

Revitalizing Kurumba Paintings With Screen And Block Printing

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In many places of the world, art is a means for communication that transcends time. Artists have produced a vast array of works, including paintings and sculptures, to support causes, explore deeply personal issues, and challenge preconceived assumptions. Kurumba tribal art from the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu is one such disappearing art tradition.

The Kurumba tribes are found in the western central region of Tamil Nadu state, southern India, and the Nilgiris highlands. Originally, they were pastoralists and were most likely related to the Pallavas, who ruled Southern India in the early 4th century. Kurumba, a tribal group living in the southern part of India in the state of Tamil Nadu, has a rich heritage of painting. Many organizations are coming forward to preserve this art. Based on the facts mentioned above and with a keen interest to revive Kurumba art, the researcher has created various styles of sarees with Kurumba paintings which indeed empower the Kurumba society with surface design techniques. This project helped to uplift their lifestyle and gave them an opportunity to honor and popularize their traditional art. In the last few years, the concept of fashion has changed and people love to get products with traditional values which in turn supports society.

Keywords: Revival, Dying Art Form, Kurumba Painting, Printing Techniques.

1. Introduction

Textile printing is the process of applying colour to fabric in definite patterns or designs. In properly printed fabrics the colour is bonded with the fiber, so as to resist washing and friction. Textile printing is related to dyeing but, whereas in dyeing proper the whole fabric is uniformly covered with one colour, in printing one or more colours are applied to it in certain parts only, and in sharply defined patterns says Tozer and Levitt (1983). Hind (1993) writes that textile printing was known in Europe, via the Islamic world, from about the 12th century, and widely used. However, the European dyes tended to liquify, which restricted the use of printed patterns. Fairly large and ambitious designs were printed for decorative purposes such as wall-hangings and lectern-cloths, where this was less of a problem as they did not need washing. When paper became common, the technology was rapidly used on that for woodcut prints.

Textiles with design elements or motifs which are applied to the surface of the fabric with colorants such as dyes or pigment. Many different types of printing methods exist, some of

which include rotary screen printing, heat transfer printing and block printing says Mitras (2000). Meller and elffers (1995) remarks that textile designs breakdown the families into categories based on one or more of the following criteria- motif, layout, color, fabrication. Textile printing has evolved from block printing by hand, to copper plate printing, to roller printing, to Perrotine printing to screen printing by hand, to flatbed screen printing, to the current system of the choice. All these methods have in common their effort to translate the artist work faithfully from paper to cloth. Murphy (2003) is of the opinion that the idea of printing the fabric developed in India few centuries before the birth of Christ. India has long been renowned for the quality of her cotton and silk cloth and also the skill of her dyers. Silk screen printing is a modern innovation a faster method of printing. It is introduced to cater to the tremendous demand for printed fabrics. Screens are more expensive and once made need to be utilized to printing several hundred meters of cloth at a time.

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2. Objectives

The aims and objectives of the study includes

- Studying the Kurumba paintings.
- Designing saree collection using Kurumba paintings for women
- Creating Kurumba designs in the fabric using block printing and screen-printing techniques
- Creating sarees using Kurumba paintings
- Evaluating the saree collection with Kurumba paintings with the faculty members (men), faculty members (women), college students (boys and girls), fashion design students (boys and girls), designers, retailers, weavers, merchandisers, working women and working men.

3. Scope and Methodology

3.1. Selection of Tribal Painting

Nilgiris, over the years had a passion for tribal residents practicing their fascinating culture. Nilgiris is ecologically and culturally home to six primitive tribal groups in which Kurumba were very special tribal group of people who practiced a traditional art form in which artist took inspiration from the milestones in the tribal life and draws figures. The researcher has attempted to integrate the Kurumba painting in the sarees and bring out its beauty.

3.2. Selection of Age Group and Sex

Kurumba painting illustrates human figures made with minimal lines, they are much suitable to form designs with adult and adolescent garments. In adult group, working women were selected for the study because they have the maturity to accept the tribal design easily. From adolescent age group, college going students were selected because they set the trend for the fashion and they used to accept the trends sooner than other age groups. With the reference

to the above facts, the researcher selected college going adolescents, working women for this study.

3.3. Printing Process

Printing is one of the methods selected to recreate the Kurumba painting. The researcher had selected screen printing method and block printing method for create design for this study. “Cultivation” painting was converted by screen printing method and “Honey cultivation” painting was converted through block printing method.

