CHAPTER – 7
OCCUPATIONAL BASED FOLK PAINTINGS
CHERIAL NAKASHI PAINTING

Cherial Paintings

Plate No. 180

Plate No. 180A
Introduction:

‘The Cherial scroll painting is stylized version of ‘Nakashi’ art rich in local Motif, peculiar to Talangana region of Andhra Pradesh.

The scrolls are painted in a narrative format much like a film roll, or comics- strip, depicting stories of mythology and folk- lore, and intimately shorter stories from Puranas and Epics.

Either these paintings are prevalent across Andhra as also various other part India, albeit flavored their distinct style and other local peculiarity dictated by local customers or traditions.

In the same way Cherials scrolls must have been popular across the Telangana in a earlier time though with ad-
vent of Television, Cinema and Computers, it has been fenced into its last outpost, the Cherial village.’

**Origination:**

‘The scroll paintings on the cloth, which are hitherto unknown but crucial form of Deccan Painting.

The Deccan is the territory south of the Vindhya Mountains and River Narmada and to the North of Krishna and Thunga Bhadra rivers. This region comprises the present states of Maharashtra, Northern Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. These scrolls paintings were painted and shown in Telangana 'Heart of the Deccan' in the North Western Andhra (now Telanagan State). They were painted by local artists and used by minstrel showmen in several villages in Telangana’. 

**History:**

‘The Scroll painting has rich history and play important role in the ancient artistic tradition. In China scroll paintings were part of the sophisticated tradition of the Nobility and the Court.

In India, however, scroll painting was propagative of itinerant bard and the village artist, in essence a folk tradition of the village.

In each region and village developed its own scroll painting traditions, marked by characteristic content form and technic depending on the local patronage and socio-economic
Orissa and Bengal are famous for their “Pattachitra” traditions, while above mentioned traditions could have significantly influenced the Cherial scroll paintings, which was to be a distinctly local invention, peculiar to Telangana region drawing mainly as a local tradition.

It can safely be said that the local temple art traditions and Kalamkari tradition across Telangana in particular and graphic art traditions of the Deccan and south Indian, in general were the major influences that shaped and guided the art of scroll paintings.

However it should also we remembered that the sphere of activity, subject and the artistic idiom of every scroll painting including that of Cherial is peculiar and confined to the village or abetment, the scrolls were very important part of sociological and cultural settings of Telangana.

In the earlier times, scrolls were colorful back drops to the equally interesting oral traditions of common people-the village harijan, the barber, the toddy-tapper, the dhobi, the charmer (leather worker), the fishermen, the weaver and farmer (Madiga, Goud, Muddiraju, Malas Padmashali, Chakali and Mangali) the seven working and marginalized castes and communities of the village.

The scrolls set out the adventures and exploits of local folk heroes, who performed on fringes of epics, Puranas,
etc., of the Hindu greater tradition.

Each community had its peculiarities and its favorite heroes and heroines as also selection of stories from local mythology.  

THE TRADITION:

‘The traditional art form became inseparable part of profession of the story telling, the balladeer community known as “Kaki Padagollu” displayed scrolls, and accompanied by music and dance. They went from village to village narrating and singing their ballads based from their rich folk lore which was rooted in the puranas and Indian epics enliven many a lazy village evening.

In a typical recitation, story teller, (the balladeer) wander as a team of usually five people with two to narrate the story and other would provide a simple but hectic musical accompaniment with harmonium Tabla and clarinets. The stage also would a simple affair, erected on four poles with a horizontal bar on which scrolls could be displayed.’

THE SCROLLS:

‘The scroll would flow like a film roll, it was generally around 3ft. side, and went up to 60 ft. in length depending on the story.

The traditional scrolls are normally in vertical format illustrating stories in a horizontal panels a floral border in
the middle separates the two panels while linear narrative is demonstrated by holding both hands are suspended from tree or building and continually rolling up.

Not withstanding the specific themes of these different castes, differ from each other on issues such as length, format, and in general direction of their painted narratives.

Scrolls of model Puranam are vertically Structured those of Jambhavata Puranam are horizontal. Some of the narrative begins at right side and proceed to left side and vice versa.

Other like those of Enotic Gouds begins at the top and moves downwards, while that of Gouda Chettys begins at the bottom.

These Pictorial differences within scrolls are specific and there became crucial marker of identity of story tellers. They are therefore stringently enforced by the performers (bards). And carefully adhered to by the Nakashi’s.

Each painted narrative is Sacred Caste narrative which explains how a particular caste came to be in its present form. These texts although divergent and distinct and also inter related and in edition to be read inter-textually. Well-orchestrated above all is sense of composition and sense of narration is remarkable.¹ ⁵
Process:
(Making of Cherial Painting)

‘The making of Canvas is a very elaborate Procedure. The Khadhi Cotton is treated with a mixture of starch, suddha matti (white mud), a paste of tamarind seeds and gum water. It has to be ensured every coating thoroughly dried before next coat is applied. Once canvas is ready the artist sketches the outline directly on the canvas using a brush.

