

MAKING KALAMKARI TEXTILES:  
ARTISANS AND AGENCY IN COROMANDEL, INDIA

by

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## Abstract

This study sheds light on the undertheorized histories of artisan communities on the Coromandel region of southeastern India who were responsible for producing masterfully crafted dyed, painted and printed cottons during the early modern era. The textiles from these workshops are known as *kalamkari* (literally ‘pen work’) and were integral components of the early modern trade networks connecting India with other parts of Asia and Europe. Subsequently, these fabrics were collected and documented by the leading museums and institutions in India and the world. Kalamkaris have been regularly included in major exhibitions globally since 1970. However, a critical assessment of the agency of these textile makers was largely absent in the studies. What are the possible ways to reconstruct the agency of these textile makers whose practice thrived leaving hardly any trace but the textiles?

Recent scholarship has provided methodological tools to identify the multiplicity of historical accounts and the ephemeral histories of the Deccan. My thesis expands the parameters of these approaches by foregrounding the multifaceted practice of the contemporary kalamkari makers. My sustained engagement with block makers of Pedana, dyers in Polavaram and Hyderabad, and other artisans of the Coromandel has informed my understanding of agency. I have repeatedly referred to a set of early modern and contemporary kalamkari fabrics from Indian museum collections to further my argument. Building on a rich corpus of interdisciplinary scholarship, fieldwork, and object analysis, I theorize “agency” as a fluid rather than fixed notion that embodies a series of complex interactions between the textile makers and their surroundings. Through repeating the intangible bodily practice of their masters and ancestors, the textile makers produce, sustain, and transform craft making. I emphasize that kalamkari making is the practice of continuously reconfiguring artisanal subject position by signaling the entanglement of agency and bodily actions—the repository of historically informed knowledge of the craftspeople. This exploration contributes to the ongoing scholarly discussions on the early modern cosmopolitanism, sensorial aspects of material culture, and embodied histories of the marginalized craftspeople.

## **Lay Summary**

The early modern dyed, painted, and printed textiles (also called kalamkari) from the Coromandel region of southeastern India remain one of the most widely studied South Asian textiles across the world. Collaboratively produced by the communities of dyers, block makers, painters, and printers, the kalamkari textiles have strengthened our understanding of early modern oceanic trade, cultural exchange, and cosmopolitanism. However, the contribution of the artisans remained underrepresented in the scholarship due to the lack of evidential records on their livelihood. This thesis focuses on retrieving the suppressed accounts of the artisanal past and recognize their integrity. I approach this problem by prioritizing alternative modes of memorizing the past—through oral narratives and bodily actions of textile making, also explored in the recent scholarship. My study recognizes the cruciality of bringing the active presence of contemporary artisans into this investigation to reconstruct the agency of the historical kalamkari makers.



## Preface

This dissertation is the original and independent work by the author, Rajarshi Sengupta. The fieldwork reported in this thesis was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate (subject: H15-00908). Three peer-reviewed essays were published based on the material presented in this thesis: “Many Gatherings: Cosmopolitan World of a Golconda Coverlet,” *Journal18*, vol. East-Southeast (2017) drew on the analysis of the Golconda Coverlet furnished in Chapter 3; examination of the craft tools from Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 contributed to “An Artisanal History of *Kalam*?” *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* 7, no. 1 (2019): 25-37; “Performing Histories: Enduring Dyes and Waterways in Artisanal Lives,” *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* (2019), DOI: 10.1080/20511787.2019.1648992, is a concise version of my argument in Chapter 2.

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## Introduction

A recent drive to envision the ephemeral histories of India's Deccan foregrounds a key question—how to reconstruct practices which thrived in the past without leaving substantial traces?<sup>1</sup> Historian Daud Ali and art historian Emma Flatt's invigorating project tracing the histories of pre-colonial Deccani gardens has addressed this and also enriched the interplay between tangibility and ephemerality.<sup>2</sup> Gardens are in between representations and embodiment; they are not only constructed spaces but also repositories of sensory experiences. Despite being carefully designed, many garden spaces in the Deccan have changed over time due to human interactions and lack of conservation.<sup>3</sup> Whereas these transformations in the planned garden spaces have made the tasks of reconstruction challenging, they compelled Ali and Flatt to navigate through the traces of human experiences around these spaces recorded in various media. Their methodological approach reflects the concerns for safeguarding ephemeral practices delineated by the 2003 UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention and the scholarship assessing the historicity of cultural practices.<sup>4</sup>

A proclivity in these studies noted above towards bridging craft making, oral narratives, and social practices with inanimate cultural objects and monuments has expanded the scope of historical inquiry.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the overlapping of “sensuality” and “sociality” in anthropological studies from the 1990s has led to questioning the predominance of sight over other sensory faculties.<sup>6</sup> The turn to the potentials of sensory perceptions demonstrates that

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<sup>1</sup> Monica Juneja, “Preface,” in *Garden and Landscape Practices in Pre-colonial India: Histories from the Deccan*, eds. Daud Ali and Emma J. Flatt (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), xxi.

<sup>2</sup> See Daud Ali and Emma J. Flatt, “Introduction,” in *Garden and Landscape Practices in Pre-colonial India*, 1-17.

<sup>3</sup> Ali and Flatt point to the lack of administrative and scholarly attention to Deccani gardens as opposed to Mughal gardens in northern India. *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> D. Fairchild Ruggles and Helaine Silverman, “From Tangible to Intangible Heritage,” in *Intangible Heritage Embodied*, eds. D. Fairchild Ruggles and Helaine Silverman (New York: Springer, 2009), 1. Also, see *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Along with craft making, oral narratives, and social practices, the other categories of intangible heritage recognized by UNESCO are “performing arts (such as traditional music, dance, and theater)” and “knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.” Ruggles and Silverman, “From Tangible,” 2.

<sup>6</sup> David Howes, “Sensual Relations,” in *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 56.

memorizing past experiences in the present can effectively inform knowledge about a past which has left little tangible signs for contemporary researchers.<sup>7</sup> Scholars of South Asian art and textiles, Kishwar Rizvi and Sylvia Houghteling stress that the retrieval of affects, emotions, and sensory responses are central to constructing early modern histories and subjectivities.<sup>8</sup> Building on these dynamic approaches to perceive and theorize ephemeral histories, my study will attempt to reconstruct the agency of the dyed, painted, and printed textile makers of the early modern Coromandel region in south eastern India by considering the lives and practices of select contemporary practitioners from this region.

My emphasis on the multiplicity of historical accounts of these painted and printed textile makers is drawn from the pioneering studies on marginalized communities put forward by the Subaltern Studies scholars. In particular, I consider how identity or the assertion of a particular subject-position is marked through the study of the past. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty stresses the importance of recognizing the multiplicity of subject-positions and the limitations of institutional narratives to uncover neglected histories.<sup>9</sup> He states, “history writing assumes plural ways of being in the world.”<sup>10</sup> Marginalized or neglected historical accounts resist the process of historicization and lead to questions regarding the functioning of the discipline of professional history—predominantly based on tangible evidence.<sup>11</sup> As I have noted above, a similar concern

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<sup>7</sup> See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Constantina Nadia Seremetakis, “The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory,” in *The Senses Still: perception and memory as material culture in modernity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 1-18.

<sup>8</sup> Kishwar Rizvi, “Introduction: Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in the Early Modern Period,” in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture*, ed. Kishwar Rizvi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 1-20; Sylvia Houghteling, “Sentiment in Silks: Safavid Figural Textiles in Mughal Courtly Culture,” in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires*, ed. Kishwar Rizvi, 124-47.

<sup>9</sup> My understanding of the notion of “histories” is derived from historian Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty argues that the discipline of history is one of the many ways to envision the past. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 9 (1998): 477. Chakrabarty elaborates on his argument in his seminal publication *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. He states, “The act of championing minority histories has resulted in discoveries of subaltern pasts, constructions of historicity that help us see the limits to modes of viewing enshrined in the practices of the discipline of history. Why? Because the discipline of history—as has been argued by many (from Greg Denning to David Cohen in recent times)—is only one among ways of remembering the past.” Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Minority History, Subaltern Pasts,” in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 106.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

of moving beyond the scope of evidence-based investigations is raised by the advocates of ephemeral histories. However, in Subaltern Studies the focus remains on the politics of suppressing marginalized voices.<sup>12</sup>

Critical theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the writing of history is largely responsible for constructing the position of the *privileged* and the *neglected*.<sup>13</sup> Subjectivity and the issue of writing history are organically intertwined since authoritarian versions of the past repeatedly suppress alternative ones. Although Structuralist and Post-structuralist theorists have questioned the sovereignty of the subject and power relations, Spivak argues that their methodologies could not fully displace authoritarian structures. As a result, notions of “consciousness” thus remained the criterion for both the Imperialist subject and subject of humanism.<sup>14</sup> In South Asia, colonial rule imposed a tradition of history writing that was imperialist in design and employed for serving administration of the state. On the one hand, this disciplinary history centers around “evidence,” which Spivak notes, often entails a “failure” to recognize underrepresented groups.<sup>15</sup> On the other, the systematic destruction of a self-sufficient economy caused by colonialism in South Asia diminished the scope of producing alternative histories. In her argument, the multiplicity of historical accounts is acknowledged. The stress on *plurality* in Spivak’s argument, as well as scholars such as Chakrabarty noted earlier, indicates that disciplinary history and “minority histories” can simultaneously exist.

The oral histories and lived experiences of contemporaray textile makers—the dyers, washers, painters, woodblock makers, and printers—are interconnected with imperial and colonial accounts of the Coromandel but were suppressed by the predominance of these institutional histories. The reasons for leaving out these artisanal histories from the history of Coromandel textiles are several. The prime one is perhaps the dearth of archival records elaborating on the role of the artisans in textile production. I must clarify here that there are

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<sup>12</sup> Historian Ranajit Guha identifies *Instrumentality* as a problem in the structure of the elitist historiographies, which results in the erasure of unnamed voices from historical narratives. Ranajit Guha, “The Small Voice of History,” in *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 316.

<sup>13</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987) 197-221.

<sup>14</sup> Spivak brings up theorist Michael Foucault’s critique of subjective authority. Foucault’s questioning of authoritarian power calls for attention towards how authoritarian power affected the construction of “history.” Ibid., 202.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 199.

archival records on the techniques of cotton painting and dyeing from the early modern period; however, a critical assessment of the textile makers' involvement in this history is lacking.<sup>16</sup> Accounts of the process of production appear in early colonial texts as a means of teaching these methods to practitioners in Western Europe with a promise that following a specific set of techniques ensures success in dyed textile making.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that while social and economic historians have analyzed the community structure and wages of artisanal communities in the Coromandel region and south India the voices of early modern textile makers are not typically accounted for.<sup>18</sup> Economic historian Tirthankar Roy has recognized the contribution of individual textile makers in safeguarding their knowledge in nineteenth-century India, which suggests an alternative narrative of the decline of craft practices.<sup>19</sup> Roy's study stands as a major intervention for the ways in which he draws on material in colonial archives to recognize individual textile makers for their innovation. Whereas the role of colonial archives in reconstructing the early modern material culture is undeniable, my project will argue for the importance of intangibility and multiplicity as two pivotal facets of the histories of the dyed textile makers of the Coromandel. This presents a useful way to re-investigate the Coromandel artisans.

Early modern Coromandel dyed, painted, and printed textiles themselves are historical documents produced by the textile makers. Even though only a few of them bear signs of the individual practitioners or the name of their manufacturers, the brilliantly executed textiles present analytical tools for establishing the agency of their makers.<sup>20</sup> In my analysis I stress the

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<sup>16</sup> See W. H. Moreland, *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century* (London: printed for the Haklyut Society, 1931), especially the accounts of W. H. Methwold and Anthony Schorer; John Irwin and Katharine B. Brett, "Beaulieu's account of the technique of Indian cotton-painting: Introduced and with a commentary by P. R. Schwartz," in *Origins of Chintz* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1970), 36-41.

<sup>17</sup> To elaborate this further, I will analyze botanist William Roxburgh's well-known project *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel: Selected from Drawings and Descriptions* (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1795) in Chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> See David Washbrook, "India in the Early Modern World Economy: modes of production, reproduction, and exchange," *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 87-111; Giorgio Riello, "The world's best: cotton manufacturing and the advantage of India," and "Learning and substituting: printing cotton textiles in Europe," in *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 59-85, and 160-85; Pius Malekandathil, "Indian Ocean in the Shaping of Late Medieval India," *Studies in History* 30, no. 2 (2014): 125-49.

<sup>19</sup> Tirthankar Roy, "Out of Tradition: Master Artisans and Economic Change," *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no.4 (2007): 963-91.

<sup>20</sup> *Origins of Chintz* lists Coromandel textiles with inscriptions, I will address this in Chapter 1.



concept of “agency” in order to assess the acquired forms of knowledge that produced the visually complex and technically outstanding dyed cottons of Coromandel (**Figure 0.1**). By agency, I point to the ability which prompts or restrains actions to survive and act upon the world.<sup>21</sup> Exploration of this key idea thus sheds light on the textile makers’ interactions with their immediate ecological, social and cultural environment. Such an exploration also enables us to situate the textile makers within networks of patronage, production, and consumption. Given the prime importance of historical textiles in my study, it is crucial to note that I do not equate the agency of the producers with the agency of the textiles.<sup>22</sup> Firstly, craft production is an interactive process between humans and non human agents, such as climatic conditions and raw materials. Textiles are the results of these interactions. Secondly, it is not clear if the producers of the textiles were allowed to make decisions about the choice of images or composition formats. Decision in this context, is a balance between one’s own interest and negotiations with other factors.<sup>23</sup> Retrieving something of these intricacies from the historical textiles, I will argue, is possible when the textiles are posited within the realm of human experiences.<sup>24</sup>

A group of dynamic individuals demonstrated the possibilities of reconstructing historical textiles of the Deccan to support indigenous modes of production. When my thesis project was initiated, I had the opportunity to meet with Suraiya Hasan, an activist and practitioner who has played a decisive role in reconstructing *himroo* textiles (an Indo-Persian brocade with silk warp and cotton weft) in the Hyderabad region. Her approach to reconstruction and craft deeply informed my methodology of assimilating archival and ethnographic resources. She strongly supported the need for experiential knowledge to retrieve the histories of the Coromandel textiles:

You must visit the Coromandel Coast where these [dyed] textiles are being made for centuries. You have to meet the artisans, spend time with them, and understand their lives

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<sup>21</sup> A detailed examination of agency drawing on the theorization by Yong Wang, Uzma Rizvi, Roma Chatterji, and other scholars will be featured in Chapter 1.

<sup>22</sup> Anthropologist Alfred Gell strongly argues for the agency of objects. Even though his argument is largely formed by the studies of ritualistic objects, it applies to the context of the Coromandel textiles too. Raw materials, culture, society, and patrons—alongside the producers—are responsible for shaping an object. See Gell, “The Problem Defined: The Need for an Anthropology of Art,” in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1-10. A detailed discussion of Gell’s work will appear in Chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> The issue around decision making in this process will be discussed in Chapter 3 in regard to woodblock making.

<sup>24</sup> See Christopher Pinney, “Creole Europe: The Reflection of a Reflection,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 20 (2002): 137-8.

to write about their ancestors. Without understanding the places [the sites and workshop spaces] of production, one cannot gain knowledge about objects. I wonder if the ocean water, the flora, the availability of mineral ores, and the warm humid weather must have been indispensable for the production of textiles in the Coromandel region.<sup>25</sup>

Hasan developed deep knowledge about the craft communities in southern India through her family's role in the anti-colonial movement in the early twentieth century and her association with the Cottage Industries Emporium, Hyderabad—established by her father, Badrul Hasan.<sup>26</sup> Hasan's involvement with reconstructing *himroo* with master weaver Umar Syed makes her insight especially relevant here. Hasan's underscoring of experiential knowledge was not a denial of archival research but rather a recognition of different forms of knowledge. Striking a balance between experiential and archival research also figures into activist scholar Uzramma's approach to reconstruction of the past. While re-introducing natural indigo dyeing and pit loom weaving to the weavers of Chinnur in Telangana, Uzramma found "alternating between library and the weavers" sharpened her insights on the issue.<sup>27</sup>

The aspect of experience establishes the potential of linking the contemporary practice of textile making with historical inquiry. In his theorization of *habitus*, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that habitual practices, like craft making, comprise an accumulation of thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions which belong to both history and the present.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the idea of ongoing "practice," in regard to dyed textile making, cannot be separated from the conditions in the past that shaped them or the contingencies of the present that revoke past conditions. Bourdieu stresses that these similarly structured practices of the "present past" have possibilities of reactivation in the future when provoked by "external necessities."<sup>29</sup> This, however, does not mean that the practice of early modern dyed textile making has a one-to-one

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Suraiya Hasan in Hyderabad, August 2015.

<sup>26</sup> See Radhika Singh, "The Loom as Ideology: Suraiya Apa's Legacy," *Marg* 67, no. 4 (2016): 98.

<sup>27</sup> Uzramma and Annapurna M., "Weaving a Vision: Doria of Chinnur," in *Threads and Voices: Behind the Indian Textile Tradition*, ed. Laila Tyabji (Mumbai: Marg, 2007), 60.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices," in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52-3.

<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu describes practice as a "system of dispositions - a present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices, an internal law through which the law of external necessities, irreducible to immediate constraints, is constantly exerted - is the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it." *Ibid.*, 56.

association with ongoing practices today. Rather, I will suggest that dyed textile making in the Coromandel region emerges between continuation and transformation.<sup>30</sup>

A major point here is that the practice or overlapping practices of making dyed textiles are embodied understandings of the textile makers. By embodied or bodily practice, I refer to the conscious physical actions as manifest articulations of a decision-making process that is in turn informed by the practitioners' socio-cultural surroundings. The mindful action of making a decision requires identifying and understanding a problem, which prompts responses driven by a range of conditions. My analysis proceeds from the position that decision making is based on understanding, response, and careful deliberation in executing a reaction. Sociologist Richard Sennett, in his book *The Craftsman*, argues understanding and thinking are not exclusive to the brain elaborating on the physical experience of "gripping".<sup>31</sup> By setting up the relationship between the functioning of the hand and the faculty of thinking, Sennett implies that decision-making is informed by physical actions.<sup>32</sup> The socio-political situations around textile makers are continuously evolving; however, the need for artisans to respond to changing environmental and social surroundings, to take up challenges and to make decisions is a constant. This ongoing problem solving that emerges in the works of early modern textile makers, as well as contemporary practitioners, demands that their practices be considered highly perceptive as opposed to "unthinking, unfeeling" repetitive actions.<sup>33</sup>

While I wish to emphasize the agency and embodied practice of the dyed, painted, and printed textile makers of the Coromandel, my research has drawn from a range of interdisciplinary sources produced in the fields of Coromandel textiles, South Asian crafts, Deccani material culture, and ethnographic studies. The historical textiles featured in this study, dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are from the collections of the Calico

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<sup>30</sup> The issues around continuation and transformations will be addressed in Chapter 4.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Sennett, "The Hand," in *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 151. Also, see Raymond Tallis, *The Hand: A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Sennett, "The Hand," 152.

<sup>33</sup> Rafael Cardoso, "Craft Versus Design: Moving Beyond a Tired Dichotomy," in *The Craft Reader*, ed. Glenn Adamson (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), 325. Cardoso notes that the systems of manufacture since the nineteenth century reduced the craftspeople to "unthinking, unfeeling drone," in the scholarship on craft.

Museum, Ahmedabad; National Museum, New Delhi; and Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad.<sup>34</sup> My study of the contemporary textile makers has been conducted through interviews in Telugu and Hindi at Machilipatnam, Pedana, Polavaram, and Srikalahasti in Andhra Pradesh; and Hyderabad, Thangalapally, and Warangal in Telangana.

Other sources drawn on for this study include books and albums produced within a range of disciplines and by colonial officials. Four books and albums especially useful for my project have been: *Plants of Coromandel Coast: Selected from Drawings and Descriptions* by the Scottish botanist and surgeon William Roxburgh published in 1795 which stands as one of the first detailed documentations about *chaya* roots, an important dye source;<sup>35</sup> *A collection of Specimens of the Textile Manufactures of India published in 1874* by Scottish physician and the director of the India Museum, London (1858-1879), J. Forbes Watson; and *Specimens of Fabrics Dyed with Indian Dyes* by British dye-enthusiast and industrialist Thomas Wardle. His extensive catalogues of dyed textiles present fragments of the actual textiles produced in southern India and other parts of South Asia.<sup>36</sup> *Cotton Painting and Printing in the Madras Presidency* published in 1917 by American artist W. S. Hadaway provides extensive documentation of textile production centres and market systems.<sup>37</sup> The varied professions of the authors mentioned above indicate the rich investment in the Coromandel textiles and their situation at the crossroads of trade, economic, botanical, and political interests.

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<sup>34</sup> The Coromandel textiles in the Calico Museum collections were acquired from the Amber Palace, Jaipur, possibly during the early twentieth century. See, John Irwin and Margaret Hall, “Early Coromandel Group,” in *Indian Painted and Printed Fabrics* (Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles), 16 and 19. The majority of the artifacts in the Salarjung Museum was transferred from Nawab Mir Yusuf Ali Khan (popularly known as Salarjung III) and Mir Osman Ali Khan’s (the last Nizam of the princely state of Hyderabad) private collections. The librarian of the English section at the Museum, Soma Ghosh, stated that several of these artifacts were without accession dates as the two collectors did not provide the information. Interview with Soma Ghosh in Hyderabad, June 2015.

<sup>35</sup> William Roxburgh, *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel: Selected from Drawings and Descriptions* (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1795). I am thankful to the National Library, Kolkata, for their assistance with this rare book and granting me permission to re-produce selected images.

<sup>36</sup> J. Forbes Watson, *A collection of Specimens of the Textile Manufactures of India (second series)* (London: India Museum, 1874); Thomas Wardle, *Specimens of Fabrics Dyed with Indian Dyes*, Vol I-XV (1867). The complete set of these catalogues are preserved in the Botanical Survey of India, Kolkata. I am grateful to Amrita Mukherji, founder of Sutra, for drawing my attention to this; and to the officials at the Botanical Survey of India for their co-operation.

