsourced to royal courts on a trial basis whenever the court had a dearth of manpower with no evident success.

Local artists of Gujarat, who were trained in Jain miniature style of art were brought to Mughal court during Akbar's rule and they added new dimension to the prevailing style with local features like use of bright and bold primary shades of colours and for the figures a complete profile or three quarter view with protruded eyes typical of Jain miniature style.

But when the practice of Jain miniature painting faced a crisis due to the lack of artists, the folk painters could not make up for the deficiency, for the strict rules of paintings and pressure of mass production refrained them from experiencing the same level of artistic freedom they were so used to.

Perhaps that was a cause for their periodical expulsion from their own community.

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It is also speculated that the folk painters were often outsourced to royal courts on a trial basis wherever the court had a dearth of manpower with no evident success. There are mentioning that when as I told the earlier story where the group of Jain born they had to move to the Southern India during the famine because of many crises of the other people who stayed back. They lost their memory due to malnutrition and then when the other group returned back after the famine, when everybody came back to a normal state they realize that many of the text which where orally spread got lost due to the lack of memory.

So, in that particular time they felt that they need to rescue the text from getting lost forever and in that particular time, they needed more manpower to write and illustrate all those scripts from the oral tradition to the written manuscript and they needed lots of people to help them out in that task.

It is popularly known that a group of Patti Chitrakar from Bengal and from other provinces they were called and commissioned. They were told to follow the rules of Jain miniature painting and paint them or illustrate all those Jain texts in their own ways, but they could not do it with some satisfaction because we used to the freedom that they enjoyed that they could not work under any pressure or any timeline, any deadline and that is one reason they were expelled from that place.

Also, if it is also another thing that we get to know when we visit places like Raghurajpur and Orissa that the communities who live there, they have surnames called Maharana and Maharana is not a common surname in Orissa. So, these are the group of people who were commissioned by the king of Orissa and they were all called therein Orissa from Rajasthan. They were all painters from the Western India, who were called and they were also send by some of the Western Indian king as you know as the evidence of the friendship and good relationship and they came here and now they settled back and the kind of work that they do that has a lot of Western Indian influence in the East. So, they had been amalgamation of the traditional art with the folk and minor art, but this is for true that this are based on different stories and different facts which are not written anywhere properly.

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The same level of artistic freedom that they were used to, perhaps that was a cause for their periodical expulsion from their own community. This caused them to convert their religion to Islam, but intrinsically they remained, but intrinsically they remained neither Hindu nor Muslim with free access to both religious households. In Bengal, the religious identity is the matter of a great exception. They practice the Namaaz. They also propagate Namaaz as the compulsion for Islam and paint pictures of Hindu deities narrating Hindu Sagars with equal enthusiasm. They claim that they belong to a religion of their own as the special children of God Visvakarma.

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In Bengal their religious identity is a matter of great exception. They practice and propagate *Namaz* as a compulsion for Islam and paint pictures of Hindu deities narrating Hindu sagas.

They claim that they belong to a religion of their own as the special children of God *Visvakarma*. In *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, an ancient text, there is an indication of how the artist community came into being. Lord *Visvakarma* and Apsara *Ghrithachi* fell in love and perennially took birth to unite and that resulted to the birth of their nine sons *Malakara* (Flower Sellers), *Karmakara* (Blacksmith & Carpenter), *Shankhakara* (Conch shell carver), *Kundibaka* or *Tantubayee* (Weaver), *Kumbhakara* (Potter), *Kangsakara* (Metalwork artisans), *Sutradhara* (Carpenter), *Chitrakara* (Painter) and *Swarnakara* (Goldsmith). Out of those nine sons, *Brahmins* cursed three of them - *Sutradhara* refused to collect wood for sacrificial fire; *Swarnakara* for stealing money from a *Brahmin* and *Chitrakara* made a painting, which was defective, and not according to the *Brahmin's* order.

Parashurama's Sloka further supports this fact stating that, deviation from the normal form has led the *patuas* to be exiled by the curse of the *Brahmin Society*.