The outlines are very well defined and sharp reflecting the quality and the experience of craftsmen.

The colours are made by the artists themselves from natural sources. The brushes are made from squirrel hair tied to a stick. The thick brushes are hair of goat’s tail. Women help in painting while men do the final details.’

CHARACTERISTICS

‘The Cherial Painting are easily be recognized by the following peculiarities and unique characteristics.

Painted in vivid hues, mostly primary colours with predominantly the red in the background of the paintings, are characterized by unbridled imagination of local artisans who are not constrained by academic rigour that characterized by
more classical Tanjore painting and Mysore painting.

For example artist hardly bothers about perspective and sets the narrative by placing relevant figures in appropriate order, and position, in relevant background.

The iconography of event the major deities like Shiva, Vishnu has strong idiom. The subjects of these scroll paintings are easy as themes and stories are familiar and are drawn from ancient literary mythological and folk traditions.

The common themes are the Krishna Leela, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Shiva Puranam, Markandeya Puranam. Interspersed with ballads and old stories of commonalities like Gouda, Madiga and so on.

The main narrative is spiced up with scenes from simple life: women doing chores in the kitchen, men working in the fields, festival scenes etc... endearingly depicted.

The costumes and settings in which the figures are depicted are typical of Andhra Culture. Within narrow panels, proportion is created by depicting trees or building, a pillar with drawn curtains etc.

However more often than not, the proportion of individual character is determined by their relative impor-
tance in that particular scene with most important character being the largest and most detail, and lesser one smaller and lesser in detail.

What is next, more peculiar to these scroll is the vigor, their inter related colour areas and continual regard for rhythm which permeates through and links together the entire scroll as once limit heavy viral, rounded and firm out lines which enclose the brightly coloured and local areas and figures all set against dominant red background.

The general layout, the choice of episodes to be painted in each panel, and iconography of each deity seem to have been traditional set out for scrolls made for different castes.

If one compares an early scrolls with that of the same theme painted at a later date, the elements are practically same. Reason for this is, that when colours of the scroll had flanked it was given to the artists to be painted over and is a scroll was badly frayed it was thrown in to river and new one commissioned.

In the latter case however, before immersion of the frayed work, the performer would stay for three or four days, with the painter and get rough layout and drawing sketched in accordance with the narratives, depicted in the frayed work.

The Cloth for new scroll was provided by performers while painting materials was artist’s own. When the
painting was finished performer would pay the artist in cash, clothing, grain, and goat.

When an old scroll badly damaged it was cremated and immersed in a river, like a dead person and other related rituals were followed.  

PERFORMERS

‘They are hereditary professionals and are invited by the members of a particular caste group.

They moved from village to village giving performances, except during the rainy season. Performances took place in the evening and continued for a week. The spectacle and narration started with the prayers to Ganesh whose large image is shown in the opening panel of the most scrolls.

The main narrative was accompanied by Four or Five male members of the family, while other played musical instruments, rarely did the women folk join the troupe, if so only to sing. The performers were paid by the invite in cash and kind, as well as some audience also contribute.
CLASSIFICATION OF PERFORMERS

Enumerated here are some of the most popular legends depicted in these paintings, the caste of which they were shown and caste of their performers.

1. Markandeya and Bhavana Rishi Purana (about Legendary – Progenitor of Padma shali or weavers. Performed before Padmashalis by the “ Kune Pullalu”

2. “The Virata Parva” episode from Mahabharata performed before kanbis (agriculturalist, heads men domestic helpers etc), by Kaki Padagilu and Pandavalu


5. Gond Purana and Ballanaraju Katha – Performed before Goud Caste. (Wine sellers, Goud Chettis.)

STYLE

In contrast to folk style of narrative scrolls with mythological themes are the Yamapatas and Jadupatas, which were painted by artists minstrels or village painters in different regions of our country. Those who from Telangana are in fairly refined style which cannot be termed folk.

They do not show any influence of the court painting prevailing at the Muslim Courts of Golconda of Hyderabad. The refined style of scrolls of this group makes it evident that the same painters were commissioned by Hindu aristocracy and by common people at the same period. Thus there is no line of demarcation between paintings done at Hindu Court and at the village level.

To better understand the style of the early scroll and latter examples (1775) of this group and established their connections in pictorial conversions with Vijayanagara and southern Nayaka Paintings, it would be useful to underline the characteristics of the latter two styles.

The following traits parallels in style discerned both in scrolls of early date and above two Southern Schools of Painting-the seminude figures are agile and stand on the base lines with feet and heads shown in profile and directed to one side, leaving the chest almost in front view. They show a sensuous
appreciation of volume in their rounded contours which are
treated and clearly and have powerful limbs and vehement ges-
ture which are accentuated by their gliding curves. Forehead
and nose are in one peaked line and Eye large without fore-
shortening in some figures more sinuous profile with part of the
further Eye also visible.

Interestingly, in our early scroll also pupils of the
large eyes, following the Vijayanagara convention, are painted
along the lower eyelids.