<sup>37</sup> William Snelling Hadaway, *Cotton Painting and Printing in the Madras Presidency* (Madras: Government Press 1917).

## The Sites, Trade, and Historical Textiles

The dyed, painted, and printed textiles from southeast India are also known as *qalamkāri* or *kalamkāri* (*qalam* or *kalam* meaning a pen, and *kāri* indicating handwork) at least since the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>38</sup> By “dyed textiles” and *kalamkari* in this thesis, I am referring to dyed, painted, and printed fabrics. In European accounts, these textiles are also called *chintz*, *sarasa*, and *pintado*.<sup>39</sup>

Coromandel textiles are also identified with the larger Deccan region. The term “Deccan” is a derivative of *dakshin* meaning south, and the name “Coromandel” possibly derived from the Tamil word *Cholamandalam*, evoking the rich trade history of the Chola dynasty in this region (Figure 0.2).<sup>40</sup> The Deccan plateau in south India is surrounded by the Malabar Coast to the west, the Vindhya Mountain range to the north, and the Coromandel Coast to the east.<sup>41</sup> The long coastline is broadly divided into northern and southern Coromandel. The borderline between these two regions is not specific; however, the confluence of the Krishna river in the Bay of Bengal is marked as the end of northern Coromandel. There are three large rivers which flow eastward to meet the Bay of Bengal and pass through this coastal region. In the northern part, Godavari dominates the landscape. As mentioned above, the river Krishna is located at the center of the coastal region. Towards the south, there is the river Kaveri. All three of these rivers enrich the agricultural, social, religious, and cultural lives of the people within this region. The centers of textile production on the coast are located close to the confluence of the rivers with the sea. Palakollu is one such historical centre of dyed and painted textile production and is situated in

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<sup>38</sup> *Mughal Documents: Catalogue of Aurangzeb's Reign, Volume 1 (1658-1663)*, ed. M. A. Nayeem (Hyderabad: State Archives, 1981), 129. For further reading on *kalam*, see Rajarshi Sengupta, “An Artisanal History of *Kalam*?” *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* 7, no.1 (2019): 25-37.

<sup>39</sup> Sylvia Houghteling, “From Foot-cloth to Petticoat: The British Uses of Indian Chintz ca. 1700,” in *Setting the Scene: European Painted Cloths 1400 – 2000*, eds. Christina Young and Nicola Costaras (London: Archetype Books, 2013), 51-3; Also, see Pedro Moura Carvalho, *Luxury for Export: Artistic Exchange between India and Portugal around 1600* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum; Pittsburgh: Gutenberg Periscope Publishing, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Rila Mukherjee, “Ambivalent engagements: The Bay of Bengal in the Indian Ocean World,” *The International Journal of Maritime History* 29, no. 1 (2017): 101.

<sup>41</sup> Colonial literature, however, claimed different epistemological roots of this term and referred to the interactions between coastal communities and the foreign traders. J. B. J. Palconda, “Coromandel Coast,” *The Indian Antiquity-A Journal of Oriental Research in Archaeology, History, Literature, Languages, and Folklore, sc., sc., 1*, ed. JAS. Burgess (1872): 380. Palconda stated, “It is now I believe pretty generally accepted that the first word in the phrase ‘Coromandel Coast’ is derived from the name of a village between Madras and Pulicut...” Then, he claimed that the phrase *kori mandal* meaning black sand to be the possible root of the term Coromandel. The “early explorers,” according to him, mistook this phrase as a name of this region and it was propagated by others.

the northern Coromandel region, close to the confluence of river Godavari and the coast.<sup>42</sup> Bandar region—situated close to the Krishna delta—has active centers of dyed and printed textile production. The historic coastal city Machilipatnam or Masulipatnam remains the most important site. Machilipatnam emerged as a port in the seventeenth century and its principal orientation of trade was with Burma, Malaya, Thailand, and Indonesia (**Figure 0.3**).<sup>43</sup> Close to Machilipatnam, Pedana and Polavaram were two active sites for producing wood blocks, and dyed and printed textiles (**Figure 0.4 and 0.5**). Towards the south of the Krishna river, the town of Nizampatnam—formerly known as Petaboli—was also a site of dyed textile production.<sup>44</sup> Prior to the emergence of this port town, Pulicut, a Dutch trading centre, though now reduced to the size of a fishing village, was one of the most important ports on the coast, connected to the city of Vijayanagara or Hampi via Penukonda (**Figure 0.6**).<sup>45</sup> Situated towards the north of Madras (present-day Chennai) in Tamil Nadu, Pulicut was an important and active site of dyed, and painted textile making. Two significant textiles from Petaboli and Pulicut, presently in the collection of the Calico Museum, are central to my study.<sup>46</sup> The temple town of Srikalahasti, located on the bank of river Svarnamukhi, is also an active site of painted cottons (**Figure 0.7**). Historically, this site was known for producing large scale narrative temple hangings.

The geographical location of the Deccan and its political histories since the sixteenth century has left a great impact on the trade activities in the Coromandel. The constant shifts in political power over the centuries have led a variety of scholars with different interests, to document textiles and crafts in this region. Foreign traders often referred to as *parangi* (పారంగి in Telugu) had a prominent presence in the Deccan region.<sup>47</sup> The Animela inscription of 1531, at

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<sup>42</sup> Irwin and Brett, “Technique and conditions of manufacture,” in *Origins of Chintz*, 7. The production of dyed and painted textiles in this center has stopped.

<sup>43</sup> Om Prakash, “The Indian Maritime Merchant, 1500-1800,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 3 (2004): 448-9.

<sup>44</sup> Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel Group,” 14.

<sup>45</sup> The capital of the Vijayanagara Empire (1336-1614) was moved to Penukonda at 1556 after the fall of the Empire by the combined forces of Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmednagar states in Deccan. The coastal port towns were well connected with the important political and trade centers in the mainland.

<sup>46</sup> Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel,” 14. These two dyed textiles from Petaboli and Pulicut are also prominently featured in Irwin and Hall’s book.

<sup>47</sup> P. Chenna Reddy, *Guilds in Medieval Andhra Desa*, 17.

the Kamalapura taluk in Cuddapah district, noted that merchants and people from fifty-six regions were present in that region during the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>48</sup> Interactions between Indian and European traders were both cooperative and conflictual.<sup>49</sup> Historian Om Prakash argues that the emergence of Machilipatnam as a port was a response on the part of Indian merchants to the Portuguese monopoly of the Pulicut-Malacca route.<sup>50</sup> His proposition indicates that the growth of Machilipatnam port during the seventeenth century was heavily influenced by the entangled conflicts of trade rights between the Coromandel and European trader communities. What Prakash has termed the “cooperative” and “conflictual” relationships between the traders and communities in the Machilipatnam area are attributed to the cultural specificity of this site. The constant flow of traders and commodities were impacted by the migration of varied linguistic groups in the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

These trader communities on the coast were affiliated with different organizations. Historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam has argued that the trading communities on the coast not only worked under larger organizations but also independently.<sup>51</sup> There were continuous contestations between the Dutch and Portuguese traders during the first half of the seventeenth century. Nagapatnam continued to be a stronghold of the Portuguese, whereas Sao Tome, close to the Dutch trading port Pulicut, suffered badly from these conflicts. Armenian traders had trade connections with India since the twelfth century, and these traders considered staying in the coastal areas longer since the monsoon conditions on the subcontinent were unfavorable for frequent oceanic travels.<sup>52</sup> The case of Armenian traders indicates that trading communities along the coast were not only varied, but their ways of trading were also diversified.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 42. The Animela inscription reads: “Ayyavali- mukhyu- laina- chalumula- samastha- yambaiyaru- desala-setti- pekkandru.” Reddy differentiates traders from different regions as- *desi* (local), *svadesi* (native), *paradesi* (foreigner), and *nanadesi* (from different countries).

<sup>49</sup> Om Prakash, “The Indian Maritime Merchant, 1500-1800.” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 3 (2004): 436-50.

<sup>50</sup> Prakash also stresses that consolidation of the Qutb Shahi kingdom in Golconda under Ibrahim Qutb Shah (1550-80) was another crucial factor for the growth of Machilipatnam. Ibid., 454.

<sup>51</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Staying On: the Portuguese of Southern Coromandel in the late seventeenth century,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 22, no. 4 (1985): 445-63.

<sup>52</sup> Sebouh David Aslanian, “The Julfan Trade Network I: The World of the Indian Ocean,” in *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, London, and New York: University of California Press, 2011) 44-65.

The dynamics between the Indian Mughal empire and the Ottoman, Safavid, and Ming empires resulted in the migration and circulation of objects in Asia.<sup>53</sup> Textiles from Coromandel in the east and Gujarat on the west coast were often exchanged for spices from South East Asia, and gold, ivory, and slaves from Menomotapa in Zimbabwe and East Africa. Fragments of Indian dyed textiles found from Fustat (Old Cairo), Egypt, has established the prime significance of textiles in the early Indian Ocean trade networks.<sup>54</sup> Textile historian Ruth Barnes argues that the dyed textiles from India entered into a “complex political and social system of gift exchanges,” especially in Southeast Asia, and were often elevated from trade items to heirloom objects.<sup>55</sup> Through this process, as Barnes suggests, Indian textiles became an integral part of indigenous networks as well as interregional trade networks.<sup>56</sup> These multidimensional connections initiated by the oceanic trade also fostered an “historical coherence” between the port sites.<sup>57</sup> In other words, these endeavors enabled Deccani communities in the region to become part of a larger cultural network.

Diversified cultural and linguistic practices and trading activities gave rise to early modern Deccani cosmopolitanism. As literary theorist Walter D. Mignolo and others argue, the notion of cosmopolitanism is understood as a counter to the economic, cultural, and political homogenization posed by globalizing processes.<sup>58</sup> Deccani cosmopolitanism was marked by the simultaneous economic, cultural, and political developments in the various kingdoms of

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<sup>53</sup> Pius Malekandathil, “Indian Ocean in the Shaping of Late Medieval India,” *Studies in History* 30, no. 2 (2014): 125-8.

<sup>54</sup> See Ruth Barnes, *Indian block-printed textiles in Egypt: The Newberry collection in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>55</sup> Ruth Barnes, “Indian Cotton for Cairo: The Royal Ontario Museum’s Gujarati Textiles and the Early Western Indian Ocean Trade,” *Textile History* 48, no. 1 (2017): 27. Also, see John Guy, “Rama, Rajas and Courtesans: Indian Figurative Textiles in Indonesia,” in *The Secrets of Southeast Asian Textiles- Myth, Status and the Supernatural*, ed. Jane Puranananda (Bangkok: River Books, 2007), 40-57.

<sup>56</sup> Ruth Barnes, “Introduction,” in *Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies*, ed. Ruth Barnes (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 1-3.

<sup>57</sup> Pedro Macahdo and Sarah Fee, “Introduction: The Ocean’s Many Cloth Pathways,” in *Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures, and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean: An Ocean of Cloth*, eds. Pedro Machado, Sarah Fee, and Gwen Campbell (Laddusaw: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism,” in *Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 157.



Vijayanagara, Golconda, Bijapur, Ahmednagar, Berar, and Bidar. These dynamic cultural encounters during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were much more complex than what Crispin Branfoot calls a “centrifugal diffusion” of culture from the capital cities to the margins.<sup>59</sup> These provincial centers assimilated metropolitan cultural norms with already existing regional practices. The Islamic states of the Deccan strived to establish their presence in the Safavid and Ottoman kingdoms—in other words, beyond the geographical limits of South Asia.<sup>60</sup> Exchange of royal robes, luxury textiles, and exquisite metalware was at the centerstage of these cultural mediations.<sup>61</sup> Subrahmanyam notes that the agents of these transmissions were traders and ambassadors, such as Augustin Herryard and François Bernier, who communicated between local communities and Europeans, and also between different kingdoms and groups within India.<sup>62</sup> These interlocutors, on the one hand, diligently studied south Indian cultures and customs; on the other hand, they carefully maintained outsider status in these societies. However, while such accounts provide an overview of multicultural encounters, they do not necessarily represent views “from below.”<sup>63</sup> Mignolo suggests that inclusion of the narratives of the marginalized, such as workers and craftspeople, into this mix cannot address their contributions. He instead proposes “border thinking,” or “the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspectives of people in subaltern positions.”<sup>64</sup> Art historian Finbarr Barry Flood also establishes that cosmopolitanism was not limited to the boundaries of the court or

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<sup>59</sup> Crispin Branfoot, “The Tamil Gopura: From Temple Gateway to Global Icon,” *Ars Orientalis* 45 eds. Nachiket Chanchani and Tamara I. Sears, (2015): 92.

<sup>60</sup> Phillip B. Wagoner and Laura Weinstein, “The Deccani Sultanates and their Interregional Connections,” in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, eds. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 791.

<sup>61</sup> The role of textiles in cross cultural encounters between Hindu and Islamic courts in the Deccan is brilliantly brought up in Wagoner’s discussion around *kabayi* and *kullayi*. See Phillip B. Wagoner, “‘Sultan among Hindu Kings’: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996): 851-880. I will further elaborate this issue in Chapter 3.

<sup>62</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Introduction: Before and Beyond ‘Orientalism’,” in *Europe’s India: Words, People, Empires, 1500-1800* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 15.

<sup>63</sup> Mignolo, “The Many Faces,” 157.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

formalized spaces by highlighting the migration of stonemasons from Rajasthan and Gujarat to Bust, Ghur, and Ghazni during the twelfth century.<sup>65</sup>

### **A Seventeenth-century *Qanat* from The National Museum, New Delhi**

Important to my study is that the dyed and painted textiles of Coromandel can be assessed in terms of the textile makers' experience of early modern Deccani cosmopolitanism. The earliest surviving *kalamkaris* date from the first quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>66</sup> By discussing one such textile—a *qanat* or tent hanging from the National Museum—I will demonstrate how the textile makers absorbed the layered cultural exchanges and participated in cultural transformations (**See Figure 0.1**). An examination of the striking visual features of the panels of this hanging will facilitate discussions of the complexity of forms and techniques.

The surviving hanging consists of five vertical panels. The vertical panel in the right corner of the hanging is centered around a composite motif consisting of a cypress tree and flower vase. A bouquet of stylized flowers is flanked by long serrated leaves adorning each side as the cypress tree springs out of the lip of the vase. The terminal panels on both sides represent the cypress motif imagined as cylindrical tree forms with uneven contours, suggesting leaves without any additional details. The smaller vases on either side of the central motif are characterized by a narrow base, bulbous body, and pointed tips marked with repeated half-circular forms in red, overlapped by turmeric yellow. The repeated motifs covering the bulb of the vase could also be interpreted as smooth rock formations, as seen in the ceiling murals of the sixteenth-century Veerabhadraswamy Temple at Lepakshi among many other Deccani sites (**Figure 0.8 and 0.9**).<sup>67</sup> Suspended rock formations also appear in between the prominent motifs. The rock clusters recall similar Chinese formations, which also make appearances in Deccani, Mughal, and Persian miniature paintings. The upper section of the panel features minutely portrayed pheasants around the central cypress and stylized flowers. Four pheasants rest on long

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<sup>65</sup> Finbarr Barry Flood, "Conclusions," in *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 265.

<sup>66</sup> Irwin and Hall, "Early Coromandel," 14; Rosemary Crill, "Local and Global: Patronage and Use," in *The Fabric of India*, ed. Rosemary Crill (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), 167. Crill refers to trade documents which date back to 1609 and 1613 showing the sale of these textiles in London.

<sup>67</sup> The temple in Lepakshi is dedicated Veerabhadra—the fierce form of Shiva—and made during the reign of Vijayanagara king Achyutadevaraya (1529-42). Detailed discussions of the murals will be featured in Chapter 3.

serrated leaves as if the leaves have transformed into the branches of a tree. The layered visual narratives are framed within a pronounced cusped archway. The boldly patterned cusped arch delineated with blood red on myrobalan-treated cotton limits the organic growth of the many vegetal, animal, composite forms, and composite ideas. The archway is further framed by two bands of horizontal panels at the top and bottom.

The framing devices of the hanging are a reminder of Mughal and Deccani architectural elements; indeed this textile would have functioned to create a temporary architectural enclosure. Four horizontal bands run across the upper and lower borders of the hanging and secure five cusped archways within. The uppermost panel depicts battlements similar to the ones observed in Deccani and Mughal fort structures. These repetitive battlements embody a witty interplay of presence and absence; the physical form of the battlements are upturned in the void space between two battlements. The stark red battlements adorned with resist-painted vegetal motifs evoke the structural integrity of physical architectural forms. The battlements also mark the upper edge of the hanging, similar to the battlements in built structures. The references to imagery and objects across different forms of material culture is a pivotal characteristic feature of this hanging.

The two outer panels are mirror images of one another. These two panels show a range of naturalistic and composite animal forms with the panel on the right depicting two *yāli* (a composite mythical lion-form found in south Indian visual culture) beneath the central vase motif. The yalis are considered guardians of temples and palaces and are widely represented at entrance gateways and pillars of Vijayanagara and Nayaka temples in southern India (**Figure 0.10**).<sup>68</sup> In temples and palaces, the composite image of yali evokes supernatural power; here, the composite form merges into the shared pool of images. The panel on the left does not represent yali but mirroring groups of deer and tigers on either side of the oval vase motif. The bodies of the tigers are rendered with *chaya* red overlapped by turmeric yellow and possibly some variation of black, which is presently worn out. The bodies of deer under attack are featured more prominently than the subtle bodies of the tigers. Beneath the pair, another deer with a

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<sup>68</sup> The Vijayanagar Empire with its capital in Vijayanagara or Hampi marked an important phase of architectural, artisanal, political, and economic activities in southern India. After the fall of the Vijayanagara empire by the Deccan Sultanates, the governors under the Vijayanagara Empire established independent Nayaka rule in southern India. Under the Nayakas, architectural and artisanal activities continued to grow. The enlargements of the Sri Ranganathaswamy temple in Srirangam, Meenakshi Amman Temple at Madurai, and Rajarajesvara Temple or Periya Koyil in Tanjavur were done during the Nayaka period.

different color scheme, has managed to escape the tiger. The pair of animals, especially deer being attacked by tigers emerge as a theme associated with kingship and royalty in Persian textiles and other portable items. The animal representations from a varied range of media including architecture, textiles, and trade goods are assimilated in modeling the yali, tiger, and deer motifs. The carefully drawn pineapple motifs at the apex of the vase specifically reference foreign trade. Pineapple arrived in the Coromandel region via trans-Pacific trade from the South Americas.<sup>69</sup> The value of this foreign fruit is indicated by showing it as crowning jewels of these two end panels. The foreignness of the fruit is celebrated and also absorbed into the established pool of imagery. Assimilation of motifs from these varied contexts displays a playful recontextualization of established cultural practices in the skilled hands of the textile makers.<sup>70</sup> The layering of cultural experience is brought into representation with the dyed fabric and the iconography of these painted cottons.

The very process of textile making can also have a larger significance in relation to cultural exchange. Dyed textile making brings together a set of techniques involving the usage of dyes, mordants, and resists. Dyes are the coloring agents but the performance of dyestuff on cloth is dependent on the usage of mordants and resist. Mordant and resist work quite contrary to each other. Mordant assists dyestuff to stay on the fibers of cloth, whereas resist material prevents dyes from settling on the textile surface. I will suggest that the techniques of mordant and resist dyeing worked in favor of the textile makers to reflect on, or embody, the complexity of intercultural interactions. Sometimes dyes are directly applied on fabric; for example, turmeric yellow is usually applied towards the end of the dyeing cycles and treated with mordant for longevity. However, for blood red, the application is drastically different. In one process of achieving red, the mordant solution is applied on myrobalan-treated cloth and processed before boiling it in hot water mixed with Chaya roots or madder.<sup>71</sup> Because of this, while applying the mordant solution, which is usually transparent, the artisans could not achieve a “red” outcome immediately. In a different way, the very nature of indigo demands a total immersion of textiles

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<sup>69</sup> The significance of the pineapple motif in Deccani architecture and textiles is addressed in Chapter 3.

<sup>70</sup> As textile scholar Carol Bier notes, textiles embody a complex set of relations established between the patrons, materials, and producers. See Carol Bier, *Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart: Textile Arts of Safavid and Qajar Iran, 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1987).

<sup>71</sup> The process of applying dyes in the dyeing workshops of the Coromandel region is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

into a vat. Application of indigo dye with a brush will fail to achieve the depth of color attained by immersion in a vat. Unlike red, indigo does not require boiling. Based on these criteria, dyes are generally divided into two groups—hot and cold dyes. The application of resist also depends on special factors; the resist for hot dyes cannot work for cold dyes. My point here is that cultural and trade encounters have both immediate and gradual significances for coastal societies. It can be argued that the careful selection and use of direct and indirect application of dyes serve as a metaphor for assimilation and resistance which are crucial aspects of cultural exchange. The combination of the individualized techniques into a mix, I argue, is a form of resistance against homogenized production. The choice of motifs and techniques of making dyed textiles thus presents, as I argued earlier, a form of cosmopolitanism in relation to the textile makers. Mignolo defines the participation of the marginalized into cultural conversation or “border thinking” as *critical cosmopolitanism*.<sup>72</sup>

The contour lines, defining forms and details of the images are often drawn with a distinctive tool known as a *kalam* or pen (in Dakhni, Telugu, Hindi, and Persian languages) made of bamboo and cotton. The sharp linearity of the *kalam*, as opposed to the brush, was perhaps the strongest means for asserting the presence of the textile makers. The lines define the forms, their details, and their location within the network of images. For the prevalence of strong lines, each motif is clearly defined within a given space. In printed textiles, the sharp lines of the *kalam* are replaced by finely carved woodblock impressions.<sup>73</sup> In both painted and printed representations, the sharpness of the forms emerges as a key characteristic feature. My discussion around techniques and imagery of Coromandel textiles is specifically formulated to recover the presence and actions of the early modern or historical *kalamkari* makers.