"Vyati Karmena Chitranang Sadyashchitra Karaeshtta Patita Brahma shapenna Brahmananancha kopita"

Reference: Published materials and interviews of researchers and curators of Gurusaday Museum, Kolkata

However, from the very mentioning of nonconformity to a rule it is suggestive that there existed rules. *Vishnudharmottara Purana* is another text written around the same time, little before the Common Era, with mentions about canons of painting. So it may be assumed that the painters were abiding by those norms to some extent.

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Out of those nine sons, *Brahmins* cursed three of them, *Sutradhara* refused to collect wood for sacrificial fire; *Swarnakara* for stealing money from a *Brahmin* and *Chitrakara* made a painting which was defective and not according to the *Brahmins* order. *Parashurama's* Sloka further supports this fact stating that deviation from the normal form has led the *patuas* to be exiled by the curse of *Brahmin society*. "Vyati Karmena Chitranang Sadyashchitra Karaeshtta Patita Brahma shapenna Brahmananancha kopita."

The reference it is taken from the published materials and the catalogues and interviews of researchers and curators of the *Gurusaday museum, Kolkata*. However, from the very mentioning of nonconformity to a rule is suggestive that there existed rules. *Vishnudharmottara Purana* is another text written around the same time little before the common era with mentions about canons of paintings. So, it may be assumed that the painters were abiding by those norms to some extents in Bengal. The reality is that the

Patuas are considered untouchable in the society. Most of the stories related to their existence end with some clue of the painters being expelled for some reason or the other and the entire communal understanding is very complex and intricate. They were highly respected by their admirers, at the same time they are quite well known in their artistic establishment. This is also true that they try to be as ignorant as possible above their religious identities. They enjoy the two different kinds of names which are Hindu and Islamic. At the same time are they all have Hindu pet name where they have a formal Muslim name often.

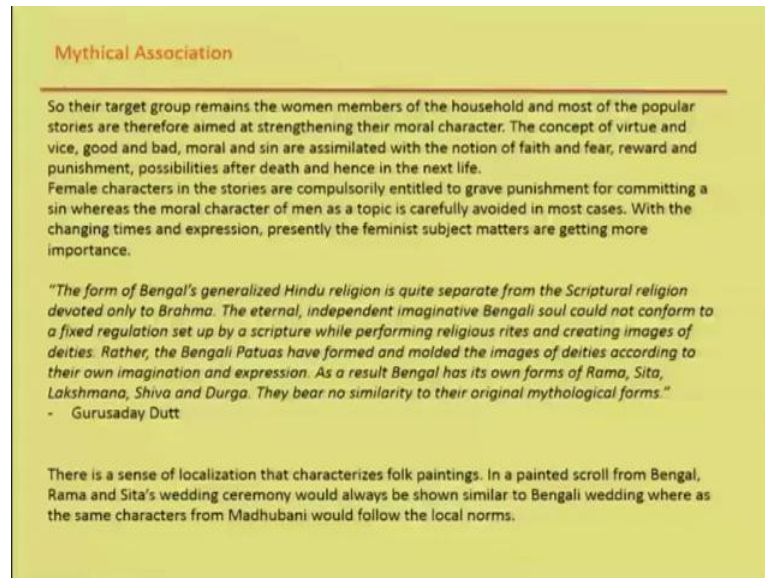
So, these are the thing which are very personal and that is connected to the social structure of that their living and regular habitual practices, but it does not really cause much of a disturbance as far as their art practices are concerned, rather it creates a new dimension to their art works where the subject matters are chosen not only for their religious identities, but because of their story telling richness that characters are taken from mythologist regardless of the religion and they are chosen and handpicked to establish certain characteristics and identities of those people to pass on some messages and that makes it more interesting.

There is some that an ancestors of the present day Patuas once drew the portrait of Mahadeva; the Lord Shiva, the great God of Hindu without seeking his permission and that is just the local saying after completing the drawing the artist apprehended that the Lord Shiva would be offended and angry and that may lead to some disaster because He is the Lord of Destruction. He is calm and He seldom gets angry, but once He is angry, He can destroy the world and that is how it goes on.