3.3.1. Screen Printing

Screen printing is probably the most versatile of the printing techniques, as it uses a porous mesh screen with an ink-resistant image on its surface as a template to transfer ink to substrates. “Cultivation” painting was converted into textile design through screen printing technique. Screen printing process involves the following steps

1. Design creation
2. Screen preparation
3. Exposure of screen
4. Printing process
5. after treatment

The process of screen printing starts with design creation with a painting - cultivation. Through Photoshop, the designs were created digitally and get it printed on a black and white transparency. Human figures and crop motifs were converted into digital motifs. Next step was to coat the screen with emulsion so that the screen making a thin even layer on the both sides of the screen. After the screen was coated, leave it to dry in a dark area. Then the screen was exposed with a halogen lights. First, lay down a black piece of fabric. Bring the screen and place it upside down on the fabric. Next place your design backwards on the screen and put the piece of glass on top. Everywhere the light has hit, the emulsion has hardened. The screen was washed to clean out the remaining, unhardened emulsion. This made the area of the design open for ink to come through. Before printing, fabric was stretched on the printing table and pinned firmly. The pigment dyes were prepared for black colour. Screen was placed over the fabric and a small amount of dyes were poured on the top of the screen. Now keep the squeegee at about a 45 degree angle and while pushing down with some pressure and pull the ink across the design. So, it will push the ink through the screen and onto the fabric. Then the screen was lifted. This step was repeated till the desired result was achieved. The screen-printed sample was treated in the curing chamber. This aids in improved colour fastness.

3.3.2. Block Printing

Block Printing was one of the oldest types of printmaking. “Cultivation” painting was converted into the textile through block printing method. Images that were printed with block printing technique were typically much bolder than other types of print making: The blocks were carved by hand, there was often less detail and more texture to the prints. The first step was to sketch the design on the craft foam. The foam was good because it had a smooth, flat, waterproof surface that was slightly spongy and made a perfect printing medium. It was

important to reverse the image as the printed image will be the reverse of what is on the block. Then the designs were cut out very carefully with scissors and stuck onto the small rectangular piece of tile to create blocks. Block printing was undertaken on both cotton and silk fabrics of varying counts. The fabric required a preprinting treatment where the fabric to be printed was washed free of starch. The fabric was stretched over the printing table and fastened with small pins. These blocks were then dipped in dye and imprinted on to the fabric. The printing started from left to right. When the block was applied to the fabric, it slammed hard with the fist so that a good impression has registered. A point on the block serves as a guide for the repeat impression, so that the whole effect was continuous and not disjointed. Fabrics were dried out in the sun after the printing as part of the fixing process. They were rolled in wads of newspapers to prevent the dye from adhering to other layers. The fabric, after printing is dried out in the sun. This is fixing process or after treatment of printing. It is then rolled in wads of newspapers to prevent the dye from adhering to other layers and it was finished by ironing out single layers, which fix the color permanently.

3.4. Creation of sarees with Kurumba paintings

Selected motifs of the Kurumba paintings were extracted and were converted into textile design through various fabric printing methods.

3.4.1. Sarees with Printed Designs

Kurumba paintings were created on the fabric with screen printing and block printing method. Screen printing was done with “Cultivation” painting and block printing was done with “Honey Cultivation” painting.

3.4.1.1. Sarees with Screen Printing

Screen printing was an interesting method of printing designs on the fabric with the help of a screen. The designs to be printed were exposed on a mesh fabric which was used as a screen



for printing. Motifs were taken from “cultivation” paintings and it was applied on the sarees. The following sarees were designed and printed with screen prints. Saree was screen printed with motifs taken from Kurumba painting. Motifs like crops and people from cultivation were converted into the screen.

Figure 1 - Sarees with Screen printing

3.4.1.1. Sarees with Block Printing

Block printing was a traditional method of printing designs on the fabric. Blocks were prepared with craft foam according to the motif in the “Honey Cultivation” painting. Motifs like tribal people playing two faced drum, sowing the crops, harvesting the crops and women’s dancing was taken from the painting.

Figure 2 - Sarees with Block printing



3.5. Evaluation

Five different questionnaires were prepared and distributed to the group of evaluators. The first set of questionnaires is given to faculty members, second set of questionnaires was given to college students. Third set of questionnaires was given to group of retailers, weavers, designers, merchandiser and fashion design students and they were asked to evaluate the sarees collection created with printing technique. Working men and working women were given a different set of questionnaires to evaluate the sarees. Responses were tabulated irrespective of the category of the respondent. Further cross tabulation was performed to analyze response by respondent category through percentage.

4. Result and Discussion

Sarees were evaluated by faculty members (men), faculty member (women), students (boys and girls), fashion design students (boys and girls), working women and working men, designers, retailers, weavers and merchandisers. Suitability of design in the sarees, placement of design, colour combination and overall appearance were evaluated with rating scale (excellent, good, fair, poor, very poor). The results are tabulated and explained below.

A questionnaire was administered to 500 individuals for evaluating the Kurumba tribal designs in sarees. These evaluators are faculty members (men), faculty member (women), students (boys and girls), fashion design students (boys and girls), working women and working men, designers, retailers, weavers and merchandisers. Fifty samples were collected among faculty members (men), faculty member (women), students (boys and girls), designing students (boys and girls), working women and working men. Twenty-five samples were collected among designers, retailers, weavers and merchandisers.