An important aspect of my thesis is the coexistence and continuation of generational dyeing techniques and unique experimentations that are apparent in the early modern Coromandel textiles. As further chapters will explore, Coromandel textile makers pushed the limits of their knowledge of dyes and techniques to explore new visual idioms. This intrinsic

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<sup>72</sup> Mignolo, 174.

<sup>73</sup> Irwin and Hall have noted that painted textiles predate printed ones. This argument might have been influenced by the evolutionary understanding of techniques; hand drawing being technically simpler than printing, it is considered older than printing. Later scholars, namely Rosemary Crill, argues that painting and printing developed simultaneously in the Coromandel workshops. Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008), 2-4.

feature of their practice serves as a potent ground to examine the ongoing experimentation of dyed textile making as well as the construction of agency and identity of their makers.

Scholars of South Asian material culture across disciplines, especially archaeologist Jonathan Mark Kenoyer and anthropologist Samuel Parker demonstrate how the study of contemporary craft tools, techniques, and communities can shed light on the underrepresented facets of histories.<sup>74</sup> Their projects also caution us from establishing a seamless connection between the historical and contemporary craft practices. The continuous transformations in the artisanal livelihood compel them to shape their practices according to the needs. Every aspect of contemporary textile making cannot find resonance with the early modern practices. Considering this relationship between the past and present, scholars have complemented ethnographic studies of craft making with archival resources. My approach to reconstruct the histories of kalamkari textiles is informed by these scholarly approaches as well as the practices of contemporary textile makers of the northern Coromandel region.

### Contemporary Practitioners

In this predominantly Telugu speaking region, the communities of dyers are called అడ్డకము చేసే వాళ్ళు (*addakamu chesevāllu*; *addakamu/addakam* indicates dyeing). The block makers are generally addressed as అచ్చు చేసే వాళ్ళు (*acchu chesevāllu*, where *acchu* means a stamp or mould). Kalamkari drawing is known as వ్రతపాని (*vratapāni* or handwork) among some textile makers in Srikalahasti although this term is not widely used.<sup>75</sup> Alongside addressing the producers as dyed textile makers and kalamkari makers, I also call them craftspeople and artisans to situate their practice within the larger context of craft making in southern India. Textile producers and craftspeople in India form the second largest occupational sector, after agriculture. The block makers, dyers, and printers belong to both agrarian and weaver communities. There is no particular community who specializes in block making or dyeing in the Coromandel.<sup>76</sup> My study focuses on five key individuals: master woodblock carvers Kondra

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<sup>74</sup> See Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, "Shell Working Industries of the Indus Civilization: A Summary," *Paleorient* 10, no. 1 (1984): 49-63; Samuel Parker, "Text and Practice in South Asian Art: An Ethnographic Perspective," *Artibus Asiae* 63, no. 1 (2003): 5-34. I address the relevance of Kenoyer and Parker's studies in my project in Chapter 4.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Jonnalagadda Gurappa Chetty in Srikalahasti, November 2015.

<sup>76</sup> The community engagements in the present-day workshops will be discussed in Chapter 1 and 2.

Gangadhar and Kondra Narsaiah; late master dyer and printer Mukkantieswarudu Rao (d. 2017); master dyer Muhammad Salim Pasha; and artisan Bhikshamayya Chary. Throughout this thesis I will address three of these craftspeople using the honorific term *gāru*.<sup>77</sup>

The term “master” in the context of South Asian craft is employed to identify highly skilled artisans who are practitioners and active teachers; the term is the English equivalent of the Sanskrit and Hindi word guru. This honorific appeared in the early scholarship on South Asian crafts and continued to be in use by scholars and institutions.<sup>78</sup> Since the 1950s, master craftspeople across the country are recognized by the Govt. of India and are awarded in an annual ceremony.

The workshop of master block makers Kondra Gangadhar and Kondra Narsaiah is located in Pedana, near Machilipatnam, in the Bandar region of Andhra Pradesh (**Figure 0.11 and 0.12**).<sup>79</sup> Brothers Gangadhar garu and Narsaiah garu have practiced woodblock making since the 1980s. Gangadhar garu learned block making from his uncle Narasingha Rao during the 1970s in Hyderabad and later trained his younger brother.<sup>80</sup> Before settling down in Pedana, Gangadhar garu worked in Bombay (now Mumbai) as a block maker. Presently the Kondra brothers are considered the most skilled block makers in the Bandar region. The wood blocks made by them have found an audience and ready market not only in the Telugu speaking regions, but in other parts of India as well. Despite this recognition, the scholarship on their work is still limited.<sup>81</sup> They are 2002 recipients of the All India National Craftsman Award by the Ministry of

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<sup>77</sup> గౌరవ or *gāru* is a Telugu honorific used for both women and men.

<sup>78</sup> See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* (London: Probsthain & Co., 1909); *The Master Weavers: Festival of India in Britain*, Royal College of Art (Bombay: Tata Press Ltd., 1982).

<sup>79</sup> In Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka, often people have their father’s given name as their surname. Kondra is the first name of their father Late Kondra L. Patel. Patel is their family surname; however, a large number of people in southern India choose their father’s name as surname.

<sup>80</sup> Interview of K. Gangadhar and K. Narsaiah in Pedana, September 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Kondra Gangadhar and Kondra Narsaiah’s works are featured in a few news and magazine articles in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. For example- T. Appala Naidu, “Unsung Heroes of Kalamkari designs.” *The Hindu*, April 20, 2013,

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-in-school/unsung-heroes-of-kalamakari-designs/article4635003.ece>

My article on my first encounter with the Kondra brothers was published online in Sahapedia, Mar 9, 2012.

<https://www.sahapedia.org/kalamkari-woodblock-makers>.

Textiles, Govt. of India.<sup>82</sup> They supply blocks to local printing units as well as to workshops and studios across India and are capable of executing any image demanded by a diverse group of patrons.

Mukkanti garu belongs to the *Devanga* community, who are predominantly weavers and worshippers of devi *Durga*—Hinduism’s great mother goddess (**Figure 0.13**). His father Nageswara Rao hailed from a weaver family in Polavaram and was instrumental in starting the dyeing and printing unit there.<sup>83</sup> In the 1970s, Rao learned dyeing and hand block printing processes from Vinnakota Venkataswamy Naidu. After Naidu’s death, his successors chose not to continue this line of work. Rao bought the majority of Naidu’s collection of wood blocks and relocated them to his newly constructed dyeing workshop in Polavaram (**Figure 0.14**). Rao practiced both printing and painting with natural dyes on cotton and produced large scale hangings depicting Hindu and Buddhist deities in the 1980s (**Figure 0.15**). Unlike his father, Mukkanti garu focused solely on printing (**Figure 0.16**). Mukkanti garu’s dyeing shop was selected for a month-long workshop conducted by the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, prior to the *Festival of India in Britain*, 1982.<sup>84</sup> Mukkanti garu noted that the specialty of their workshop was *mehrab* (a central arch motif) and *koniam chakra* (a central circular motif and borders) textiles, which were featured in the *Festival of India* (**Figure 0.17 and 0.18**).<sup>85</sup> The festival gave them India-wide and international exposure which was partly responsible for sustaining natural dyeing in Mukkanti garu’s workshop. Unlike his grandfather and father, Nageswara Rao started off his career as an engineer. He studied and worked at Bangalore, in southern India. After a certain point in time, he recognized his growing interest in dyeing and printing and left his work to assist his father at Polavaram. Mukkanti garu’s wife Durga M. spins

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with K. Gangadhar in Pedana, July 2017.

<sup>83</sup> In my text, I will address Nageswara Rao [father of Mukkanti garu] as Rao and Nageswara Rao [son of Mukkanti garu] as Nageswara Rao.

<sup>84</sup> I will return to the government-funded craft initiatives in India later in my Introduction.

<sup>85</sup> The *koniam chakra* and *mehrab* textiles are featured in the catalogue of *Master Weavers* (No. 25-27, 2.8.1-3 Cotton hanging; 28-30, 2.9.1-3 Cotton hanging; 35, 2.11.3 Cotton spread, 36, 2.12.1 Cotton spread, and 37, 2.12.2 Cotton spread). *Mehrab* textiles will be discussed in Chapter 4.



cotton threads in the covered courtyard of their house.<sup>86</sup> Her association with spinning and weaving is a reminder of their ancestral occupation.

Muhammad Salim Pasha started his career as a car driver for the Dastkar Andhra in the 1980s and then took up natural dyeing after recognizing his growing interest in this field (**Figure 0.19**).<sup>87</sup> Dye specialists K. V. Chandramouli and Jagada Rajappa were responsible for teaching natural dyeing to Pasha.<sup>88</sup> Pasha recalled a colleague who once told him that as a non-hereditary dye enthusiast Pasha would never be able to acquire the skill properly.<sup>89</sup> He took up the challenge, learned to dye diligently, and established himself as one of the most prominent indigo dyers in India. He taught dyeing to his daughters and sons and presently, Pasha and his family are based in Hyderabad and all of them practice natural dyeing (**Figure 0.20**).

I address Bhikshamayya Chary as an “artisan” since he practices a whole range of crafts including block making, loom making, and machinery making (**Figure 0.21**). At his ancestral village in Nalgonda district, Chary learned wood carving from his father. He was appointed to the position of block maker at the Weavers Service Centre, Hyderabad, by craft activist and scholar Pupul Jayakar in the 1980s and was instrumental in creating a repository of woodblocks at the Centre.<sup>90</sup> While he has retired from the post, Chary continues to practice his many interests at his residence cum workshop in the old city of Hyderabad.

In an attempt to foreground the presence of these contemporary textile makers and to actively acknowledge their expertise, I often present their statements in direct quotes. Oral history or the practice of verbal narration, according to director-activist-scholar Rustom Bharucha, is a kind of embodied history.<sup>91</sup> Referring to his interaction with folklorist Komal

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<sup>86</sup> Durga M. practices spinning and takes care of the household and looking after the guests. The artisans at Mukkanti garu’s workshop are given breakfast, lunch, and tea everyday, which is also Durga M.’s responsibility.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Muhammad Salim Pasha in Hyderabad, June 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Uzramma and Annapurna M., “Weaving a Vision: *Doria* of Chinnur,” in *Threads and Voices: Behind the Indian Textile Tradition*, ed. Laila Tyabji (Mumbai: Marg, 2007), 61. Rajappa’s active role in promoting natural dyes will be discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Bhikshamayya Chary in Hyderabad, July 2017. I will address Jayakar’s contribution to the development of crafts in post independent India later in my Introduction.

<sup>91</sup> Rustom Bharucha, “Listening to Komalda,” in *Rajasthan: An Oral History, Conversations with Komal Kothari* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003), 2.

Kothari, Bharucha indicates that the restorer of oral histories embodies histories within them. The narrators are carriers of knowledge from whom histories reach an audience. Bharucha also suggests that listening is not only the act of following a narration but also observing the narrator, being attentive to the variations of tones and pauses between words and expressions. Bharucha's argument, therefore, does not identify a speaker as the only discrete source of oral history but takes into account the communicative energy between a speaker and listener. The words and expressions from a speaker undergo transformations due to the subjectivity of the act of listening.<sup>92</sup> How does one transcribe these expressions into text? Does the act of writing down every word convey the speaker's expression in writings? Bharucha argues that this mode of transcription diminishes the struggle of the interviewee drawing through their memory and searching for words or gestures to form the narration.<sup>93</sup> Bharucha signals the active presence of the translator in translated notes. In my transcriptions of interviews and conversations with craftspeople during my fieldwork, I have emphasized how sights and sounds were mediated through me. Moreover, I stand as a mediator between the narrator and readers; mediation is not a transparent method of transference.<sup>94</sup> Writing about my experience of the sounds, utterance, and oral communications are guided by the idea of embodiment, as delineated by Bharucha. Conversations between the artisans and me were not independent of the surroundings, climatic conditions, and the nature of the relationship between us. As anthropologists Huon Wardle and Paloma Gay Blasco argue, the incorporation of experiential aspects of ethnographic interviews "do not reduce its value as true knowledge, but they give ethnographic knowledge a rather particular shape." The experiential accounts resist the unification of ethnographic accounts and attribute specificity of the situations.<sup>95</sup> While discussing sounds and speeches in my chapters, I am attentive to how historical knowledge is embedded in these expressions.

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<sup>92</sup> While reflecting on the role of translators, Walter Benjamin noted, "words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process." Benjamin suggested that perceived meanings of the spoken words are always in flux. Walter Benjamin, "The task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*," in *Illuminations*, ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 73.

<sup>93</sup> Bharucha, "Listening to Komalda," 11.

<sup>94</sup> I elaborate on the mediation of visuals and knowledge in Chapter 3.

<sup>95</sup> Huon Wardle and Paloma Gay Blasco, "Ethnography and An Ethnography in the Human Conversation," *Anthropologica* 53, no. 1 (2011): 119.

## Scholarship on Indian Crafts and Coromandel Textiles in the Twentieth Century and Beyond

The image of artisans and craft communities was shaped in relation to specific political motivations—from the anti-colonial movements to the post-independence initiatives—in the Indian subcontinent during the twentieth century. Art historian Deepali Dewan argues that the body of the craftsman became the site for contesting ideologies and concepts during the colonial era.<sup>96</sup> On the one hand, craftspeople were considered as keepers of tradition; on the other hand, colonial scholarship blamed them for the gradual degradation of craft skill. A colonial project by George Watts and Percy Brown, an exhibition in 1903 and publication in 1904 attempted to catalogue and categorize crafts in India and set them in a “systematic sequence.”<sup>97</sup> Early twentieth-century scholarship overlapped with the nationalist movement in India. During the early decades of the twentieth century, Mohandas Gandhi promoted the importance of handwork and homespun cloth known as *khadi*.<sup>98</sup> Gandhi’s emphasis on khadi was a highly effective anticolonial move as it demonstrated the importance of local sustainable economy in nation building. Gandhi’s attempt was to oppose British Imperialism and discourage the import of mill-made foreign cloth to India. Gandhi’s revolutionary step to re-introduce homespun cloth to the Indian people influenced generations of scholars, craftspeople, artists, and activists. As an example, the first Prime Minister of independent India Jawaharlal Nehru promoted the image of rural India as the site of the nation, and crafts to be the authentic products of the nation. Several

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<sup>96</sup> Deepali Dewan, “The Body at Work: Art education and the figure of the ‘native craftsman’,” in *Confronting the Body: The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Post-colonial India*, eds. James H. Mills and Satadru Sen, (London: Anthem, 2004), 118-34.

<sup>97</sup> George Watts and Percy Brown, “Preface,” *Arts and Crafts of India: A Descriptive Study* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979), vii. Watts and Brown’s book was first published in 1904, in an attempt to document varieties of crafts from the subcontinent. Both historic artifacts and saleable objects are documented in this book which were part of the Indian Art exhibition at Delhi in 1903.

<sup>98</sup> Historian Lisa Trivedi underscores Gandhi’s strategic move to balance tradition with modernity during the nationalist struggle. Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). Popularization of khadi outside wearable items was informed by the new idea of home, as historian Abigail McGowan argues. Abigail McGowan, “Khadi Curtains and Swadeshi Bed Covers: Textiles and the changing possibilities of home in western India, 1900-1960,” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 2 (2016): 518-63.

measures were taken to revitalize crafts in India after 1947, especially during the 1950s which also drew considerable scholarly attention to the craft sectors and Coromandel textiles.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, an art historian and one of the early scholars in the field of South Asian crafts, worked closely with objects and texts to construct a nationalist narrative of India's history. Coomaraswamy's studies—supported by extensive fieldwork and interpretation of historical Sanskrit texts—emphasized the ways contemporary craft practices have roots in historical and mythological practices from the Indian subcontinent. His scholarship and ideology were driven by the Indian nationalist movement in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. In *The Indian Craftsman*—published in 1909—for instance, Coomaraswamy clarified his aim to influence youth to take an interest in the study of Indian arts and crafts.<sup>99</sup> He served as curator of the Indian section at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1917-47) and remained a prolific figure in promoting and drawing critical appreciation of Indian crafts and arts.

Like Coomaraswamy, art historian Stella Kramrisch has been an influential scholar, teacher, and interpreter of Indian arts. She argued that Indian art, since the prehistorical period, brought together abstract rhythm with “unbounded freedom” into representational forms.<sup>100</sup> Her focus on expressiveness and spontaneity remained throughout her career which drew her interest to rural crafts.<sup>101</sup> While serving as the curator of Indian art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1954-1993), Kramrisch actively built an impressive and diverse Indian collection and conceived and organized many exhibitions for North American audiences.

Following Ananda K. Coomaraswamy's suggestion, Gautam Sarabhai along with his sister Gira Sarabhai, who had inherited a treasure of textiles from their ancestors, founded the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad in 1949.<sup>102</sup> The museum has published several books and

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<sup>99</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* (London: Probsthain & Co., 1909). Also, see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934). I will return to Coomaraswamy's discussion on the collective identity of the craftspeople in Chapter 1 and theorization of time in Chapter 4.

<sup>100</sup> Stella Kramrisch, “The Expressiveness of Indian Art,” *Calcutta Review* (1922): 7.

<sup>101</sup> See Stella Kramrisch, *Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1968).

<sup>102</sup> The Calico Museum of Textiles and the Sarabhai Foundation Collections, “About Calico Museum: The Story of the Calico Museum,” last modified in 2014, [https://calicomuseum.org/?page\\_id=177](https://calicomuseum.org/?page_id=177).

monographs on historical dyed textiles and dyeing processes in India, including two of particular relevance to my study.<sup>103</sup>

Appointed by Nehru, scholar, freedom fighter and activist Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay took measures to establish the handloom and the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB) in 1952. Chattopadhyay's studies argue for the timeliness of craft practices and for the individuality of craft producers. On the one hand, as chairperson of the AIHB she was responsible for implementing policies to safeguard craft practices; on the other, through her writings, she argued for the necessity of handmade products in a rapidly mechanizing nation.<sup>104</sup> In 1956, Weavers Service Centres in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras were established to facilitate training and support to regional textile makers. These initiatives also contributed to shaping the field of Coromandel textile studies.

One of the first major projects after India's independence outside the subcontinent, *Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India* was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) in 1955.<sup>105</sup> This significant exhibition of South Asian artifacts, inaugurated by Coomaraswamy, was a collaboration between Edgar Kaufmann and Monroe Wheeler at the MoMA and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.<sup>106</sup> The exhibition featured contemporary craft objects of high skill that could be compared with historical ones. In other words, the exhibition took the responsibility of conveying the message to the world that India was still capable of producing the highly skilled crafts that the country was famed for.

In the following decades, Pupul Jayakar, a contemporary of Chattopadhyay, traveled widely across India to different craft centres and played a pivotal role in establishing a long-term relationship between the artisans and the Handicrafts Board. She initiated the idea of the

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<sup>103</sup> See Irwin and Hall, *Indian Painted and Printed Fabrics*; B. C. Mohanty, K. V. Chandramouli, and H. D. Naik, *Natural Dyeing Processes of India: Studies in Contemporary Textile Crafts Series* (Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles, 1987).

<sup>104</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, "Handicrafts in India," in *Indian Handicrafts* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1963), 4-6.

<sup>105</sup> The exhibition also featured significant performances and screenings. Six evening performances of Ali Akbar Khan (sarod), Chattur Lal (tabla), Shanta Rao (dance), the world premiere of Satyajit Ray's "The Story of Apu and Durga" were arranged alongside the show at the MoMA.

<sup>106</sup> See *Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India*, ed. Monroe Wheeler (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955); Saloni Mathur, "Charles and Ray Eames in India," *Art Journal* 70, no. 1 (2011): 39.

National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, co-founded by Gira and Gautam Sarabhai.<sup>107</sup> Jayakar's position on rural crafts was celebratory and driven by a political agenda.<sup>108</sup> The celebratory mode in her writing was meant to promote the merits of crafts for the governing bodies and to bring crafts sustained support for the future. Jayakar and Chattopadhyay's interests, activism, and aims were linked and distinct at the same time. Both Jayakar and Chattopadhyay maintained a balance between activism and scholarship where they practiced craft activism through scholarship and their scholarship became vehicle for spreading awareness and appreciation for crafts.

For a majority of scholars, a continuation of specific craft practices has implied hereditary practitioners. The issue around hereditary artisans appeared prominently in the 1961 *Census of India*. Special reports on craft production and crafts communities from various states of India were published as part of this census.<sup>109</sup> Historian Abigail McGowan argues that craft as defined by the census was “artistic or more purely utilitarian objects, produced primarily by hand among hereditary artisan families.”<sup>110</sup> However, a major feature of the 1961 census was the identification of individual craftspeople and their contributions.<sup>111</sup> This led the AIHB and design institutions, such as National Institute of Design (NID), to collaborate with craftspeople in successive decades.

A 1970 collaboration between the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Toronto, and the V&A, London, facilitated *Origins of Chintz*, the first comprehensive exhibition of Indian dyed cottons. The exhibition featured works from the ROM collection along with an extensive catalogue.<sup>112</sup> It was the first exhibition to recognize the interregional imagery on dyed, painted,

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<sup>107</sup> Ritu Sethi, “Shaping Textile Futures: Those Who Led the Way,” *Marg* 67, no. 4 (2016): 23. NID has played an important role in fostering artisan and designer collaborations and also undertaken documentation of various crafts in India.

<sup>108</sup> Pupul Jayakar, *The Earth Mother* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989).

<sup>109</sup> See A. Chandrasekhar, *Census of India, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-A (1), Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1964).

<sup>110</sup> Abigail McGowan, “Introduction,” in *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 12.

<sup>111</sup> The census presented perhaps the only comprehensive record of the wax resist practice in Machilipatnam during the late 1950s. I will discuss its significance in Chapter 4.