So, the painter did what he did was, he held his paint brush inside his mouth as Mahadeva came by, Mahadeva instead of being offended at the picture said that the artist would have thrown the paint brush away instead of making it inauspicious by putting inside his mouth. So, he had to curse him and his community by declaring that they would neither be Hindus nor Muslims. They would have to perform Muslim religious rites and paint stories from Hindu pantheons. The artist must not be known by their religion as said by most of the Patuas, but their artwork and the art is their soul religion interestingly the Patua community being unorthodox in their religious austerity enjoyed greater acceptance in both communities.

Many of the Patuas till date move from door to door reciting the oration and unfolding their painted scrolls to earn their daily living. They hold in their mind the obligation to inject moral principles for the betterment of the society. It is an observation by many that the visit common houses during the midday and afternoon with the male members of the household are usually away for work.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:44)



Mythical Association

So their target group remains the women members of the household and most of the popular stories are therefore aimed at strengthening their moral character. The concept of virtue and vice, good and bad, moral and sin are assimilated with the notion of faith and fear, reward and punishment, possibilities after death and hence in the next life. Female characters in the stories are compulsorily entitled to grave punishment for committing a sin whereas the moral character of men as a topic is carefully avoided in most cases. With the changing times and expression, presently the feminist subject matters are getting more importance.

"The form of Bengal's generalized Hindu religion is quite separate from the Scriptural religion devoted only to Brahma. The eternal, independent imaginative Bengali soul could not conform to a fixed regulation set up by a scripture while performing religious rites and creating images of deities. Rather, the Bengali Patuas have formed and molded the images of deities according to their own imagination and expression. As a result Bengal has its own forms of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Shiva and Durga. They bear no similarity to their original mythological forms."

- Gurusaday Dutt

There is a sense of localization that characterizes folk paintings. In a painted scroll from Bengal, Rama and Sita's wedding ceremony would always be shown similar to Bengali wedding where as the same characters from Madhubani would follow the local norms.

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expression. As a result Bengal has its own forms of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Shiva and Durga. They bear no similarity to their original mythological forms.

There is a sense of localization that characterizes folk paintings in a painted scroll from Bengal. Rama and Sita's wedding ceremony would always be shown similar to Bengali wedding, whereas the same character from Madhubani would follow the local norms. There are mentioning of stories that was also very beautifully written by the article of K. G. Subramanyan, where the story revolves on the issue of Shiva and His beautiful wife Parvathi. Parvathi was young, beautiful and the daughter of a very rich man who is the Himalaya, the mountain very powerful and she was married to Shiva who was almost a beggar. He was ignorant of all material need in the whole world and He used to move like a recluse. So, it was a mismatch of some sort, but they shared great love and respect between them.

So, it was one instance when Parvathi demands a pair of conch from her husband Shiva and Shiva does not have money to bring that, but He was willing to get that and Parvathi got angry and left home and it was a story where Shiva comes and tries to please Parvathi in disguise of female and the story was very fascinating. What we get to see there is the use of conch shell that is the conch shell bangles that is like a common ritualistic part of the Bengali household, where the married woman in Bengali community wear those bangles.

It is a sign of their marriage, but this is very interesting to see that every time we get to see certain visuals, we see that is the localization about it whereas, when we see in Madhubani painting, we see that Sita who belongs to that place Mithila in this story and also in reality. They try to establish many evidences where there are temples of Sita and she is the daughter of that particular zone and she wears a very different costume than the Sita in Bengal whereas, the two states are almost joining. They are very close to each other, but culturally they are very different.

So, there had been some kind of an effort to preserve the regional identity and it was more like cultural preservation that they maintained throughout. They did not want to go out. They had been some confinement into the style, but the texts were connected because the sources were common. It just got localized and it also become very rich and various through the imagination, the high imaginative capacities of its painters.