4.1. Kurumba Design as Screen Print

As far as the Kurumba design as screen print is concerned, 85% of the respondents felt that the screen print designs were excellent. A minor proportion of respondents 9% has expressed that they are good; whereas 1 – 3% of respondents has articulated the screen print designs as fair and poor. It is “very poor” states by 0.3% of the respondents.

Table 1 - Kurumba design as screen print

RESPONDENTS	RESPONSE %				
	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	V.POOR
FACULTY MEMBERS - MEN	74	18	3	4	1
FACULTY MEMBERS -WOMEN	90	8	2	0	0
STUDENTS - BOYS	86	9	4	1	0
STUDENTS - GIRLS	89	9	1	1	0
FASHION DESIGN STUDENTS	90	5	3	1	1
DESIGNERS	87	6	4	2	1
WEAVERS	89	8	3	1	0
RETAILERS	92	6	1	1	0
MERCHANDISERS	81	11	5	3	0
WORKING MEN	96	2	1	1	0
WORKING WOMEN	70	19	7	3	1
TOTAL	86	9	3	2	0

It may be observed that 86 – 96% of working men, retailers, faculty members (women), fashion design students, students (girls), weavers, designers, students (boys) have expressed that the Kurumba designs as screen print is excellent, while 81% of merchandisers, 74% of faculty members (men) and 70% of working women shared the same opinion.

Figure 3 - Kurumba design as screen print



4.2. Kurumba design as block print

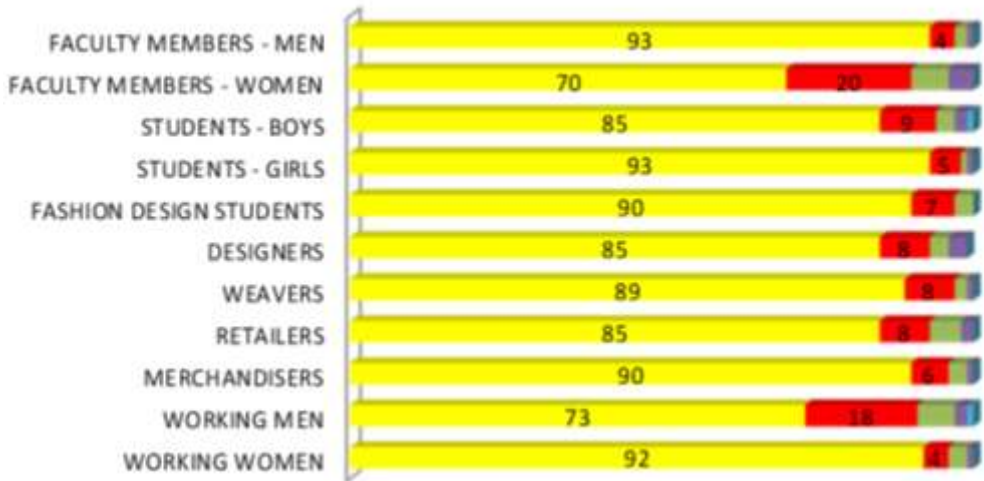
Table 2 and figure 4 indicate that 86% of the evaluators have rated the Kurumba block design as excellent, whereas 9% of them feel that it is good, 3% of them have express it as good and below 2% of the respondents rated the same as poor and very poor.

Table 2 - Kurumba design as block print

RESPONDENTS	RESPONSE %				
	EXCELL ENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	V.POOR
FACULTY MEMBERS - MEN	93	4	2	1	0
FACULTY MEMBERS -WOMEN	70	20	6	4	0
STUDENTS - BOYS	85	9	3	2	1
STUDENTS - GIRLS	93	5	1	1	0
FASHION DESIGN STUDENTS	90	7	3	0	0
DESIGNERS	85	8	3	3	0
WEAVERS	89	8	2	1	0
RETAILERS	85	8	5	2	0
MERCHANDISERS	90	6	3	1	0
WORKING MEN	73	18	6	2	1
WORKING WOMEN	92	4	3	1	0
TOTAL	86	9	3	2	0

It may be observed that 89- 93% of faculty members (men), students (girls), working women, fashion design students, merchandisers and weavers has shown the rating as excellent. The remaining groups of evaluators have rated between 73 – 85%. None of the faculty members (men and women), students (girls), fashion design students, weavers, designers, retailers, merchandisers and working women has reported the Kurumba block print designs was very poor.

Figure 4 - Kurumba design as block print



5. Conclusion

The integration of Kurumba paintings into screen and block printing on sarees represents a significant step towards preserving and revitalizing this ancient tribal art form. By adapting these traditional motifs to contemporary textile designs, we not only honor the rich cultural heritage of the Kurumba tribe but also create new avenues for artistic expression. This project has demonstrated that traditional art forms can be successfully merged with modern techniques to produce unique and marketable products. In conclusion, the revitalization of Kurumba paintings through screen and block printing on sarees is more than an artistic endeavor; it is a holistic approach to cultural preservation, ensuring that the rich tapestry of India's cultural heritage continues to thrive in the modern world.

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