<sup>112</sup> See Irwin and Brett, *Origins of Chintz*.

and printed textiles produced in India.<sup>113</sup> Designer Nellie Sethna visited the collection of the V&A during 1954-56 and started working on the revival of a few motifs, namely the mango, *stambha* or cypress tree, and paisley. In the 1970s, Sethna took active measures to revitalize the dyed, painted, and printed textile making in Srikalahasti and Machilipatnam.<sup>114</sup>

A series of *Visvakarma* exhibitions held between 1980 and 1990—initiated by textile scholar, activist and conservationist Martand Singh and supervised by Pupul Jayakar—played a pivotal role in promoting collaborations between artisanal groups, designers, and government institutions in India.<sup>115</sup> As chief designer and director of the series, Singh was actively involved in reviving ikat in Andhra Pradesh and block printed fabrics in Rajasthan.<sup>116</sup> Various Weavers' Service Centres based in India's major cities collaborated with craftspeople to produce these textiles. The exhibitions were held in Britain, France, Sweden, Russia, and the USA, alongside India. The first one in the series, *The Master Weavers: Festival of India in Britain* culminated in the 1982 exhibition and publication of handcrafted textiles produced by contemporary textile makers.<sup>117</sup> This event boosted scholarship around both historical and contemporary Indian textiles.

In her 1982 book Lotika Varadarajan writes about the history of kalamkari with references to contemporary artisans.<sup>118</sup> Varadarajan presents in-depth descriptions of the block making process, drawing on cloth, and the dying processes. Her interaction with craftspeople in the Coromandel region (Polavaram, Machilipatnam, and Palakollu) enriched her analysis of historical techniques in relation to contemporary ones and provides a basis for my own

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<sup>113</sup> Sarah Fee, "'Origins of Chintz,' The Exhibit: A Look Back to 1970," *Royal Ontario Museum*, [www.rom.on.ca/en/blog/origins-of-chintz-the-exhibit-a-look-back-to-1970](http://www.rom.on.ca/en/blog/origins-of-chintz-the-exhibit-a-look-back-to-1970).

<sup>114</sup> Sethi, "Shaping Textile," 26.

<sup>115</sup> Rita Kapur Chisti, "Tradition and Beyond," in *Handcrafted Indian Textiles: Tradition and Beyond*, ed. Martand Singh (New Delhi: Lustre Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>116</sup> Sethi, 25.

<sup>117</sup> The Festival of India came full circle in Britain in 2015. Part of the festival, a show dedicated to Indian textiles titled "The Fabric of India" took place at the V&A, London.

<sup>118</sup> See Lotika Varadarajan, *South Indian Traditions of Kalamkari* (Bombay: The Perennial Press, 1982).

investigation.<sup>119</sup> The most important aspect of Varadarajan's project is the acknowledgment of individual craftsmen from whom she learned the process of block making and dyeing.<sup>120</sup>

With growing migrations and fluid mobility of people and objects across the continent towards the end of the twentieth century, the scholarship on historical trade textiles of Coromandel re-emerged on the global stage.<sup>121</sup> Since the early 2000s, globalism has emerged as a central theme in relation to Coromandel textiles. In 2003, a conference on the global textile trade took place in Calcutta organized by Sutra Textile Studies.<sup>122</sup> A full-fledged study by curator Rosemary Crill of chintz textiles from the extensive collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, was published in 2008 as part of the exhibition titled *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West*.<sup>123</sup> The relationship between trade history and art history was strengthened in the recent exhibition and catalogue titled *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*.<sup>124</sup> In this project, textiles are conceptualized as connecting threads between geographies, ideas, and materials.<sup>125</sup> Instead of focusing on textiles from a specific region, the project focused

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<sup>119</sup> Varadarajan praises the efforts of artisan V. Venkataswamy Naidu, who was mostly responsible for keeping the practice alive during this time. She also documented master dyer Mukkanteswaradu Rao's practice. Varadarajan, "Chapter Three," in *South Indian Traditions of Kalamkari*, 47.

<sup>120</sup> Another important book published in the same year was anthropologist and curator Mattiebel Gittinger's *Master Dyers to the World*, which focuses on the dyers, responsible for producing the early modern trade textiles from the Coromandel coast, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. The title of Gittinger's book announces the prominent presence of dyers; however, the book predominantly deals with the study of important painted and printed trade textiles from the collection of the Textile Museum, Washington DC; Cincinnati Museum of Art; and Brooklyn Museum of Art. Gittinger investigates the textiles through a thorough archival research of the British trade documents and object analysis supplemented by her fieldwork in India. In her comparison of the historical dyeing techniques with the contemporary ones, the dyers and printers are identified with places or communities, for instance, "Ahmedabad printers (*chippas*)" and "Artisans of Orissa State." The knowledge of the dyers is acknowledged and appreciated in her study, but their identities remain underrepresented. Mattiebel Gittinger, "Master Dyers to India," in *Master Dyers to the World: Techniques and Trade in Early Indian Dyed Cotton Textiles* (Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 1982), 61 and 85.

<sup>121</sup> Arjun Appadurai's pioneering study on commodities, transportation of "things," and the fluidity of geographical borders remains influential for studies on the transregional movement of textiles. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction," in *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63.

<sup>122</sup> The Conference was titled "Textiles from India: The Global Trade," 12-14<sup>th</sup> October 2003, Kolkata.

<sup>123</sup> Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textiles for the West* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013).

<sup>125</sup> Thomas P. Campbell, "Director's Forward," in *Interwoven Globe*, VI.



on the interconnections between varied textile practices from diverse regions.<sup>126</sup> Textile scholar Elena Phipps explores the oceanic trade in dyestuffs and argued that dye materials virtually connected the world in the early modern era.<sup>127</sup> The early modern dye trade directly affected the migration of craftwork and colonial expeditions. Phipps's study establishes a close connection between botanical studies, dye trade, and colonial exploitation. The most recent major exhibition on Indian textiles, *The Fabric of India*, was held at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, in 2015. The exhibition catalogue elaborates on the range of raw materials, dyes, weaving, printing, and embroidery techniques.<sup>128</sup> Unlike the earlier *Chintz* and *Interwoven Globe* exhibitions, *The Fabric of India* presented a brief history of Indian textiles without a specific thematic focus.

The first dedicated display of early modern Deccani artifacts from the National Museum, New Delhi, was the 2015 exhibition *Nauras: Many Arts of the Deccan*.<sup>129</sup> The co-existence of “many arts” was viewed as a result of syncretism—“where identity is forged by making connections across difference”—practiced at the Deccani courts.<sup>130</sup> Two early modern Deccani textiles featured in the show—the qanat and the Golconda coverlet (**Figure 0.22**)—aptly conveyed the spirit of syncretism embedded in dyed textiles which I found particularly useful for my investigation.<sup>131</sup>

As I have elaborated above, recent discussions on early modern Coromandel textiles and global networks focus on textiles and objects in the trans-oceanic trade and their role in transforming culture and economy across borders. These scholarly discussions around trade connections and the exchange of knowledge can be enhanced by recognizing the contributions of the makers of these thoughtfully crafted textiles.

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<sup>126</sup> See John Guy, “One Thing Leads to Another: Indian Textiles and the Early Globalization of Style,” in *Interwoven Globe*, 12-27.

<sup>127</sup> Elena Phipps, “Global Colors: dyes and the dye trade,” in *Interwoven Globe*, 120-35. Also, see Elena Phipps, “Cochineal Red: The Art History of a Color,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 67, no. 3 (2010): 1-48.

<sup>128</sup> *The Fabric of India*, ed. Rosemary Crill (London: V&A Publishing, 2015).

<sup>129</sup> *Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan*, eds. Preeti Bahadur Ramaswami and Kavita Singh (New Delhi: National Museum, 2015).

<sup>130</sup> Kavita Singh, “Nauras, New Rasa,” *Nauras*, 13.

<sup>131</sup> I will present an analysis of the coverlet in Chapter 3.

Parallel to new approaches around early modern cosmopolitanism, a group of textile scholars have further integrated ethnographic studies, historical analysis, and activism. Activist scholar Laila Tyabji, co-founder of Dastkar—a non governmental organization engaged in supporting and reviving craft practices, employs historical research to comprehend challenges faced by contemporary artisans. Tyabji evokes the role of the craft guilds and “courtly-religious forms of patronage” in the past to secure rights and livelihood for artisans to contrast with contemporary market systems.<sup>132</sup> The problem, as she demonstrates, is deepened by marginalizing craft knowledge and considering the sustainment of craft as a problem rather than potential.<sup>133</sup> Textile scholar Eiluned Edwards’s sustained research on western Indian block printed, resist, and embroidered textiles brings artisanal insights into dialogue with historical textiles.<sup>134</sup> Edwards, along with Barnes, facilitated master *ajrakh* (resisted and printed cotton from Kutch and Sindh) printer Ismail Khatri’s visit to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.<sup>135</sup> The gesture of connecting craftspeople with museum objects is beneficial for both; museum objects are interpreted through the practitioners’ viewpoint and the craft makers gain access to tangible remains of their past. Both Tyabji and Edwards work as mediators between textile makers and institutions—a direction which I find replete with potential.

## Chapter Division

My thesis consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. Within the pages of this study, agency is recognized as a fluid rather than fixed notion and embodies a series of complex interactions between the textile makers and environment. This study builds on ongoing scholarly discussions on early modern cosmopolitanism, sensorial aspects of material culture, and the intangible histories of marginalized craftspeople. I will explore the agency and embodied knowledge of the kalamkari makers through three prime aspects of textile making: first, the artisans’ multifaceted encounters with the ecological and cultural resources available in the coastal Coromandel; secondly, their abilities to take part in the intercultural exchanges and

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<sup>132</sup> Laila Tyabji, “Revivalism and Revivalists,” *Marg* 67, no. 4 (2016): 35.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. Also, see *Threads and Voices: Behind the Indian Textile Tradition*, ed. Laila Tyabji (Mumbai: Marg, 2007).

<sup>134</sup> See Eiluned Edwards, *Textiles and Dress of Gujarat* (Ahmedabad and London: V&A Publishing in association with Mapin Publishing, 2011).

<sup>135</sup> Eiluned Mair Edwards, “Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk,” *Textile History* 47, no. 2 (2016): 165-6.

translating their experiences through the visuals by means of repetitive bodily actions during the early modern as well as contemporary periods. Third, the multiple temporalities of textile making which sets up a relationship between the past and contemporary modes of kalamkari making. I heavily draw on the practices of Gangadhar and Narsaiah garu, Mukkanti garu, Muhammad Salim Pasha, and Bhikhamayya Chary, among others. A selection of the seventeenth-eighteenth century Coromandel textiles from Indian museum collections will be analyzed to support my argument.

Chapter 1, titled “Mark of the Makers: Agency, Identity, and Bodily Practice,” will underscore the theoretical underpinnings of agency, the challenges, and possible methods of reconstructing their agency. Reassessment of agency also calls attention to the multiple identities of the textile makers. I will demonstrate the overlapping of regional, community-based, and individual identities of the kalamkari makers by elaborating the idea of *Visvakarma* and the interconnectivity between artisanal groups. Both agency and identity of the artisans are constructed through their bodily actions and interactions with materials. In the last section of the chapter, I will discuss the cruciality of recognizing bodily practice as a prime knowledge reserve for them and for us to retrieve their underrepresented histories. This chapter will foreground ongoing block making and dyeing activities in the Bandar region. Historical Coromandel textiles, especially a tent hanging from the National Museum, New Delhi, is analyzed to further my argument in this chapter.

Chapter 2, entitled “People Here Think Differently Because of the Water: Place and Localized Knowledge,” will present a critical analysis of the dyers’ material and perceptual engagement with the coastal environment, water, and dyestuff. By stressing the localized knowledge resource of Mukkanti garu and his workshop members, I will present perspectives to envision the early modern dyers’ involvement with cultural mobility and cosmopolitanism. Focus on localized knowledge presents an alternative reading of the historical texts, such as William Roxburgh’s account. I will further contextualize this by presenting the key features of the coastal ecology and environment which enabled the sustainment of the dyers’ knowledge reserve. After that, I will discuss the accounts of dyeing and printing in the Bandar region, supported by examination of both historical and contemporary kalamkaris to reflect on how the coastal water affect the dyers’ ability to “think”.

The third chapter, “Repetitive Actions and Mimetic Practices: Approaching Early Modern Imagery through Contemporary Block Making,” will empower the repetitive bodily actions of the woodblock makers to discuss the artisans’ role in producing interregional, intercultural, and intermedial imagery figured in the early modern Coromandel textiles. The textile makers often worked on the instructions from their patrons; does that reduce their contribution into an act of copying? Through analyzing the dynamic body of research on mimesis and the practice of block making, I will examine this problem and argue for recognizing the significance of the mediation of visuals in the textile makers’ workshops. To further establish the relevance of mimetic practices of the kalamkari makers, I will assert how these practices are key to making decisions, synthesizing knowledge, and creating a knowledge repository for future usage. Gangadhar and Narsaiah garu’s collection of traced drawings—which allows us to consider the modes of their archival practice—will be discussed in this section. To support my argument in this chapter, I will examine a range of historical visual material including Deccani architecture and Vijayanagara murals.

Chapter 4, “Imprints of Time: On Layered Temporalities of Kalamkari Making,” will investigate the historicity of craft knowledge and will test the viability of approaching early modern Coromandel textiles through contemporary practices while acknowledging both continuity and transformations in kalamkari making. The collaborative venture between dyers, painters, block makers, and printers in contemporary workshops brings different temporal systems together during the production of dyed textiles. To unravel the layers of temporalities embedded in kalamkari making, I will address two aspects. First, the role of sequence in kalamkari making by presenting an account of indigo dyeing at Pasha’s workshop. Secondly, the transformations and continuities of historically informed textile making in the Coromandel region. I will draw on Chary’s insights to develop my argument and further support it by my experience of printing at the Weavers’ Service Centre, Hyderabad. To reflect on the coexistence of transformations and continuities in ongoing kalamkari making, I will provide two case studies on the discontinued practice of wax resist drawing in Machilipatnam and the *mehrab* textiles—portraying a set of early modern imagery—from Mukkanti garu’s workshop.

## Mark of the Makers: On Agency, Identity, and Bodily Practice

Block carver Nilamabar handed an unfinished woodblock depicting intertwined lotuses and creepers to master block maker Gangadhar Kondra (**Figure 1.1**). He intended to demonstrate some of the factors block makers should consider while carving a block for printing.<sup>136</sup> Upon closely examining the block, Gangadhar garu reflected:

This block is being prepared in such a way that it can be printed in both vertical and horizontal order. When this is printed on a sari or running fabric, the flow of the pattern should be seamless. To ensure that, we keep registration marks in the corners of the block. For everyone else, those marks may seem to be part of the design matrix, but a printer will be able to recognize it in an instant. Without these registration marks, printing such motifs can be difficult...once the block is prepared, we attach a wooden handle at the back so that the printers can hold it firmly while using. We pay attention to the placement of the wooden handle; it should be placed on the back side of the block in such a way that it can allow uniform pressure of the block on the textile while printing. If the pressure is not uniform, the printed image will not appear properly.<sup>137</sup>

Gangadhar garu's comments allowed me to see beyond the meticulously carved lotuses on the block and to consider the functional aspects which were overshadowed by the lyrical linear image. The integrity and ingenuity of the block makers is often not in projecting their individual mark on the cloth but in being attentive to the need of the patrons who commission the works, and printers who execute the final imprint of the blocks on textiles. The seemingly humble endeavor of the block makers embodies a keen knowledge of resources, continuous assessment of their acquired skill, and an eagerness to serve the needs of their fellow artisanal communities. This salient characteristic feature of contemporary block making in Pedana can also be applied to the practices of early modern dyed textile makers of the Coromandel, as I will argue, to reconstruct their agency.

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<sup>136</sup> I discuss the process of preparing woodblocks in the workshop of master block makers Kondra Gangadhar and Kondra Narsaiah in Chapter 3.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Kondra Gangadhar in Pedana, September 2015. While referring to the registration marks, Gangadhar garu called them "holes made with nails" and *chēd* (hole, in Hindi). I took the liberty of calling them registration marks for the purpose of writing. All translations of the interviews are my own unless otherwise noted.

In this chapter, I will first define agency and introduce the problems of reconstructing agency of the early modern dyed textile makers. Also, I will discuss the role of historical textiles to retrieve artisanal agency. When addressing the issue of agency, the second section of this chapter grapples with the question of regional, collective, and individual identity which contributes to the complexity of artisanal agency. Since the identity of the textile makers develops from their bodily engagement with the production process, it is crucial to ask how do identity and agency relate to bodily practice.

### **Defining Agency of the Dyed Textile Makers**

As I have noted in my Introduction, by agency of the dyed textile makers, I point to their ability which prompts or restrains actions to survive and act upon the world. Bringing “making” to the forefront of this discussion, I will focus on two crucial aspects constituting agency: the relationship between humans and non-human agents, and the gestures or actions which convey the ability of artisans. My analysis of these two aspects draws from sociologist Yong Wang’s theorization of agency and how he repositioned the concept as a variable and contingent aspect of social and material relationships.<sup>138</sup> Wang recognizes the integral components of a relational state of power between structural mechanisms and human action to argue that agency is a coded practice that is embedded in the intentions, desires, and beliefs of both individuals and communities.<sup>139</sup> By non-human or structural mechanisms, in this context, I point to the raw materials used in textile making, as well as to environmental and cultural factors. The deep impact of culture in determining artisans’ actions or responses is undeniable; however, asserting foremost importance on culture tends to undermine the ingenuity of individuals.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, agency cannot be entirely attributed to individuals; in that case, all individuals would be considered equals, which would defy the purpose of a better representation of underrepresented groups. Keeping both these conditions in consideration, Wang poses an important question—will the removal of the structural constraints attribute agency to the people.<sup>141</sup> As response, he

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<sup>138</sup> Yong Wang. “Agency: The Internal Split of Structure.” *Sociological Forum* 23, no. 3 (2008): 481-502.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 487.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

proposes that agency is the gap between humans and structural mechanisms or the “structure’s posited other” that embodies both its possibilities and limits.<sup>142</sup> Human interaction with culture or the structural mechanisms is a continuous process which embodies participation and resistance. During these interactions, the assertion of people’s presence in society marks agency. However, assertion should not be misunderstood as visible proof of people’s participation; dissolving visible proof to serve a purpose is also an indicator of agency. Following Wang, I attest that agency of the dyed textile makers is intrinsically a fluid notion which manifests during their interactions with the structural mechanisms. A key nodal point in my discussion rests on the assertion that agency is relationally contingent and can be cast as variable rather than a constant.

Social anthropologist Alfred Gell’s well known and much discussed attribution of agency to art objects advances the relationality of agency.<sup>143</sup> He stresses that the notion of agency is “context-dependent,” and even though objects are essentially manufactured by humans, the agency of objects is not fully dependent on humans.<sup>144</sup> Gell’s strong argument for the agency of objects warns us against equating objects with their makers; this proposition compels us to assess the role of the historical Coromandel textiles in reconstructing agency of their makers. According to Gell, the makers’ agency cannot be equated directly to the products they make as raw materials and ecological factors play crucial roles to shape the objects; thus, the textiles are not complete reflections of the producers. He furnishes examples of ceremonial objects which are believed to have originated on their own. Whereas Gell’s primary concern remains with asserting agency to the objects, his thesis does not empower the makers of the objects.<sup>145</sup> “Intention” appears as a crucial factor in Gell’s theorization of agency which prompts actions for both human agents and objects.<sup>146</sup> Intention as a precursor to action tend to suggest a linear relationship between the two. Endorsing this can lead to the differentiation between thinking and

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>143</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>144</sup> Gell, “The Theory of the Art Nexus,” in *Art and Agency*, 22.

<sup>145</sup> See Howard Morphy, “Art as a Mode of Action: Some Problems with Gell’s Art and Agency,” *Journal of Material Culture* 14, no. 1 (2009): 5-27; K. Arnaut, “A Pragmatic Impulse in the Anthropology of Art? Alfred Gell and the Semiotics of Social Objects,” *Journal des Africanistes* 71, no. 2 (2001): 191–208.

<sup>146</sup> Gell, “The Problem Defined: The Need for an Anthropology of Art,” in *Art and Agency*, 17.

doing, as anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests in his critique of Gell's model.<sup>147</sup> Ingold argues that the reduction of action as mechanical loses the scope of theorizing it in relation to the environment and existing practices. Also, "intention" in Gell's context, is "to change the world," which signals transformations in an existing practice. This does not fully justify the dyed textile makers' practice since their repetitive actions are not always employed in transforming but in sustaining the line of work.<sup>148</sup> Wang's theorization, on the other hand, prioritizes people's participation in society over making changes.

Interactions or entanglements between materials and human beings, according to archaeologist Uzma Rizvi, is constitutive of subjectivities.<sup>149</sup> Her argument focuses on the term "resonance," which she describes as affective and empathetic communicative responses between materials and craftspeople.<sup>150</sup> Materials preserve potentials to evoke sensory responses from the people who work with them. Rizvi asserts that the subjectivity of the artisans develops from their correspondences with materials. Stress on the interactions between humans and objects—also addressed in Gell's book—is further complicated in Rizvi's consideration of material-human correspondences.

We can only investigate these "correspondences" from the artisans' point of view and how materials generate emotional and bodily responses within them. Examining the actions—constitutive of these correspondences—provides us instances to possibly account for the authority of the actors/artisans, which is another aspect of the notion of agency. According to Wang, an action, which transforms a current social struggle by overcoming previously failed attempts, embodies agency of the actors.<sup>151</sup> These actions also enable artisans to reflect on failure and thus, impact their ability to think. Wang clarifies that the entire time span of performing actions is not synonymous with agency; instead, he focuses on the moments which mark transformations in practice and thought process. His theorization is particularly useful in the

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<sup>147</sup> Tim Ingold, "Of String Bags and Birds' Nests: Skill and the Construction of Artefacts," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 352.

<sup>148</sup> Gell, "The Problem Defined," 6.

<sup>149</sup> Uzma Z. Rizvi, "Crafting Resonance: Empathy and Belonging in Ancient Rajasthan," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 15, no. 2 (2015): 256.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>151</sup> Wang, "Agency," 499-500.



context of this study as it allows for greater consideration of how textile workers do not always work by rote or according to pre-established patterns but rather how they work in response to manifold factors that influence the outcome. By situating agency in “moments”, Wang further amplifies the fluidity and variability of this notion.