The sweep of the stripped garments and swing of
fluttering girdles gives an illusion of angular spiraling move-
ment to the figures which display a fondness for towering jew-
eled crowns and elaborately and pleated draperies, The hard flat
curves of their design and patterns emphasized in different
colours.

The colour and position of drapery and ornaments
have a purely formal purpose and though the line cannot resist
the urge to following swelling contours of the figures, there by
giving them scale and dignity, it is not allowed to disturb the
rich two dimensional texture of painted surface. It is noted that
with each decade, costumes, the crowns, the ornaments, show
slight changes, regional preferences are observed.'
PRESENT TIMES

In recent times “Nakashi” shifted to different professions as their art has no takers. The long stories from the local mythologies have been cut short, as the traditional patrons for long scrolls no longer exists.

The artisans are forced to adapt smaller version of scrolls, depicting in a single episode or character from traditional stories. Since these scrolls are amenable to framing and can be hung on walls in modern homes, the scrolls are made, into smaller paintings to suit the needs.

Further colours are not prepared traditionally any longer and synthetic ones are used and involves less labor and are economical. Cherial paintings have made their way on Gift-Boxes, Candle-Stands and even on textiles.

Only one family, the descendents of “Nakashi” Venkata Ramaiah still continue to paint in the Cherial village.

Venkata Ramaiah's son, Chandraiah his son Nageshwar, Chandraiah's brother Vaikuntam, are few still practice this art and are popularizing this art form by participating in various festivals and demonstrations organized by the government.

In fact the late Venkata Ramaiah was perhaps the finest amongst the scroll painters after 1900. Although the European red, Blue and yellow his placement of colours was well orchestrated, and above all, the sense of composition and clar-
ity of narration were remarkable.

However Chandraiah and his family are creditable, in spite of the odds, their art having earned the name of Cherial painting, it is a great wonder that it is still alive, despite numerous challenges. The passion of Cherial artist has helped to preserve a veritable piece, in Indian rich cultural mosaic.

**INSPIRATION**

‘Many contemporary artists have been inspired by the Cherial tradition paintings.

Laxman Aelay of Kadhiren Gudam of Telangana is one, whose vibrant, quasi – realistic paintings and arduously drawn imagery evoke sense of apprehension and nostalgia.

His men and women air typical Telangana cultural identity in all its vitality and vigor and demonstrate highly skillful renditions of portraits layered with imagery taken from folk art of “Nakashi”.

The life size hyper realistic street performers” Itinerant bards and tantalizing common people, built and rebuilt over multiple layer of motifs, that burst from his subconscious memories reveling predicaments of the oppressed communities.’

8
References:


2, 7 & 8. Deccani Picture show men - 17th 19th century by Padmasri Jagadeesh Mittal.

Internet References:

1. wikipidia.org/wiki/cheriyalscroll_paintings
2. wikipidia.org/wiki/cheriyalscroll_paintings
3. wikipidia.org/wiki/cheriyalscroll_paintings
4. wikipidia.org/wiki/cheriyalscroll_paintings
5. wikipidia.org/wiki/cheriyalscroll_paintings

Personal References:


Reference of Plates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate No.</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>180 &amp; 180A. Cover</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181. Rasaleela</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182. Pandavas</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183. Pot Makers</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184. Rasaleela</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185. Women at their Chores</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186. Ambari</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187. Women at Work</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188. Daily Chores</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189. Dialy Chores</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190. Gokulam</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## List of Personalities Interviewed (Cherial Painters)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No</th>
<th>Name of the Person</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chandraiah S/o. Venkatramaiah</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Cherial Village Adilabad Dt.</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>D. Vaikuntam Nakash (NMC)</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>H.No. 75/5/109, Street No. 7 Srisairam Colony Boduppal Mdl. Ghatkesar. RR dt. TS.</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>D. Vanaja</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>H.No. 75/5/109, Street No. 7 Srisairam Colony Boduppal Mdl. Ghatkesar. RR dt. TS.</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>D. Rakhesh Nakash</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>H.No. 75/5/109, Street No. 7 Srisairam Colony Boduppal Mdl. Ghatkesar. RR dt. TS.</td>
<td>M.Tech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>D. Vinay Kumar</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>H.No. 75/5/109, Street No. 7 Srisairam Colony Boduppal Mdl. Ghatkesar. RR dt. TS.</td>
<td>BFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>T. Nageswar Nakash</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>H.No. 16/8/8/1, PO Cherial Mdl. Warangal dt.</td>
<td>12th Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>T. Padma</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>H.No. 16/8/8/1, PO Cherial Mdl. Warangal dt.</td>
<td>SSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>D. Saikiran</td>
<td>Traditional Cherial Painter</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>H.No. 44/88/1/2, Beerappanagar Jagadigirtta Hyderabad - 37</td>
<td>BFA Painting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rasaleela
Plate No.181

Pandavas
Plate No.182
Potmakers
Plate No. 183

Rasaleela
Plate No. 184
Women at their Chores
Plate No. 185
Ambari
Plate No. 186
Women at work
Plate No. 187
Daily Chores
Plate No.188

Daily Chores
Plate No.189
Gokulam
Plate No.190