The fluidity of artisanal agency is explored in Roma Chatterji’s succinct analysis of contemporary *pata* (scroll in Bengali) painters of southern Bengal.<sup>152</sup> Chatterji situates artisanal agency between the contesting notions of self-expression and responses to societal demands.<sup>153</sup> According to the author, artists often consciously go against societal norms to establish their voices; in contrast artisans cannot afford to achieve this. Drawing on this observation, Chatterji concludes that artisanal agency is multiple and synthetic, instead of subjective and autonomous. By multiple, she points to the simultaneous responsibility of carrying out their patrons’ commissions while nurturing their own interests. Following Wang, she suggests that artisanal agency manifests in “contingent acts,” and that can be reconstructed from the objects which appear as end products of these actions.<sup>154</sup> Her consideration is particularly relevant as it complicates the engagement of the dyed textile makers; working on patrons’ instructions do not discredit but empower artisans’ achievement. By focusing on two *chitrakars* (scroll painters)—Swarna and Tagar Chitrakar—Chatterji demonstrated the impact of these individuals in fostering “collective creativity” of scroll painters in southern Bengal.<sup>155</sup> Recognizing the contribution of individual painters and their situation in the community enabled Chatterji to read the multiplicity of artisanal agency.

Recognizing ephemerality is the key to theorizing agency of the dyed textile makers. The “affective” relationship between materials and textile makers is far from being constant. With seasonal and environmental changes, the responses of raw materials to the textile makers vary; an astute understanding of the block makers towards the quality of the teak wood or the dyers towards the potency of dyestuff enable them to interact with the materials accordingly. Whereas

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<sup>152</sup> Roma Chatterji, “Repetition, Improvisation, Tradition: Deleuzean Themes in the Folk Art of Bengal,” *Cultural Analysis* 15, no. 1 (2016): 99-127.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-101.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

the shifting nature of these interactions complicates the location of artisanal agency, it does affirm that agency can be retrieved from similar interactions.<sup>156</sup> Cotton, wood, dyestuff, and tools—which generated resonance within the early modern dyed textile makers—continue to yield thoughtful responses from the contemporary practitioners. The contexts in which the material-artisan interactions play out attribute specificity to locating the ephemeral agency of textile makers. Context-specificity also enables us to trace the transformative moments in craft making which alter the existing struggles of productions. Reflections on these ephemeral moments are observed in two ways—first, in the socio-culturally and historically informed specifics of textile making; secondly, through the portrayal of unfamiliar images. Even though on the macro level the procedure to make dyed textiles might appear standardized, attention to minute details reveals the absorption of “transformative moments” through practice.<sup>157</sup> Faced with unfamiliarity, textile makers push the boundaries of their knowledge practice to bring “foreign” or unfamiliar ideas, motifs, and compositional schemes into their fold.<sup>158</sup> I locate agency of dyed textile makers—which signify the extent of their knowledge practice—in the shifting relationship nurtured between materials and ephemeral actions.

In light of the above discussion on agency, I would like to return to Gangadhar garu’s statements which opened this chapter. While composing the lotus motif on the woodblock, his intention was not in establishing his distinctive mark but ensuring the seamless flow of this motif onto the textile (**Figure 1.3**). The seamlessness or unbroken continuity of motifs depends on the reproducibility of the block. If the quality of carving demonstrates the skill of the block makers, the design solution to ensure reproducibility represents the carvers’ thoughtful consideration of the printers’ job. An unbalanced alignment of the motifs in the blocks causes disruption in the printed outcome. While executing the wood blocks, block makers are required to consider their future use and take preventive measures to avoid failure. I read this awareness as the bearer of their agency which allows them to anticipate and eliminate any disruptions during printing. The awareness comes from the “transformative” strategies to overcome previous struggles of reproducing repetitive motifs. The sound understanding of the block makers to the demands of

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<sup>156</sup> Rizvi’s analysis of the use of “pure copper” showed an effective implementation of this methodology. Rizvi, “Crafting Resonance,” 259-64.

<sup>157</sup> I illustrate this issue in Chapter 4 by examining the role of sequences in the dyed textile making.

<sup>158</sup> I examine unfamiliar motifs in the Coromandel textiles, such as the pineapple and cherry blossom, in Chapter 3.

their patrons and requirement of the printers contribute to the multiplicity of their agency. The notion of awareness, in this context, can be extended to other sectors of dyed textile making. Washers need not use harsh washing material to the unbleached cotton which affects the absorption of dyes in the fabric while dyeing. During mordant printing, printers usually mix fugitive dyes with transparent alum solution to alert the washers and boilers to the presence of mordant in the fabrics (**Figure 1.4**).<sup>159</sup> These embedded decisions are found in almost every step of dyed textile making; one group of artisans not only perform their tasks but acknowledge their role in a multi-part process.

The second striking issue in Gangadhar garu's comment was the use of "registration marks". As he stated, the motifs could only be recognized as registration marks by the printers. The decision to utilize motifs as registration marks is an indication of the block makers' agency. However, the issue around concealment complicates their participation in the process. Concealing their presence instead of announcing it is a requirement of the practice. While proclaiming one's contribution is equated with agency, the conscious disguise of their distinctive marks from the wood blocks can be read as their strategy to act upon the world. When this observation is projected onto the historical textiles, the absence of the distinctive presence of the textile makers is reinterpreted as artisanal decisions. Throughout my thesis, I will keep returning to the idea of the apparent absence of the artisans' hand to argue for an active presence of the early modern dyed textile makers of Coromandel in the cloth they produced.

Gell's caution in drawing a simplified relationship between art objects and their makers is a reminder that examining historical Coromandel textiles does not provide ready access to the lives of their producers. As tangible evidence of ephemeral knowledge practices of the dyed textile makers, the significance of these textiles in this study is central. Informed by Gell's framework, I will demonstrate how historical textiles enable us to understand aspects of agency.

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<sup>159</sup> Alum mordant is a transparent solution which is used to obtain a range of colors including various tones of red. Fabrics with mordant are processed through elaborate washing and boiling processes which is different from fabrics with only black or indigo. For that, notifying washers and boilers about the mordant in fabrics is crucial.

## A Study of the National Museum Tent Hanging: The Two-headed Bird

The transformative decisions of early modern textile makers enriched the visual vocabulary of the Coromandel textiles. The moments which compelled the producers to push the limits of their knowledge are manifested in “unexpected” ways in the transformed images.<sup>160</sup> Visual imagery which are between cultural and material expressions stand as potent examples of these actions. The sensorial reception of these trans-cultural exchanges can be explored in the complex image of a two-headed bird, featured in the central panel of the National Museum hanging (**Image 1.5**). Finbarr Barry Flood and Deborah Hutton’s comprehensive analysis of the intercultural motifs in early modern South Asian and Deccani visual culture contextualize the emergence of these complex images.<sup>161</sup> The courtly interactions and trade relations between the Deccan and Coromandel with other parts of South Asia, the Middle East, and Western Europe penetrated into the practice of dyed textile making.<sup>162</sup> To keep up with the spirit of these interactions, textile makers represented images which were beyond their social and cultural milieu. The results, in other words, the transformed images, are the tangible records of the artisanal decisions. These images also embody the crucial moments in their practice which resulted in visual complexity. I will demonstrate this by analyzing the bird motif from the National Museum hanging.

The central panel, perhaps the most dynamic of the five panels, is dominated by the extraordinary presence of a two-headed bird, who is barely contained within the cusped arch frame.<sup>163</sup> Two heads emerge from its shoulder. The heads, wings, and feathers of the bird are

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<sup>160</sup> Chatterji, “Repetition,” 100.

<sup>161</sup> See Finbarr Barry Flood, “Cultural Cross-dressing,” in *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 62-5; Deborah Hutton, “The Use of Imaginary Landscape in Paintings from Bijapur,” in *Garden and landscape Practices in Precolonial India: Histories from the Deccan*, eds. Daud Ali and Emma Flatt (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011), 134.

<sup>162</sup> Similar arguments are made in the field of Mughal visual culture. Architecture, miniature paintings, and objects patronized by Mughal rulers embodied cross-cultural and intermedial knowledge. See Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book 1560-1660* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2002); Kavita Singh, *Real Birds in Imagined Gardens: Mughal Painting between Persia and Europe* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2017).

<sup>163</sup> The Victoria & Albert Museum, London, has a similar tent piece (A/c no: IS.19-1989), collected from the royal court of Amber, Rajasthan. The similarity between the New Delhi and the V&A tent hanging is striking. See George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, “Textile, metalwork and stone objects,” in *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 227. In Michell and Zebrowski’s text, the two-headed bird is confused with the mythical *yali*.

possibly drawn from the Chinese phoenix, delineated with flowing lines and a careful selection of patterns and colors. Initially, two elephants were drawn in the beaks of the bird, which are worn away with time leaving only a trace of their forms.<sup>164</sup> On the two sides of the heads, malleable rock formations are shown. The bird flies down in a plunging sweep picking up the elephants from the ground. The solidity of the rock formations is asserted by the use of dark tones; otherwise, the structures could easily be interpreted as clouds. The downward movement of the bird and its' stiff claws infuse a dynamic charge to this image. This dynamism is further exploited by the dragon heads and crisscrossings of its feathers and their movement in the pictorial space. The crosshatched pattern of feathers resonates with the web of creepers and vegetal motifs from the neighboring panels. The bird's body has a stable vertical orientation but its stability is challenged by the energy of the feathers and heads. The muted patterns and color scheme of the body add to the complexity of the visual.

In southern India, the two-headed mythical bird or eagle is known as *gandaberunda* and represented in temple murals, carvings, metal-ware, and textiles.<sup>165</sup> Gandaberunda is often identified as a form of the Hindu god Vishnu and presently serves as the official emblem of Karnataka state. The scroll painters of Cheriya depicted this composite bird while addressing the history of Padmashali weaver community in the Deccan.<sup>166</sup> In their origin myth, Padmashalis identify themselves as the descendants of Bhavana Rishi. In one of the episodes of the origin myth, Gandaberunda appeared in a forest before Bhavana Rishi. The association between Bhavana Rishi and Gandaberunda deepens the significance of this two-headed bird for the Padmashali weavers.

However, the visual representations in temples, scrolls, metal-ware, or woven textiles do not show Gandaberunda upside down. Divine figures in Hindu belief are usually not shown

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<sup>164</sup> This description of the two-headed bird is also featured in “*Qanat* or Tent with Five Panels,” by Anamika Pathak in the exhibition catalogue of *Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan*, ed. Preeti Bahadur Ramaswami and Kavita Singh (New Delhi: National Museum, 2015), 132.

<sup>165</sup> The *gandaberunda* is found in Nayaka period murals at the Rajarajesvara temple or Periya Koyil, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, carvings on Hoysala and Vijayanagara temples in Karnataka, metal wares of the Deccan, and woven textiles, such as Kanchipuram saris.

<sup>166</sup> Art collector Jagdish Mittal, co-founder of the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad, has an impressive scroll depicting the tale of Bhavana Rishi. Jagdish Mittal, *Deccani scroll paintings in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art* (Hyderabad: Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, 2013).

overturned. Moreover, Vishnu is believed to be the sustainer of the universe and even his combative incarnations respond to the notion of stability. A consideration of these aspects raises confusion about the identification of this two-headed bird. The confusion is furthered by the incorporation of the features of the Chinese mythical phoenix *feng huang* in this image.<sup>167</sup> A prime reason for initially identifying the downward flying bird with Gandaberunda is its association with elephants. Gandaberunda is typically shown holding elephants in its claws; however, in this hanging, the diminutive elephants are held in the bird's beaks. The motives behind altering established iconographic traits of Gandaberunda are ambitious and ambiguous. The two-headed bird motif, for example, also appears in Dutch royal insignias and coat of arms of wealthy families. Carved granite gravestones at the seventeenth-eighteenth century Dutch cemetery at Machilipatnam carry this motif, which is often associated with military power, monarchy, and courage (**Figure 1.6**). A gravestone depicts an image of the double-headed bird which bears a striking resemblance to the one on the hanging. The two-headed bird from the hanging thus draws on imagery shared between cultures and beliefs across geographies and denies a straightforward identification with the Hindu mythical bird Gandaberunda.

Considering the location of textile makers in the Coromandel and Deccan, it is most probable that the artisans were aware of the mighty bird form of Vishnu. While portraying the bird, they have negotiated between the established religious form and perhaps the patrons' demands to dynamize this extraordinary bird.<sup>168</sup> For this negotiation, the structure of the bird remained in between the Hindu mythological delineation and the Chinese phoenix motif. By announcing the bird's shared presence across regions and cultures, the dyed textile makers participated or acted upon the world and asserted their agency in this image.

The comparison between the visual vocabulary of textiles sheds light on the "collective creativity" of the textile makers, which according to Chatterji, is a crucial aspect of artisanal agency. The spirited and yet careful linear execution of the vegetal, animal, and human forms in early modern Coromandel textiles, according to Irwin and Brett, were the result of a "unifying

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<sup>167</sup> Feng Huang or phoenix appears as an established motif in the Chinese literature and art. The visual characteristics of this motif represented in painting, textiles, and ornaments closely resemble the bird motif in the hanging. Alan Priest, "Phoenix in Fact and Fancy," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (1942): 97-101. Also, see <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/70613>.

<sup>168</sup> Further elaboration of artisanal decisions and negotiations will be featured in Chapter 3.

decorative style which owed nothing to foreign inspiration and was in fact characteristically Indian.”<sup>169</sup> Irwin and Brett’s stress on an organized style is significant to consider the diffusion of craft knowledge among the dyed textile makers of the Coromandel.<sup>170</sup> An integrated style, in this context, is not a homogenous mode of depiction but a conscious effort to amalgamate many representational languages and unfamiliar motifs. Whereas similar modes of drawing, applying colors, and executing printed motifs are observed across these textiles, Irwin and Brett did not ignore the differences between them. They have suggested that the textile makers possibly produced their works in three ways—tracing from templates and perforated drawings, working from memory, and copying other images.<sup>171</sup> The “collective creativity” of the dyed textile makers emerged from working collaboratively in the workshop environment with a wide range of reference material.

The Golconda floor spread from Petaboli and hanging from Pulicut—which afforded a special place in Irwin and Hall’s discussion—display similarly dressed Deccani court figures but are executed in different drawing styles (**Figure 1.7 and 1.8**).<sup>172</sup> The rectangular floor spread depicts a wide variety of plants, animals, birds and occasional human figures, dressed in Deccani costume, all placed in a forest-like landscape setting. Towards the bottom right, three human figures are depicted: an amorous couple and a soldier. Clad in Deccani court costume, the figures are effortlessly drawn with spontaneous sweeps of the kalam.<sup>173</sup> Rendered in profile, these figures bear an unmistakable similarity with Indo-Persian paintings. The calculated use of color draws emphasis to the human forms and their patterned clothes. The Pulicut hanging—which, according to Irwin and Hall was double its present length—features a minute depiction of a palatial setting inhabited by royals and surrounded by vegetal motifs, animals, and birds.

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<sup>169</sup> John Irwin and Katharine B. Brett, “Early Coromandel Group: 1600 to 1650,” in *Origins of Chintz* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1970), 15.

<sup>170</sup> Irwin and Brett’s view was further supported by Rosemary Crill among other contemporary scholars. See Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textile for the West* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008), 7.

<sup>171</sup> Irwin and Brett, “Technique and Conditions of Manufacture,” in *Origins of Chintz*, 9.

<sup>172</sup> Both the floorspread (A/C no: 403) and the hanging (A/C no: 647), presently in the collection of the Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, were acquired from the Amber Palace, Jaipur. A floorspread (A/C no: IM. 160-1929) from the V&A closely resembles the Calico Museum one and is dated between 1630 and 1640.

<sup>173</sup> Irwin and Hall noted the unmistakable presence of Persian miniatures in these figures. Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel Group,” in *Indian Painted and Printed Fabrics* (Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles, 1971), 16.

Horizontal registers are situated between the palatial units in the towers. These rectangular spaces are inhabited by male and female figures. In the centre, a seated woman is engaged in a conversation with two male courtiers (**Figure 1.9**). Much importance is given in portraying their dress and attributes. The woman wears a striped shawl on her upper body and the men wear patterned robes and turbans—announcing their rootedness in Deccani court culture. Whereas the visual language of Indo-Persian miniatures is prominent here, the contour lines of the bodies appear more restrained than spontaneous. The contour lines cautiously mark the boundaries of the figures which attribute stability to the figures. The solidity of these figures marks their distinctive identity in contrast with the Deccani figures on the floor spread. This comparison enables us to see that the collective creativity of Coromandel textile makers does not diminish the scope for practicing preferred modes of drawing. I refrain from calling this “individual” style as it is unclear whether drawing styles were consciously selected by the artisans. Perhaps, it could be identified as the style of a workshop.

Analysis and comparison between other selected historical Coromandel textiles are also featured later in my thesis to stimulate discussion around the environment-artisan relationship, the repetitive process of image making, and the continuities and alterations in kalamkari production. As Gell and Chatterji remind us, often the potentials of a technique are better understood from the products which emerge out of them.

### **On Regional, Collective, and Individual Identity**

When I refer to the early modern kalamkari producers as “Coromandel textile makers,” I am also supporting the established identification of these artisans with a particular region.<sup>174</sup> In the absence of names of workshops or individuals, the region emerged as the most significant signifier of the textile makers. Both contemporary artisanal modes of working and scholarship on the Coromandel textiles affirmed that the production of these textiles is never accomplished by a single individual. However, the examination of Gangadhar garu’s view on block making suggests that the contribution of individuals in these collective ventures could not be ignored. While situating the agency of the dyed textile makers, it is crucial to ask where do we situate

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<sup>174</sup> Identifying dyed textile makers with the Coromandel and Deccan is noted in early modern European travelers’ accounts. See W. H. Moreland, *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century* (London: printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1931).



them? The ambiguity of identity has complicated as well as limited the scope of their representation in the scholarship. Artisanal agency becomes enmeshed with the question of identity—a comprehensive discussion of this issue provides context and specificity to the theorization of agency.

In her pioneering work, Spivak questions the anonymity of marginalized communities in the institutional archives by contrasting this to the case of scholars who are “named and differentiated.”<sup>175</sup> Generalization of community identities leads to denial or suppression of their agency. Spivak stresses that the idea of identity does not apply similarly to the recognized groups and underrepresented ones. The unrecognizability of voices rests on our ability to listen and understand them.<sup>176</sup> Spivak’s theorization makes us attentive to the problem of representation and the relationship between individual and agency; however, the ambiguity around locating agency between individual and collective identity remained. Building on Spivak’s theorization, anthropologist Mattison Mines argues that in the context of Tamil women, responsibility towards their family and community signals their agency, rather than individuality and autonomy.<sup>177</sup> In this case, the negotiations between individual interests and commitments towards the society constitute collective agency.<sup>178</sup> Mines’ proposition moves away from the problem of identifying individuals from underrepresented groups to claim their agency. It also indicated that agency does not require to be connected to either individual or collective but can be both.<sup>179</sup> Identity,

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<sup>175</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 66-7.

<sup>176</sup> Spivak does not question the ability of the subaltern to speak, as flagged in the title of this essay. Instead she put forward an important question to the readers—whether we can listen to them. In her analysis of Bhaduri’s death in colonial Calcutta, Spivak reconstructs the signs the young woman left as potential reasons for her suicide. Those signs were partly interpreted by Bhaduri’s contemporaries but not fully understood. This case study implied that Bhaduri did speak, but it was not heard. Ibid., 103-4; Also, see Graham Riach, “What does “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Say,” *An Analysis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s Can the Subaltern Speak* (London: Routledge, 2017), 11.

<sup>177</sup> Mattison Mines, “Themes of Individuality in Private and Public Lives: Personal Narratives,” in *Public Faces, Private Voices: Community and Individuality in South India* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994), 179.

<sup>178</sup> A shadow of Mines’ argument on responsibility is observed in Gangadhar garu’s commitment towards the printers, who are dependent on the block makers. My intention for featuring Mines’ argument in this section is to point to the changing relationship between the notions of agency, individual, and community.

<sup>179</sup> Kalpana Ram’s analysis of the notion of “subalternity” makes a similar claim. Indicating to the fluidity of this qualifier, Ram claims that the identity of the subalterns is not controlled by authority as well as by the interest of the

according to anthropologist Stuart Hall, is to recognize some common origin or shared characteristics among people or groups.<sup>180</sup> Hall argues that the process of identification is a process of “articulation,” through which the notions of “insiders” and “outsiders” are created. Following these nuanced scholarly studies, I will propose that the identity of the dyed textile makers is individual, community-based, and region-specific at the same time. By this, I do not intend to elude the boundaries between these three concepts but to explore their interrelations.

### **Individual and Collective Identity in Scholarship**

The anti-colonial movement in the early twentieth century India empowered the collectivity of craft practices as a model for the people to collectively fight against British rule as well as to build a national identity of independent India. The scholarship produced during this time demonstrated how collectivity can be connected to communities, regions, and a nation state. In more recent scholarship, recognition of the individuals in craft communities complicated the position of the artisans. These studies demonstrate a compelling method to argue for the multiple identities of the dyed textile makers.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy worked closely with objects and texts to construct a nationalist narrative of India’s history.<sup>181</sup> His interest in craft and craft guilds was informed by the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain. The collectivity of craft practices, was interpreted by him as a possible way to bring the people from India to work against colonial rule. Evoking the historical and mythical past was again to strengthen the roots of collectivity in the subcontinent. His writings are contemporary with Gandhi’s *Swadeshi* movement. Both Gandhi and Coomaraswamy argued in favor of recognizing the economic, historical, and cultural values of indigenous craft practices as a tool of decolonization. Throughout his studies, Coomaraswamy emphasized the ways contemporary craft practices have roots in the historical and mythic practices from the Indian subcontinent. He supported his argument with accounts of his extensive

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subalterns. Rather, it is both. See Kalpana Ram, “The Silences in Dominant Discourses,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no.1 (2015): 119-130.

<sup>180</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who needs ‘Identity’?,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, (London: Sage, 1996), 2.

<sup>181</sup> Coomaraswamy announced, in the introduction to *The Indian Craftsman* first published in 1909, that his aim was to influence the youth to take interest in the study of Indian arts and crafts.

fieldwork and various historical Sanskrit texts. Coomaraswamy's intentions and aims should be examined in relation to the demands of his time. It can be debated further whether Coomaraswamy's approach to Indian craftspeople could be considered an elitist point of view.<sup>182</sup> Nonetheless, Coomaraswamy was deeply committed to empowering crafts practices on the subcontinent and employing the collective model of craft making to draw youth to the nationalist movement.

To counter the homogeneous notion of community-based identity of the craftspeople in the colonial literature, Coomaraswamy went in great detail to describe the craft guilds in his 1909 publication *The Indian Craftsman*.<sup>183</sup> The guild systems, according to Coomaraswamy, existed in the urban settings since the historical times to regulate standards of production and protect the rights of the craftspeople. Rather than being caste or community-bound, these guilds were constituted of the practitioners of a specific craft. As Coomaraswamy stated, "sometimes the same trade is pursued by men of different castes, and its guild generally includes every member of the trade without strict reference to caste."<sup>184</sup> Referring to the hereditary guilds of Ahmedabad, he noted that non-hereditary artisans or "new-comers" could join the guilds by paying an entrance fee.<sup>185</sup> In other words, artisans could choose to be part of a craft guild irrespective of their community background in some cases. This consideration moves away from the simplistic idea of generational craftsmanship and acknowledges inter-communal exchanges. Coomaraswamy also justified the prevalence of collective visual traits in South Asian crafts over individualistic approaches. The collective knowledge accumulated over time often excels the scope of individual expressions, which compel the practitioners to follow these shared principles.<sup>186</sup> Coomaraswamy's theorization unsettled the boundary between hereditary and non-

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<sup>182</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty engages with a similar question in his recent project on historian Jadunath Sarkar. He reflects that each historian or scholar is to be evaluated in keeping with the demands and conditions of their own time. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and his Empire of Truth* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>183</sup> Coomaraswamy, "The Craft Guilds of the Great Cities," in *The Indian Craftsman*, 16-8.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>186</sup> Coomaraswamy, "Religious Ideas in Craftsmanship," in *The Indian*, 75.

hereditary artisans and signaled that the prominence of the rule-bound practices does not imply an absence of individual decisions.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's celebratory writings on Indian crafts meant to promote the merits of crafts for the governing bodies and to bring them support for the future.

Chattopadhyay, a colleague of Nehru, believed in the co-existence of manual and automated production sectors.<sup>187</sup> In her autobiography, Chattopadhyay addressed Gandhian influence on her understanding of craft practices and craft objects.<sup>188</sup> Chattopadhyay recognized certain continuities between historical practices and present craft forms but did not identify contemporary craft practices to be divorced from the effects of rapid mechanization. In *Indian Handicrafts*, Chattopadhyay discussed the role of craft guilds and compared the ongoing modes with historical modes of production.<sup>189</sup> Her writing has the tendency to establish Indian crafts as timeless and romantic; nevertheless, it does not overlook technical detail and sociological aspects. She stated, "Our tradition, however, is that an industrial object is also a work of art, and even though the Indian artisan seldom rose above the traditions, he was the same as artist."<sup>190</sup> Chattopadhyay presented an image of the artisan who is part of traditional practices but also not separated from rapid industrialization. Her attitude towards craft was sympathetic and strategic. Similar to Coomaraswamy, she employed craft activism as a vehicle to spread awareness and appreciation for crafts. She did not deny the method of formal analysis but continually connected object analysis to the working process of craftspeople. Formal analysis led her to analyze how individual artisans found "sufficient scope for self-expression" through these practices. She situated temple cloths, for example, in the realm of performances and reminds us of the utilitarian aspects of these textiles.<sup>191</sup> Her analysis brought together the formal, utilitarian, and practitioners' points of view to emphasize the multifaceted identities of the artisans.

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<sup>187</sup> Prime Minister Nehru argued for the technological advancement in the newly-independent country and equally promoted the importance of manual production sectors.

<sup>188</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces: Memoirs* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1986).

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-6.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>191</sup> Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, "Hand-painted Fabrics," and "Handprinting," in *The Glory of Indian Handicrafts* (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1985) 22-32, and 33-42. Chattopadhyay declared that the kalamkari in Masulipatnam (which was "the ancient Mecca of the painted cloth which went all over the world") incorporated both painting and printing.

Special reports on handicrafts—published as part of the 1961 *Census of India*—were aimed at systematic documentation of regional crafts and their role in the economy. The codification of artisans as hereditary practitioners established during the colonial era prominently appeared in these reports; however, they also recognized the contributions of individuals, instrumental to sustaining specific practices.<sup>192</sup> In A. Chandrasekhar’s report *Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh*, the Bandar region was identified as the printed textile producing centre whereas painted textiles were associated with the Srikalahasti area.<sup>193</sup> The individuals featured in Chandrasekhar’s report mostly belonged to communities of hereditary craftspeople. That way, individuals were always projected as part of a community and region. Hereditary craftspeople were seen as the custodians of tradition which contributed to the notion of distinct craft groups, confined within a certain set of rules. Whereas Chattopadhyay made room for artisans who are so-called “outsiders.”<sup>194</sup> She stated that artisans outside the group of hereditary craftspeople are also allowed to work along with them.<sup>195</sup> With its focus on the region, community-based, and hereditary artisans, the Census reports presented a comprehensive record of dyed textile making in post independence India; however, the question regarding the nonhereditary artisans remained. Which community do they belong to? How do we account for their contribution to the sustainment of dyed textile making?

Historian Paul Greenough reflects that the Congress Government in India promoted the “traditionalist” viewpoint on crafts which left a deep impression on their policies on craft development, including the establishment of a national museum dedicated to crafts in New Delhi.<sup>196</sup> Greenough cautions against framing a particular craft practice within a community and region. With that framework, the inevitability of change in artisanal livelihoods is not

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<sup>192</sup> See A. Chandrasekhar, *Census of India, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-A (1), Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1964).

<sup>193</sup> Chandrasekhar, “Kalamkari Temple Cloth Painting of Kalahasti,” and “Kalamkari Cloth Printing of Masulipatnam,” in *Census of India*, 39-51, and 52-66.

<sup>194</sup> Chattopadhyay, *Indian Handicrafts* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1963), 6.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-6.

<sup>196</sup> Paul Greenough, “Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi,” in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 235-43. The Congress party in India was the dominant political power until the 1970s.

acknowledged. Art historian Katherine Hacker stresses vitality and adaptability, which are part of the cultural identity of a community, to challenge the notion of stable and unchanging craft practices.<sup>197</sup> While analyzing sculptor Jaidev Baghel's position among hereditary brass casters of Bastar, Hacker argues that the generational stories, lived experience, and familiar motifs prompted Baghel's innovative approach to traditional practice.<sup>198</sup> Greenough and Hacker's studies enable us to see the fluid construction of community and tradition. People within a community or a family do not necessarily adhere to a homogeneous idea about craft making. Anthropologist Chandan Bose's examination of *pauti tatvam* or a "friendly competition" among Danalakota Vaikuntham Naqqash and his wife Vanaja V.—informed by their varying perception on craft making—demonstrates how this practice work as a stimulator of ideas.<sup>199</sup> Bose considers the community setting of craft making as a condition that allows the exchange of knowledge, skill, and possibilities. The complicated reading of community and its boundaries—featured in recent scholarship—reinstates that artisanal agency cannot be either individual or collective, but both.

### **Visvakarma and Interconnectivity Between Craft Groups**

How does the region play into the identity of the artisans? As I noted above, the identity of dyed textile makers is intrinsically related to Coromandel and the Deccan. Here, by regional identity, I point to the intra and intercommunal interactions between artisans. To illustrate this issue, I will refer to the concept of *Visvakarmā*. Visvakarma is considered the Hindu god of crafts, machinery, and technologies; moreover, Visvakarma is also synonymous with the five artisanal groups including ironsmiths, wood workers, sculptors, goldsmiths, and brass smiths in south India.

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<sup>197</sup> See Katherine Hacker, "Traveling Objects: Brass Images, Artisans, and Audiences," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 37 (2000): 147-65.

<sup>198</sup> Katherine Hacker, "Dismantling or Rehabilitating the Cult of the Craftsman Paradigm: Some Reflections on Jaidev Baghel's Practice," *The Journal of Modern Craft* 9, no. 2 (2016): 146.

<sup>199</sup> Chandan Bose, "Crafting objects, crafting affinities, crafting selves: narratives of home and craft from Telangana, India," *World Art* 8, no. 1 (2018): 50-2.

Historian Vijaya Ramaswamy argues that the notion of Visvakarma suggests the collective identity of these five artisanal groups without defining them as homogenous units.<sup>200</sup> Ramaswamy foregrounds interconnectivity and migration among these artisanal groups and supported her argument with inscriptional records and activities of Visvakarma craftspeople.<sup>201</sup> Ramaswamy's argument about economic factors being a crucial aspect of craft production and migration of craftspeople also indicates how craft production and economic networks had been integrally connected. She notes that the urbanization and emergence of port cities in the south resulted in the migration of weaver communities.<sup>202</sup> Cotton production in Machilipatnam, Chirala, and Srikalahasti encouraged the clustering of Telugu weavers in these sites. This also resonates with historian David Washbrook's argument on the intra-local movement of agrarian workers and craftspeople in early modern South India.<sup>203</sup> In anthropologist Kirin Narayan and Kenneth M. George's meticulous study of the figure of Visvakarma and associated rituals, they attribute tools to be an integral part of artisanal identity.<sup>204</sup> From these discussions, Visvakarma emerges as a network of exchanges united by their use of tools.

Presently, Visvakarma communities in the coastal Andhra region consist of various artisanal groups. In 2015, Visvakarma Jayanti (an annual festival for Visvakarma) fell on the starting date of Ganesha Chaturthi (an annual festival worshipping Lord Ganesha) and celebrated by *Bandaru [Bandar] Pattana Svarnakāra Sangham* (Association of goldsmiths in the town of Bandar) and *Bandaru Pattana Visvabrāhmaṇa Sangham* (Association of Visvabrahmanas or goldsmiths in the town of Bandar) near the city centre of Machilipatnam. An invitation to one of

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<sup>200</sup> Vijaya Ramaswamy, "Vishwakarma Craftsmen in Early Medieval Peninsular India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 4 (2004): 551.

<sup>201</sup> This view is also shared by anthropologist Jan Brouwer. Brouwer focuses on blacksmithy, carpentry, braziers, foundry, sculpture, and goldsmithy in Karnataka, and the interconnections between these groups. See Jan Brouwer, *The Makers of the World: Caste, Craft and Mind of South Indian Artisans* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>202</sup> Vijaya Ramaswamy, "Migrations of Weavers in Medieval India," in *Migrations in Medieval and Early Colonial India*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 171.

<sup>203</sup> David Washbrook, "India in the Early Modern World Economy: modes of production, reproduction, and exchange," *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 94.

<sup>204</sup> See Kirin Narayan and Kenneth M. George, "Tools and world-making in the worship of Vishwakarma," *South Asian History and Culture*, 8, no. 4 (2017): 478-492.

the associations listed the communities who consider Visvakarma as their patron deity.<sup>205</sup> The communities include—ironsmiths, carpenters or woodworkers, sculptors, goldsmiths, and *padrangam*.<sup>206</sup> Even though the goldsmith community living in the coastal belt is more privileged than the rest, all these craftspeople are united as worshippers of Visvakarma. The worship of Visvakarma by craft makers in present-day Bandar implies the continued veneration of this deity and relevance of intercommunal exchanges from the historical times.

Intercommunal exchanges among artisans not only counter a fixed community or regional idea of identity but also works to connect craftspeople to a larger socio-political scenario. Historian Richard Eaton presents a fresh argument which destabilized the Hindu-Muslim barrier in the history of the Deccan.<sup>207</sup> Eaton notes that internal migrations between Deccani kingdoms have been largely neglected and argues that “elite actors” enjoyed considerable mobility between kingdoms.<sup>208</sup> This indicates that courtiers and master artists must have also traveled through the cultures and art practices in this region. Temple murals from Lepakshi, in southern Andhra Pradesh, serve as useful examples of these intercultural encounters. Looking at the murals from the Veerabhadraswamy temple at Lepakshi, which was part of the Vijayanagara kingdom, one cannot say that the paintings carried only so-called Hindu elements. On the other hand, manuscripts and miniature paintings from the other Deccan sultanates of the Deccan show frequent references to Telugu, Kannada, and Sanskrit literature; for example, the “Kitab-e-Nauras” from the Bijapur court refers to the Sanskrit word *Nauras*.<sup>209</sup> Migrations and the cultural and political exchanges between people from these kingdoms invite us to rethink the status of artisans and the kinds of artistic and cultural exchanges they were

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<sup>205</sup> The invite was sent to G. Suresh, an artisan trained in weaving and rolled gold works, who owns a jewelry shop near Koneru Centre, Machilipatnam. I am grateful to him for his support during my fieldwork in 2015 and for familiarizing me with weavers and jewelry workers in Machilipatnam and the surrounding area.

<sup>206</sup> పడ్రంగం is possibly a community name. I have not yet found a translation of this term. Since it is mentioned along with four artisan communities, I assume padrangam is also a name of a community.

<sup>207</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan 1300-1761: Eight Indian Lives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>208</sup> Richard M. Eaton, “Rama Raya (1484- 1565): Elite Mobility in a Persianized World,” in *A Social History of the Deccan*, 78-9.

<sup>209</sup> *Nauras* is derived from the term *Navarasa*, meaning nine essences in Sanskrit.



experiencing.<sup>210</sup> Scholar Naveen Kanulu's discussions around *Pirla Pānduga*—a Deccani variant of Muharram (a festival of remembrance that commemorates the martyrdom of Hussayn, Muhammad's grandson) celebrated by both Hindu and Muslim weavers—also support intercommunal artisanal encounters. Eaton's argument problematizes the Hindu/Islamic divide in the history of the Deccan and compels readers to rethink the iconographic aspects of the crafts produced in this region.

Drawing on the above discussion on fluid exchanges and intercommunal encounters, I would like to return to the *gandaberunda* image on the National Museum *qanat* to reconsider artisanal livelihoods (See **Figure 1.5**). I also suggest that overturning and altering the divine bird motif stands as evidence of the exchange of intercultural and perhaps intercommunal ideas. As noted above, the Padmashali weavers' community revere Gandaberunda, since the mighty bird is considered a form of Lord Vishnu. Padmashalis are one of the prominent groups of weavers in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In Telugu, weavers are called as *sālevāllu* (సాలెవాళ్లు). In colloquial conversations, weavers are also called *padmasālia*, which shows its close relation with the term Padmashali. This shows how a name of a community becomes synonymous with all weavers in this region. Drawing on Ramaswamy's intervention, it can be claimed that the weaver groups or scroll painters of Telangana were involved in transporting this image to the textile. The textile painters had a keen knowledge about the visual features of this motif which enabled them to also bring in Eastern Asian references without losing the essential characteristics of the divine bird. The fluid border-crossings between weavers, scroll painters, and textile makers emerged as a key characteristic of the early modern dyed textiles of the Coromandel.

The present-day organization of textile workshops in the Bandar region shows that printing and dyeing are not exclusive to specific communities. This is similar in most of the dyeing and printing workshops in this region. Historians have suggested that the organization of artisans in the early modern era was also diverse. It suggests that the artisans' skill set for dyeing and printing are given priority in these workshops rather than their community identities. A block maker in Gangadhar garu's workshop—Shanmukha Rao—belongs to the Padmashali

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<sup>210</sup> See Naveen Kanulu, "Pirla Panduga: Muharram Practices of the Deccan, weavers, their migrations, songs and memories," in *Migrations in Medieval and Early Colonial India*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 129-64.

community, for which Gangadhar garu jokingly called him “a worshipper of Bhavana Rishi.”<sup>211</sup> Master dyer Mukkanti garu came from the lineage of Devanga weavers in Polavaram (**Figure 1.10**).<sup>212</sup> His father Rao learned dyeing and printing and transferred the skill to him. Nageswara Rao, Mukkanti garu’s son, explained the distribution of people in their workshop:

Around twenty-five members work here in total. They are distributed in three of the units. There are two printing units and one washing unit. The printing units are continually active whereas the washing unit is only active a few days a week. My grandfather [Rao] did not make a distinction between people from different castes and especially encouraged workers from backward castes to work in his workshop. My father also does this. In this workshop, there are Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. We have our usual holidays every *pūrṇimā* [full moon], however, some of the workers take a holiday of Sunday to visit Church. After my grandfather started the workshop, his cousins also initiated practicing near Pedana. Weavers from Pedana and Koppaladoddi joined their workshop to work on block printing.<sup>213</sup>

The distribution of dyers and printers in Mukkanti garu’s workshop breaks away from a strictly regulated and one-community based workshop setting, also observed in Gangadhar garu’s block making workshop. G. Suresh, a weaver and gold jewelry maker in Machilipatnam, indicated that it is was common practice for weaver and agrarian communities to enter jewelry making.<sup>214</sup> The widespread practice of intercommunal interactions indicates the historicity of this practice in the Bandar area.

Examining the many facets of contemporary artisanal practices enable us to suggest three key characteristics of the identity of early modern Coromandel dyed textile makers. Drawing on the discussion on identity, I find it necessary to remind the readers that by dyed textile makers, I do not indicate a caste but the group of artisans who took part in the intra and intercommunal exchanges to produce these textiles, masterfully handled the tools of the trade, and made decisions to shape the visually and thematically complex textiles from this region. The fluidity of community structures and livelihood patterns resist us from attributing the agency of the dyed

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<sup>211</sup> Interview with Kondra Gangadhar in Pedana, September 2015.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Mukkantieswarudu Rao in Polavaram, September 2015. I provided details of Mukkanti garu’s workshop in Chapter 2.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Nageswara Rao in Polavaram, September 2015.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with G. Suresh in Machilipatnam, September 2015.

textile makers to a specific group; however, impact of the region specificity in terms of its ecological, social, and cultural factors are undeniable.

### **Agency and Bodily Practice**

Defining the agency and identity of dyed textile makers revolve around the decisions, tools, and skill of the artisans, in other words, their bodily practice. I have emphasized the ability of these textile makers to participate in societal activities by means of their actions as the core of their agency. The body of craftspeople enables this participatory act by working as the conveyer of their thoughts and skill to the society as well as the mediator of knowledge within their communities. In this section I will demonstrate the necessity of theorizing bodily actions to reconstruct the agency of the early modern kalamkari makers.

As noted in my introduction, Pierre Bourdieu's pioneering theorization of *habitus* is instrumental to my understanding of bodily practice.<sup>215</sup> Bourdieu argues that *habitus* is “an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production.”<sup>216</sup> Craft making, after Bourdieu, is a habitual practice which is guided by the societal conditions but allows practitioners to exercise the highest extent of their bodily skills. By bringing “thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions” into a conversation, Bourdieu implies the interconnectivity of the actions of the brain, hands, and body.<sup>217</sup> This negates a linear progression of thoughts into bodily action and advocated for the simultaneity of these two processes. Negation of a single directional idea of time prompts his theorization of temporality and bodily action. He argues that bodily actions employed in a certain work does not belong to only the moment of its origin or the moment when it is being performed but in both.<sup>218</sup> Bourdieu's unique

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<sup>215</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures, *habitus*, practices,” in *Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52-65.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>217</sup> For further reading on this issue, see Pamela Smith, “The Body of the Artisan,” and “Artisanship, Alchemy, and a Vernacular Science of Matter,” in *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 95-128, and 129-153; Raymond Tallis, “Grasping the Hand,” in *The Hand: A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 21-46; and Richard Sennett, “Material Consciousness,” in *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 119-46.

<sup>218</sup> Bourdieu, 56.

proposition is particularly useful to argue that bodily actions of the early modern kalamkari makers are not distinct from contemporary practitioners. By practice, the body of craftspeople works as a resource of socially and individually constructed knowledge. I propose that the habitual practice of making dyed textiles allows the artisans to exercise their acquired knowledge and carry out experimentations which construct artisanal agency.

The issue around reenacting actions or memorizing is analyzed by anthropologist Paul Connerton. He argues that the abilities to carry out a certain set of skilled actions possess effective knowledge of the past and their future applicability.<sup>219</sup> The uniqueness of this remembrance is evoking the past “without ever adverting to its historical origin.”<sup>220</sup> Cultural specificity of these practices is stored in gestures, physical features, and bodily actions.<sup>221</sup> Connerton notes that the practice of the non-inscribed kind is transmitted through social memory and habits.<sup>222</sup> In the absence of written words, the rhythms of body movements become key to the remembrance of certain knowledge and skill.<sup>223</sup> Like remembrance, as he notes, forgetting is ingrained in all habitual practices.<sup>224</sup> Connerton considers tradition as a “creative recovery” operating through bodily re-enactment.<sup>225</sup> Similar to Bourdieu, Connerton describes “habit” as a cluster of forms collected together in a practice.<sup>226</sup> In other words, how the dyed textile makers perform certain actions are specific to their being in society and culture. Following Connerton and Bourdieu, I propose that the agency of dyed textile makers from the past is reenacted when contemporary practitioners perform a similar set of actions.

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<sup>219</sup> Paul Connerton, “Bodily Practice,” in *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>222</sup> Connerton, “Introduction,” in *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>223</sup> Connerton, “Tradition as Conversation and Tradition as Bodily re-enactment,” in *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104-5.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> Connerton, “Bodily Practice,” 94.

While defining agency, I put considerable stress on the interactions between the craftspeople and structural mechanisms. Similarly, I must stress, the idea of bodily practice is not confined within the body of the artisans. Anthropologist of craft Trevor Marchand stresses situating practice between mind, bodies, and environment to expand the impact of bodily practices beyond skilled actions and performances.<sup>227</sup> This proposition resonates with Connerton's understanding of the body's relationship with the social and cultural spheres around them. Whereas cognition of craftspeople can be individual, the process through which that is achieved is a sustained interaction between environment, society, culture, communities, and individuals.

### **Bodily Practice in Understanding South Asian Crafts and Histories**

Scholars of crafts and histories of South Asia have explored dynamic ways to incorporate bodily practice into investigations on crafts and histories. Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, a noted archaeologist known for his pioneering work on the history of the Indus civilization, discusses the importance of incorporating craft knowledge to enrich historical investigations.<sup>228</sup> Kenoyer's interest lay in the process of investigating how tools and practices impact one's understanding of material culture in the absence of textual records. For understanding the relationship between availability of materials and the production of artifacts, he borrowed insights from contemporary Indian shell working industries and the market systems around them. Other practices, such as unglazed terracotta pottery making, is still produced in a similar way to the past.<sup>229</sup> Kenoyer notes that the availability of materials and ecological reasons, apart from other factors, were

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<sup>227</sup> Trevor H. J. Marchand, "Making knowledge: explorations of the indissoluble relation between minds, bodies, and environment," *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 16 (2010): S2. For further reading, see Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>228</sup> Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, "Shell Working Industries of the Indus Civilization: A Summary," *Paleorient* 10, no. 1 (1984): 49-63. Kenoyer's sustained interest in the history-contemporary interactions is reflected in his lucid description of the Indian monsoon in western India and the impact of the natural calamities on the Indus valley culture. See Jonathan Mark Kenoyer and Kimberley Heuston, "Monsoons and Mountains: The Geography of South Asia," in *The Ancient South Asian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19-25. However, his detailed analysis of the Harappan shell beadwork in earlier publications remains more important to me for its focus on craft making.

<sup>229</sup> Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, "Craft Traditions of the Indus Civilization and their Legacy in Modern Pakistan," *Lahore Museum Bulletin* 9 no. 2 (1996):1-8.

responsible for the continuity of these practices. His practice-based method complements Bourdieu and Connerton's theorization of habitual practice. Kenoyer's reconstruction of the Harappan material culture shows productive ways to integrate habitual practices with historical artifacts.<sup>230</sup> His experimental reconstruction of craft tools demonstrates the actions employed in making certain objects are historically informed and histories can be reconstructed from performing those actions.

Bridging contemporary craft making in South Asia with the past presents productive ways to foreground the body of the makers and users within recent studies. Drawing on Connerton's theorization, art historian Pika Ghosh argues that the repetitive practice of embroidering *kānthās* (quilts, in Bengali) embodies "sedimented knowledge" of the past.<sup>231</sup> The practitioners' body becomes the repository of this historically informed knowledge.

Craft scholar Soumhya Venkatesan argues that the acquisition of craft skill participates in networks of social knowledge.<sup>232</sup> Similar to Marchand, Venkatesan implies that learning or knowing craft skills are dependent on their socio-cultural setting. Venkatesan presents a narrative about introducing new tools and loom mechanism to the Labbai weavers in Pattamadai to illustrate how artisans reclaim their ancestral techniques.<sup>233</sup> The Labbai weavers silently resisted the encroachment of an improvised loom by an NGO as they understood the short-lived benefits of this new mechanism. I read this resistance not as a conservative approach but as a key to remembering past skills and implementing them in the present. The resistance of the Uppada weavers in Andhra Pradesh against fast paced textile manufacture was manifested in the "slower" and more invested mode of production, as craft scholars Annapurna Mamidipudi and

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<sup>230</sup> Like Kenoyer, curator and craft scholar Louise Allison Cort's practice-based research focuses on earthenware and stoneware in Southeast Asia have made valuable contributions to the understanding of craft communities. See Louise Allison Cort and Leedom Lefferts, "Pots and how they are made in mainland Southeast Asia," *The Oriental Ceramic Society* 75 (2012): 1-16.

<sup>231</sup> Pika Ghosh, "From Rags to Riches: Valuing Kanthas in Bengali Households," in *Kantha: The Embroidered Quilts of Bengal*, ed. Darielle Mason (New Haven and London: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2009), 43.

<sup>232</sup> Soumhya Venkatesan, "Learning to Weave; Weaving to Learn ... What?" in *Making Knowledge: Explorations of the Indissoluble Relation Between Mind, Body and Environment*, ed. H.J. Marchand (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 150-1.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 163-5.

Wiebe E. Bijker argue.<sup>234</sup> The drive towards turning to the past also indicates the historicity of these textile practices.

The historicity of contemporary miniature painting practices prompted art historian Molly Emma Aitken's study of Rajput paintings.<sup>235</sup> Contemporary miniature painter Ved Pal Sharma or Bannu's "deeply silent knowledge" triggered her queries about the choices made by the Rajasthani court painters in the past.<sup>236</sup> Sharma's practice provided her with a model to analyze the mastery of the historical painters. Whereas in Aitken's discussion the makers' perspective was emphasized, art historian Sylvia Houghteling's study attempts to reconstruct the users' point of view. Houghteling points to the difficulties of retrieving Mughal bodily histories and empowered the role of textiles in understanding these ephemeral accounts.<sup>237</sup> Her examination of a wide range of literary and visual sources is complemented by her own perspective as a scholar as well as a consumer of textiles. The juxtaposition of historical material and contemporary observations in both Aitken and Houghteling's scholarship appear as a productive strategy to unearth the suppressed accounts of the past.

Even though Kenoyer, Aitken, and Houghteling's analysis center around the overlapping of multiple times and experiences, their aims and aspirations remain different. Kenoyer's examination of present-day craft practices is directed towards understanding material culture of ancient Harappan societies. Aitken and Houghteling reconnect historical artifacts with bodily perceptions. Whereas material involvement figure prominently in Kenoyer's study, the potentials of written and visual archival records are explored in Aitken and Houghteling's projects. I take an in-between path through these approaches to generate further queries about the historical craft makers in South Asia.

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<sup>234</sup> Annapurna Mamidipudi, Wiebe E. Bijker, "Innovation in Indian Handloom Weaving," *Technology and Culture* 59, no. 3 (2018): 513.

<sup>235</sup> Molly Emma Aitken, "Introduction," in *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 1-9.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>237</sup> Sylvia Houghteling, "Sentiment in Silks: Safavid Figural Textiles in Mughal Courtly Culture," in *Affect, Emotion, and Subjectivity in Early Modern Muslim Empires: New Studies in Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Art and Culture*, ed. Kishwar Rizvi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 125.

### Tracing Bodily Marks in Historical Coromandel Textiles

Houghteling speculates that a discolored patch in a damask satin panel may be a mark of perspiration of the wearer.<sup>238</sup> Houghteling also notes the hardship to establish this claim. While analyzing historical Coromandel textiles, I also looked for unintentional marks of their makers. Among the large group of dyed, painted, and printed cottons of the Coromandel, only a handful possess names or initials of their makers or manufacturers.<sup>239</sup> Irwin and Brett identified them to be in “crude” Telugu and Tamil but they still remain untranslated. The names or initials appear in the edges of the textiles leaving no unattended mark of the makers in the image area. Sections of the Golconda floor spread (See **Figure 1.7**) have eroded over time but no casual mark of the makers can be traced on this intricately drawn textile.<sup>240</sup> The spontaneous drawing style of the National Museum coverlet ( See **Figure 0.22**) is certainly distinguishable from the carefully drawn forms of the floor spread; however, no accidental mark of the kalam can be found on the coverlet.<sup>241</sup> The multi-block printed borders increase the risks of leaving accidental effects; the textile makers’ attentiveness is reflected in these carefully executed borders.

The border of the floor spread, for example, is created by a combination of resist drawing, multiple block printing, and additional hand painting. The stylized interconnected floral and vegetal motifs are featured in red, brown, blue, green, and yellow. Outlines in brown are printed first followed by resist drawings within the motifs. After that, the mordant solution is printed as a *gad* (గడ or filling, in Telugu) to achieve red.<sup>242</sup> The dark background is then printed with brown.<sup>243</sup> Developing red and brown require washing, drying, and boiling. After that process, a faint indigo dye is applied by either printing or painting. In the end, yellow is applied by hand. The overlapping of blue and yellow created green. My intention for describing this lengthy technique is to show the attentiveness of the textile makers. The work required a

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>239</sup> See Irwin and Brett, “Plate 13: Palampore,” “Plate 14: Palampore,” “Plate 15: Palampore,” “Plate 16. Colour Plate: Palampore,” and “Plate 17: Palampore,” in *Origins of Chintz*, 72-4.

<sup>240</sup> I will discuss the worn out areas of this floor spread in Chapter 2.

<sup>241</sup> The visual analysis of this coverlet will be presented in Chapter 3.

<sup>242</sup> I discuss the mordanting process in Chapter 2.

<sup>243</sup> The photograph of this floor spread shows a darker background which is the lining behind this textile.



conscious erasure of individual traces. Individual attributions could disrupt the seamlessness of the border. This is a key characteristic of the kalamkari makers' practice which is found in the present-day block making. Returning once again to Gangadhar garu's statement about the strategic registration marks on wood blocks, these specific motifs can only be understood as registration marks by the block makers and printers. This, on the one hand, could be perceived as a conscious erasure of traces of the textile makers. On the other hand, the motive behind this measured act attests to the bodily presence of the artisans there. After Gangadhar garu's insights, the marks of the dyed textile makers can be traced from the silences of the historical Coromandel cottons.

## **Conclusions**

While acknowledging the difficulty of situating the agency of the early modern Coromandel textile makers, this chapter explored potential sites to retrieve it. The ineradicable ephemerality of artisanal agency is situated in a shifting relationship between artisans, environment, society, economy, and the artifacts, rather than at a fixed point of reference. The fragmentary retrieval of artisanal agency from these resources reconfigures the relationship between them. In the course of producing Coromandel dyed textiles, the drawers rely on the washers as they treat the fabric; printers remain dependent on the woodblocks by the carvers; the master artisans rely on patrons for their livelihood. Parallel to the interdependence observed in this textile making process, the retrieval of artisanal histories is dependent on the interrelations between their agency, identity, and bodily practice.

## **“People Here Think Differently Because of the Water”: Place and Localized Knowledge**

Nageswara Rao, the only offspring of master dyer Mukkantieswarudu Rao, recalled a popular saying about Polavaram, “ఇక్కడ అలొచన బైరె గ ఉంది,” people here think differently because of the water.<sup>244</sup> This evocative saying indicating the transformative quality of the coastal water is crucial to consider how this natural resource nurtures the practice of dyeing as well as the dyers’ abilities to “think.” In this chapter, I will argue that the interactions between the dyers of the Coromandel and the local specificities—the coastal water resources, available dyestuff, coastal landscape, and culture—shaped the material practice of dyeing as well as the embodied knowledge of the dyers which is also reflected in the early modern Coromandel textiles. The insights drawn from the contemporary dyeing and hand block printing in the Bandar region allow us to reconsider the underrepresented histories of these communities.

The coastal Coromandel region, an intermediate zone between the land and sea, is a bountiful resource of salt and sweet water. The numerous canals, wells, and waterbodies of the Bandar area are the lifelines of dyed textile production. With the strategic position of the Bandar region, certain resources and community engagements were possible here during the early modern era and the present which could not happen in the mainland areas. The early modern dyed cotton of Coromandel, which were responsible for marking the prominence of this region in the global trade network, carry visual evidence of embodied artisanal knowledge of this important resource. A critical assessment of the contemporary dyers’ material and perceptual involvement with the coastal water speak to the importance of localized knowledge and resources. The convergence of materiality and intelligence observed in the practice of these craftspeople present an alternative reading of the history of the textile practices in the Bandar region and the Coromandel Coast in general. Water and the location of the coastal intermediate zone have contributed to the construction of both localized and interregional identity of the

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<sup>244</sup> A concise version of this chapter was published as an essay focusing on the entanglements of coastal water and artisanal lives. See Rajarshi Sengupta, “Performing Histories: Enduring Dyes and Waterways in Artisanal Lives,” *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* (2019), DOI: 10.1080/20511787.2019.1648992.

region and communities. This local saying—“people here think differently because of the water”—encapsulates the multifaceted discourses around coastal water resources.

The notion of localism is essentially shaped by social and cultural experiences of space. Anthropologist Margaret Rodman unravels the complexities of “place,” which according to her, embodies socio-political and historical specificities.<sup>245</sup> Rodman argues that theorizing the “sense of place” is intertwined with recognizing voices of communities.<sup>246</sup> “Place”—a “polysemic” or layered notion—is not a specific geographical location, but a space constructed of lived experiences.<sup>247</sup> Rodman claims that in geographical and anthropological studies, the significance of place to account for the underrepresented communities is not adequately addressed. Without a detailed consideration of “place,” the contributions of communities cannot be fully appreciated. The layered understanding of place compels us to envision the layers of underrepresented voices of the inhabitants. Thus, exploration of the “polysemic” notion of “place” for the coastal dyer communities contributes to recognizing their “multivocality.” Rodman’s theorization is pivotal to explore the entanglement of the coastal environment and dyers in this chapter. Climatic conditions and cultural environments also impact on community lives. Curator Louise Allison Cort and anthropologist Leedom Lefferts stress that the specific climatic conditions and resources are key to the specificities of craft production and cultural lives of communities.<sup>248</sup> The physical and cultural environment of artisans, according to textile historian and activist Judy Frater, shape the specificities of object making and value systems.<sup>249</sup>

Studies focused on the role of the dyers in making Coromandel and other dyed textiles in India, drawing on ethnographic research and object analysis, started flourishing since the 1980s. The *Festival of India in Britain* in 1982 was largely responsible for renewing scholarly interest in the textile makers. Historian and ethnographer Lotika Varadarajan conducted thorough

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<sup>245</sup> Margaret Rodman, “Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality,” *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 94, no. 3 (1992): 640-56.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 642.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 649.

<sup>248</sup> Louise Allison Cort and Leedom Lefferts, “Pots and how they are made in mainland Southeast Asia,” *The Oriental Ceramic Society* 75 (2012): 3-4, and 10.

<sup>249</sup> Judy Frater, “‘This is Ours’: Rabari Tradition and Identity in a Changing World,” *Nomadic Peoples* 6, no. 2 (2002): 156-69.

ethnographic research in the Machilipatnam, Palakollu, and the Coromandel region to document the state of dyed textile making during the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>250</sup> Her study identifies individual dyers around the Machilipatnam area, including V. Venkataswamy Naidu, P.V. Subbaiah, and Mukkanteswarudu Rao.<sup>251</sup> Naidu, an “expert” of natural dyeing, organized a few workers into a small production unit in the Desaipet area of Machilipatnam during the 1960s.<sup>252</sup> While describing the contemporary techniques of dyed textile making, Varadarajan compares them to the historical Coromandel textiles. She laments that the earlier practice—use of dyestuff, specific techniques, and motifs—is modified by the contemporary dyers. Textile historian Mattiebel Gittinger investigates the history of dyed textiles through thorough archival research of British and French trade documents and object analysis supplemented by her fieldwork in India.<sup>253</sup> Her project examines several dye materials and the complex techniques of preparing dyes. She claims the knowledge of the Indian dyers is both “empirical” and “hereditary.”<sup>254</sup> She states that complex mordanting and resisting techniques were followed by the dyers in India. Gittinger’s approach to recognizing textile makers with specific regions is different from Varadarajan’s stress on individual practitioners. In textile historian Eiluned Edwards’ study, the complex relationship between individual textile makers, communities, Govt. institutions, and private organizations are explored.<sup>255</sup> Edwards’ approach to ethnography and material practices enriches the scholarly discussions initiated by Varadarajan and Gittinger among others and called attention to the complexities of artisanal identities. Dye specialist Jagada Rajappa has been an advocate for sustainable practices using natural dyes since the 1970s.<sup>256</sup> Rajappa closely worked

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<sup>250</sup> Lotika Varadarajan, “Chapter Three,” in *South Indian Traditions of Kalamkari*, 46-67.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>252</sup> Perhaps the earliest written record of Naidu’s work is the Census Records of India, 1961. A. Chandrasekhar, *Census of India, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-A (1), Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1964).

<sup>253</sup> Mattiebel Gittinger, *Master Dyers to the World: Technique and Trade in Early Indian Dyed Cotton Textiles* (Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 1982).

<sup>254</sup> Gittinger, “Introduction,” 16.

<sup>255</sup> See Eiluned Edwards, *Textiles and Dress of Gujarat* (V&A Publishing in association with Mapin, 2011); Eiluned Mair Edwards, “Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk,” *Textile History* 47, no. 2 (2016): 146-70.

<sup>256</sup> Interview with Jagada Rajappa in Hyderabad, July 2017.

with the dyer communities in southern India and engaged in active initiatives to support and promote the dyers' practices in India and internationally.

Recent scholarship positions water as an active agent of the transmission of knowledge. While exploring the deep impact of the river Yamuna in the early modern visual culture of Braj in northern India, Art historian Sugata Ray argues that localized aesthetics is intrinsically connected with knowledge about the environment and especially water resources.<sup>257</sup> Art historian Tamara Sears argues that the riverine travel routes in medieval central India facilitated transmission of artistic knowledge between regions and kingdoms.<sup>258</sup> Water and waterways in the Coromandel region are perceived in the scholarship as the carrier of people, objects, and trade ships. The dyers' involvement with water contributes to that by signaling how the coastal water also contribute to their bodily knowledge of dyeing.

I explore the deep entanglement of water and the localized knowledge structure of the dyers by focusing on the workshop of the late master dyer Mukkanteswarudu Rao (**See Figure 0.13**).<sup>259</sup> Coromandel textiles have nurtured sophisticated and sustained scholarship on early modern mobility and globalism. In this chapter, I will contribute to this discussion by emphasizing the localized knowledge of the dyers while drawing attention to the role of the environmental specificities of the coastal regions. By environment, I point to ecology, socio-cultural, and political surroundings. The first section of the chapter explores the scholarly attention on *chaya* roots, considered to be the secret behind the brilliant red dyes of Coromandel, and complicates the study of dyeing by introducing the role of coastal water and dyers. The second section situates the localism practiced by the early modern dyers in an interregional context. The second section, then, discusses the roles of water, waterways, and the dyers to the production of localized knowledge responsible for making the Coromandel textiles.

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<sup>257</sup> Sugata Ray, "Hydroaesthetics in the Little Ice Age: Theology, Artistic Cultures and Environmental Transformation in Early Modern Braj, c. 1560–70," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40, no. 1 (2017): 3.

<sup>258</sup> Tamara I. Sears, "Following River Routes and Artistic Transmissions in Medieval Central India," *Ars Orientalis* 45 (2015): 43-77.

<sup>259</sup> I have already addressed the distribution of people from various religious and community backgrounds at his workshop in Chapter 1.

## Chaya Roots and the Brilliant Red of Coromandel

The use of dyestuff, namely the roots of the *chāya* plant (*Oldenlandia umbellata*), also spelled *chāy*, has generated productive discussions among early modern traders and travelers, colonial botanists and industrialists, and scholars. This diverse body of scholarship established chaya roots as a material singularly responsible for the brilliant red dyes of Coromandel textiles.<sup>260</sup> Chaya roots are usually 25-36 cm long and 3-6 cm in diameter.<sup>261</sup> When fresh, the roots are orangish in tone; after drying, they turn yellowish gray. The term possibly derived from the Tamil word *chāyam* (சாயம்) or *sāyam*, meaning “stain”.<sup>262</sup> Alongside chaya, *manjisthā* (*Rubia cordifolia*, *Rubia munjistha*) or Indian madder was widely used for making a range of red dyes varying from light red, red, scarlet, and chocolate.<sup>263</sup>

The remarkable use of red dye is evident in the historical textiles from the Coromandel region, including the Golconda hanging from the Calico Museum. For example, a section from the hanging depicts a group of royal figures against a brilliant red background (**Figure 2.1**). Meticulously drawn figures are complemented by the broad arched interior space delineated in red. The uniformity of the background is adorned with fine resist drawings possibly suggesting door hangings. Red is also used in the details of the figures and architectural motifs. For suggesting depth, various shades of red are employed. These tones are achieved through overdyeing. This impressive hanging demonstrates that the early modern dyers and painters of the Coromandel well understood and utilized the available dyestuff to yield red dye.

Travelers and traders’ chronicles from the sixteenth century onward described plants and dyestuff from the Coromandel region. These chronicles around the material environment and communities of India represent subjective and socially constructed views of the chroniclers.

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<sup>260</sup> John Irwin and Katharine B. Brett, “Early Coromandel Group: 1600 to 1650,” in *Origins of Chintz* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1970), 14; John Guy, “Techniques and Production Centres,” in *Indian Textiles in the East: From Southeast Asia to Japan* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 19-20; Elena Phipps, “Global Colors,” In *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: The MET, 2013), 130.

<sup>261</sup> Chaya roots are similar to the English madder, however, there are a few acidic properties namely purpurin and purpuro-xanthin carboxylic acid, which are not present in chaya roots. The acidic properties of chaya roots are neutralized while dyeing with calcium carbonate. Bijoy Chandra Mohanty, K.V. Chandramouli, and H. D. Naik, “Note on Survey of Information Collected from Various Sources,” in *Natural Dyeing Processes of India* (Ahmedabad: Calico Museum of Textiles, 1987), 148.

<sup>262</sup> Interviews with Bessie Cecil and Vaishanvi Ramanathan in Chennai, November 2015.

<sup>263</sup> Mohanty, “Note on Survey,” 145.

Historian David Arnold reflects on the political agendas of these travelers and traders' accounts and suggested that these projects embody asymmetrical power relations between the viewers and the viewed.<sup>264</sup> Arnold argues that the travelers and traders' representation of the Indian environment—especially the flora—was tainted by their financial expectations from the land.<sup>265</sup> These travelers' narratives encouraged dedicated scientific expeditions in India during the colonial era for the “improvement” of botanical studies from the tropics.<sup>266</sup> Arnold's discussion around travelers and traders' narratives compels us to consider these deep political and economic agendas. Travelers and traders during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries noted chaya roots and its use in Coromandel textiles. Praise of chaya roots in these accounts was infused with the prospective economic benefits from this dyestuff.

William Methwold, an Irish merchant and colonial administrator, traveled in the Coromandel region during the early seventeenth century and described the use of chaya roots in fabrics:

Coast of Choromandel [are] famous throughout India, and are indeed the most exquisite that are seene, the best wrought all with the pensill, and with such durable colours that, notwithstanding they bee often washed, the colours fade not whilst the cloth lasteth; and this hapneth principally by a plant which groweth only in this country, called by them chay, which dyeth or stayneth a perfect red, with them in as great account as scarlet with us, and is the Kings particular commoditie.<sup>267</sup>

Methwold's praise recognized chay or chaya to be a crucial factor which made the Coromandel textiles distinct from the other dyed textiles in India. His mention of scarlet in comparison with the red in Coromandel pointed to the distinction made between these shades. Methwold's expression, “famous throughout India,” suggested that the importance of dyestuff was already recognized in the early seventeenth century and established as a profitable commodity by the rulers and merchants of this region. Methwold's contemporary, Dutch traveler Antony Schorer also observed the prominence of chaya roots in Coromandel. He stated, “The red dye which is

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<sup>264</sup> David Arnold, “Itinerant Empire,” in *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science 1800-1856* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 28.

<sup>265</sup> Arnold, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>267</sup> W. H. Moreland, *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century* (London: printed for the Haklyut Society, 1931), 35. Methwold's account titled *Pilgrimes* was originally published in 1625 and reprinted in *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*.

brought here [Nizampatnam] for sale is admirable; the best chay-root of the whole Coast comes from an island.”<sup>268</sup> In his description, chaya roots emerged as a mysterious dyestuff which was best cultivated on an island named Tambreve in the Coromandel region.<sup>269</sup> Both Methwold and Schorer’s texts were important to study how chaya root emerged as an exclusive dyestuff of the Coromandel region.

Alongside these accounts from the travelers and merchants, several botanists studied and documented this dyestuff. I will focus on Scottish botanist and surgeon William Roxburgh’s account of the plants of Coromandel Coast, which is one of the first detailed documentation about chaya roots.<sup>270</sup> Roxburgh described himself as “Company’s [British East India Company] medical servant,” who came to India in 1766 to serve the company.<sup>271</sup> He eventually became the first salaried superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden in 1793. Roxburgh’s scientific research of the “useful plants” of the Coromandel was intended to broaden their commercial opportunities.<sup>272</sup> Roxburgh provided the readers with a detailed description of one hundred plants along with fine hand-tinted etchings (**Figure 2.2**). A colleague of Roxburgh, Dr. Patrick Russell commented, “he [Roxburgh] had retained a painter constantly employed in drawing plants, which he accurately described, and added such remarks on their uses as he had learned from experience, or collected from the natives.”<sup>273</sup> Roxburgh, on the one hand, was interested in gathering information about plants, and on the other, was invested in describing the plants for English audience, who did not have direct access to or knowledge of these plants in southern

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<sup>268</sup> Antony Schorer’s account written in 1615-6 was reprinted in *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century*. W. H. Moreland, *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century* (London: printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1931).

<sup>269</sup> W. H. Moreland, “Schorer’s Relation,” in *Relations of Golconda in the Early Seventeenth Century* (London: printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1931), 55.

<sup>270</sup> William Roxburgh, *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel: Selected from Drawings and Descriptions* (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1795).

<sup>271</sup> William Roxburgh, “Preface,” in *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel: Selected from Drawings and Descriptions*, i-ii. Roxburgh explained that not much work had been done on the botany of the Carnatic region since 1750s. By Carnatic region, he pointed to the Deccan plateau, south, and south-east India. During his service period to the British East India Company, he also travelled to Colombo and Malacca. Documentation was started by Dr. Johann Koenig in the late 1770s and then after Koenig’s death, Roxburgh and Dr. Patrick Russell took over the project.

<sup>272</sup> Arnold, “Networks and Knowledges,” *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze*, 161-2.

<sup>273</sup> Roxburgh, “Preface,” v.



India. Roxburgh's choice of prioritizing the chaya roots indicated the eighteenth-century European demand for raw materials from India.

As noted above, Roxburgh's book presents separate entries for each plant—its description and uses—supplemented by full-page hand-tinted etchings (**Figure 2.3**). Roxburgh emphasized the relevance of chaya roots by situating this entry early in his book. The lengthy description of chaya roots was accompanied by a full-page hand-tinted etching of the plant showing a flowering plant with details of the stem, delicate branches, and a long root (**See Figure 2.3**). Towards the left of the image, a dissection of the flowers on a magnified scale is seen. Towards the right, a vertical bright orange root, considered the source of red dyes, is depicted. To gather information, Roxburgh traveled to both Coromandel and Malabar coasts and collected information from unidentified peasants, dyers, and painters. Roxburgh noted that these plants are cultivated in sand along the coastal Coromandel region and stressed that a wild variety was considered as a more effective dyestuff.<sup>274</sup> They were planted during the rainy season, and cow-dung water was used along with water to strengthen their roots. After the initial phase, sunny weather rather than the wet season was favorable. It took around seven to eight months for the plants to grow fully. Once mature, the ground was dug and the roots of the plants were taken out. Roxburgh specified that only roots of these plants were used and the rest were thrown away. Once the roots were collected, they were sun-dried and kept for future usage. Once dried, they could be preserved up to five years. Farmers and dyers regarded the old roots to be more effective dyestuff than the new ones. Roxburgh added that since the fresh roots were not desired for dyeing processes, exporting the roots to Europe could be prosperous.

The second part of Roxburgh's essay presented an elaborate description of how these roots were used for dyeing to produce a range of red and purple tones. Roxburgh noted that he experimented to make dyes using these roots by himself (more than a hundred times) and failed to succeed. His description of the dyeing process relied on how dyers on both the Coromandel and Malabar coasts used them. His detailed documentation of the process provides us with first-hand information about dyeing in the eighteenth century collected from the local dyers. Before treating the cotton fabric with chaya solution, it was mordanted with alum water mixed with a turmeric solution. The areas with the alum water solution turn red after boiling in the chaya root solution. Roxburgh noted that the process of dyeing red and various shades of red, purple, and

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<sup>274</sup> Roxburgh, "Oldenlandia Umbellatta," in *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel*, 6-8.

brown was time consuming and required repeating the coloring processes. He did a comparative study of the working processes of Coromandel and Malabar artisans and noted several stages of the dyeing process which were pursued by the Coromandel artisans but skipped by Malabar artisans.

Chaya roots were exported to Europe in the eighteenth century and English dyers experimented with these roots as a potential replacement for English madder.<sup>275</sup> English madder worked better in Britain than chaya. Also, exporting the roots to England via sea trade might have affected the quality of chaya roots. Possibly the absence of prior knowledge to work with chaya roots resulted in the poor performance of this dyestuff in Britain and compelled textile makers to substitute that with Turkey red or madder.<sup>276</sup> Despite Roxburgh's extensive documentation of the dyeing processes in southern India and his own experiments, it was insufficient to reproduce the dyeing technique in Britain. This suggests that the success of red dyeing relied on the dyeing techniques and local resources, such as water and soil conditions in the Coromandel and Malabar regions. Since's Roxburgh's focus lay on chaya root, the minute description of washing becomes secondary in his text. He noted that the entire dyeing processes of red and purple took thirteen and nineteen days respectively. In these time spans, the majority of time was spent in washing the fabrics repeatedly. Roxburgh noted, "The operation [dyeing process] is finished by washing with soap, which improves the colour; and the oftener it is washed, the brighter the colour becomes."<sup>277</sup> Roxburgh observed dyers washing the same fabric during daytime as well as at night. Did drying the fabrics under the sun and drying them under the night sky make a difference in color and longevity of the textiles? Often cow or buffalo milk and cow dung were used in the successive stages of washing; did that affect the vibrancy of blood red or dark purple? These questions, alongside why chaya roots failed to produce satisfactory results in Europe, remain unanswered.

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<sup>275</sup> Mohanty, "Note on Survey," 145-8.

<sup>276</sup> Turkey red was used in eighteenth-century Britain for making red dyes. The "substation" of Asian dyestuff and techniques in Europe is addressed by Maxine Berg and Giorgio Riello. See Maxine Berg, "In Pursuit of Luxury: global history and British consumer goods in the eighteenth century," *Past and Present* 182 (2004): 85-142; Giorgio Riello, "Asian knowledge and the development of calico printing in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010): 1-28.

<sup>277</sup> Roxburgh, "Oldenlandia Umbellatta," 5.

While Roxburgh's account recognized chaya roots to be the exclusive source of the brilliant hues of red in Coromandel, Thomas Wardle's extensive documentation of Indian dyes, compiled into fifteen large albums in the 1860s and presently preserved in the Botanical Survey of India, Kolkata, suggest otherwise.<sup>278</sup> Wardle, a dyer, textile manufacturer, and dye-enthusiast from Cheshire, England, surveyed the dyeing workshops of the Indian subcontinent and collected specimens of dyed fabrics.<sup>279</sup> His account showed *Sappan* wood, *Cochineal*, and *Butea* flowers were used for red dyes in Hyderabad State. He differentiated among the various dyeing processes as "A process," "Σx process," and "Ex process," among others, but did not provide details of them. Wardle's account and the dyed cotton and silk samples show that chaya was certainly not the only dyestuff of superior quality available in the Deccan. He also documented that one dyestuff could be used for making a range of hues when different mordants were employed. Wardle's late-nineteenth-century project is a confirmation of the many experimentations pursued in the dyers' workshops in the subcontinent. It also suggests that there were many ways to achieve a result, in this case, the brilliant red.

Contemporary scholars reinstate the importance of chaya roots and madder in historical Coromandel textiles. Gittinger points to the exclusiveness of chaya roots and noted that the soil condition of the coastal region was responsible for its quality.<sup>280</sup> Varadarajan notes the use of chaya roots and madder in the past were responsible for the brilliant red dye.<sup>281</sup> Cohen admits the diversity of red dyestuff, including lac, sappan wood, and safflower, but states that chaya contained "the highest concentration of dye-producing alizarin."<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Thomas Wardle, *Fabrics Dyed with Indian Dyes*, vol I-XV (1867), Botanical Survey of India, Kolkata.

<sup>279</sup> Brenda King, "Thomas Wardle," in *Natural Dyes Destination India: Archival Treasures from the Botanical Survey of India* (Kolkata: Sutra Textile Studies, 2014), 14.

<sup>280</sup> Mattiebelle Gittinger, "Master Dyers to India," in *Master Dyers to the World* (Washington D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1982), 115.

<sup>281</sup> Lotika Varadarajan, "Chapter Three," in *South Indian Traditions of Kalamkari*, 47.

<sup>282</sup> Steven Cohen, "Materials and Making," in *The Fabric of India*, ed. Rosemary Crill (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), 32-4.

Chaya roots are no longer used by the contemporary dyers whereas alizarin—chemically synthesized from madder—is widely used at least since the 1980s.<sup>283</sup> Nageswara Rao stated,

The source of red is alizarin. We hear about the usage of chaya roots or *chavalakodi* (చవలకొడి) to get brilliant shades of red, but one cannot get them readily. We heard stories about chaya roots, that these plants grow here and southern Andhra Pradesh. They are similar to shrubs and grow fast. However, we experimented with *dēśī* Manjistha [a plant belonging to Rubiaceae family, also known as Indian madder] to make red. These are time consuming processes and because of our time constraint, we cannot afford to do these. For that, we rely on Alizarin, a chemical product that was formed and came into usage after studying the molecular configuration of the colorant present in chaya roots. Processing this root to prepare dyestuff is a complex process, and which seems to be practiced almost nowhere in this region.<sup>284</sup>

Even though chaya is not used by the contemporary dyers, the mordanting process with alum solution, washing, and boiling of fabric closely follow the historical methods to yield bright red dyes. Discussions of these processes focusing on the material quality of the coastal water foreground the dyers' role by shifting the focus from chaya roots. To contextualize the localized practice of dyeing, it is necessary to identify the prime characteristics of the Coromandel region and the coastal communities.

### **In-between Land and the Sea: The Coastal Zone and Communities**

The Coromandel region running along the southeast coastline of India is a “contact zone” which facilitates interaction between the land and the sea.<sup>285</sup> Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy proposed considering similar regions as “relational spaces”—spaces which are always in flux.<sup>286</sup> This spatial feature of the Coromandel region was pivotal to the shaping of trade and textile making in this area. An active region of oceanic trade, the Coromandel coast thrived on its waterways which were the backbone of the culture and economy of this region. The historical

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<sup>283</sup> Alizarin was first synthesized in 1868 in America. See Judith Lopez and Jane Farrell-Beck, “What Colored the Transition from Madder to Alizarine?” *Clothing and Textile Research Journal* 10, no. 3 (1992): 36-43. Varadarajan noted the use of alizarin in southern India in the 1980s. Varadarajan, “Chapter Three,” 47-8.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with Nageswara Rao in Polavaram, September 2015.

<sup>285</sup> I draw on Mary Louise Pratt's theorization of “contact zone” which challenges the discrete and homogenous notions of community and spaces. Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 33-40.

<sup>286</sup> Giorgio Riello, and Tirthankar Roy, “Introduction,” In *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3.

literature on maritime trade in this region established that the natural resources and craft production in this region attracted traders from Southeast Asia, Eastern Asia, and later, the Dutch, British, Portuguese, and Danish traders.<sup>287</sup> Historian Ashin Das Gupta proposed to bring the history of the water and seas into the discussion to complicate the trade and economic histories of the Indian Ocean networks.<sup>288</sup> It is the coastal zone which brings sea in contact with the land and provides unique ecological, economic, social, and cultural conditions deeply impacting upon artisanal productions.

The impact of the maritime trade reached far beyond the geographical limits of the coastline. According to historian Pius Malekandathil, with the increasing demand for Coromandel cotton textiles during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a large number of textile workshops moved towards the coastline from the temple towns.<sup>289</sup> Temple towns, such as Thanjavur, known for the production of Kodali Karuppur saris, had different artisanal organizations compared to the coastal towns such as Pulicut, Nizamapatnam, Machilipatnam, and Palakollu.<sup>290</sup> In-betweenness of the coastal zone allowed inland and overseas trading activities in this region to flourish and also a different kind of patronage than the ones directly

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<sup>287</sup> Among the noted historians, S. Arasaratnam and Tapan Raychaudhuri extensively worked on the trade history of South Asia and especially the Coromandel Coast. Arasaratnam and Raychaudhuri's important publications include: S. Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986); S. Arasaratnam, "Coromandel revisited: problems and issues in Indian maritime history," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 26, no.1 (1989): 101-10; Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel, 1605-1690: A Study in the Interrelations of European Commerce and Traditional Economics* (The Hague: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 1962). I discuss the impact of the interregional traders in the visuals of the Coromandel textiles in my Introduction and Chapter 3 to retain my focus on the use of water and dyestuff in this chapter.

<sup>288</sup> Das Gupta was contemporary of historian K. N. Chaudhuri, a student of historian Fernand Braudel, who worked on Indian Ocean networks following the pioneering work by Braudel. Even though both Das Gupta and Chaudhuri worked on maritime trade networks of pre-colonial South Asia, I find that Das Gupta's approach to the intra-Asian trade helpful for my project. He was one of the first historians to make propositions about the expansion of Islamic networks from the Persian Gulf to South Asia. Some of his noted publications include: Ashin Das Gupta, *Merchants of Maritime India, 1500-1800* (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Variorum; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Ashgate Publishing, 1994); Ashin Das Gupta and M. N. Pearson, *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800* (Calcutta and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Ashin Das Gupta and Uma Dasgupta, *The world of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500-1800: collected essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>289</sup> Malekandathil, "Indian Ocean in the Shaping of Late Medieval India," *Studies in History* 30, no. 2 (2014): 130-5.

<sup>290</sup> Kodali Karuppur village produced saris which featured both dyeing and brocading. Rosemary Crill and Steven Cohen, "Courtly & Urban Textiles," in *Trade, Temple, and Court: Indian Textiles from the Tapi Collection* (Mumbai: India Book House Pvt Ltd, 2002): 190.

under courtly or community-based patronage.<sup>291</sup> Historically, the production of dyed textiles in the Coromandel region was meant for inter-regional and overseas trade and not for local consumption. The production centers of the goods were fairly close to the port sites which explains the concentration of dyers, block makers, weavers, and other artisanal groups around the Machilipatnam area.

The dyed, painted, and printed textile making represented only a small fragment of the coastal textile productions. Dyed cottons were a specialized product which were not produced as much as the plain and woven ones.<sup>292</sup> Plain, striped and checked cloths, which were low in price, were largely exported from the ports of Coromandel, Bengal, and Gujarat. In other words, the dyed cottons were not produced in abundance as the plain woven ones. J. Forbes Watson collected samples of textiles and featured fragments of them in his 1874 publication (**Figure 2.4**).<sup>293</sup> The book has a few samples featuring woven patterns and printed cotton from Machilipatnam.<sup>294</sup> Printed cotton in his account is not a homogenous group. Varied cotton was used, and then, a variety of printed material was produced, starting from simple flower printed fabrics to glazed chintz pieces.<sup>295</sup> Glazed chintz are fabrics which were also polished with shells to attain silk-like quality. The woven textiles from Machilipatnam are of rectangular pattern, rendered in yellow-white, and black-red combinations. He produced extensive documentation of printed cotton in this publication showing Machilipatnam, Madras, Sydapet, Ponnary, Bellary, and Arcot among the prominent centers.<sup>296</sup> Watson's account, produced in the second half of the

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<sup>291</sup> By community-based patronage, I mean woven cottons and silks which are used locally for the everyday purposes of the communities of a region and also for religious and social gatherings. Apart from textiles, other objects such as wooden furniture, pottery, and metal crafts are also produced under community-based patronage.

<sup>292</sup> Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian Textile for the West* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2008) 12-17.

<sup>293</sup> J. Forbes Watson, *A Collection of Specimens of the Textile Manufactures of India (second series)* (London: India Museum, 1874).

<sup>294</sup> The majority of patterned cottons found in Watson's book were most likely to be the fabrics used for furnishing in Western Europe. Beverly Lemire emphasized the role of floral patterns in the Indian cottons and their journey into the domestic spaces in Europe. Beverly Lemire, "Domesticating the Exotic: Floral Culture and the East India Calico Trade with England, c. 1600–1800," *Textile: Cloth and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2003): 64-85.

<sup>295</sup> In the description of a glazed chintz from Machilipatnam, Watson wrote, "Glazed Chintz; centre pattern a large flowered design in colours on a white ground, with a deep 11-inch border of elaborately designed stripes of pines, flowers, and foliage in the red coloured ground. Four woven in one piece." Watson, *A Collection of Specimens*, 94. Similar glazing techniques were involved in polishing papers for manuscripts and miniature paintings in India.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-4.

nineteenth century, shows woven patterned textiles in the Coromandel region were produced in larger amounts than the printed ones. Watson's account presented a list of the dyed textile production centers in southern India, and not surprisingly the majority of them are in the coastal regions. The relationship between the sea and the production of dyed cottons should be read in relation to the coastal water resources as discussed in this chapter. Even though Pulicut, Petaboli, and Nizamapatnam were recognized as prominent dyed, painted, and printed textile production sites during the early modern era, Watson's book does not feature textiles from these sites. Their exclusion possibly indicates the decline of textile production in these places during the nineteenth century. Pulicut, however, appears in Watson's account as a producer of striped woven cotton. Watson's account allows us to consider the diversity of textile production in the coastal Coromandel and the close proximity between the various communities of textile makers.

The spatial features of this region attributed unique characteristics of the coastal communities. Often these characteristics were not documented in the travelers and traders' accounts but found in the embodied practices. Historian Michael N. Pearson questions the dominance of trade narratives to reconstruct the history of sea and oceanic networks and proposes considering the cultural and behavioral traits of the littoral communities on the coastline to produce an alternative narrative of oceanic histories. According to Pearson, it is almost an impossible task to draw boundaries of the reach of the Indian Ocean.<sup>297</sup> By this, he indicates the deep impact of the ocean on the culture and social practices of people living on the coasts. To conceptualize the relationship between land and the sea, Pearson refers to Jean-Claude Penrad's notion of *ressac*. *Ressac* refers to the three-fold movement of the waves, which also metaphorically stands for the to-and-fro movement of the influences between land and seas. Pearson's argument about littoral societies—which live by the sea and are dependent on the sea for their livelihood have more cultural affiliations with similar societies across water than their immediate inland neighbors—has been an effective way to think how cultural exchanges take place in different layers of communities by the sea. In Pearson's analysis, fishermen and boatmen, among other communities, hold prime importance since their lives are divided between land and sea. Pearson carefully distinguishes between the littoral and the traders by saying

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<sup>297</sup> M. N. Pearson, "Humans and the Sea," in *The Indian Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 26-37.

littoral people are not frequent overseas travelers.<sup>298</sup> Even though Pearson somewhat ignored the immediate socio-political surroundings of the littorals, his attempt at focusing on littoral histories broke away from the dominance of traders' narratives to emphasize the oral and bodily resources of histories.

Pearson's discussion of the littoral communities have both similarities and differences with the dyed textile makers in my study. In his definition of the littoral, Pearson specifies them as the communities who live at the very edge of the ocean. The coastal craft communities have a close co-relation with water but the direct sea water is not suitable for most of their purposes. Proximity to the sea and the trading ports were crucial factors in shaping the coastal artisanal practices during the early modern era. Pearson's theorization of the littorals addresses the specific characters of their habitual space; however, the impact of specific socio-political events on the community lives remains underexplored. Pearson's consideration of the behavioral traits and cultural practices of the littoral, on the other hand, indicated the importance of the intangible aspects of community histories.

The layered and intangible aspects of the dyers' histories are embedded in their interactions with the coastal water and environment. I will explore the dyers' practices and narratives to present an alternative narrative of dyed textile making from that of the travelers, traders, and colonial officials.

### **Of Water, Salt, Dyes, and Waterways**

My intention in this section is to establish water and waterways as the nurturer of dyeing activities and livelihood in Polavaram specifically and to stress the dyers' sustained engagement with the coastal water resources. As noted above, there is extensive scholarship on the dyeing techniques of the Coromandel region. My ethnographic account of the contemporary dyers seeks to enrich this already existing literature and argue for the agency of the dyers in producing dyed cotton in this region.

The landscape of Bandar region is punctuated by the prominent presence of the river Krishna, canals, and waterbodies. The way to Polavaram from Machilipatnam is on National Highway 65 towards Vijayawada and diverts near Gulabpura. The road from Gulabpura to

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<sup>298</sup> M. N. Pearson, "Littoral Society: The concept and the Problems," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 4 (2006), 357.



Polavaram runs through vast green fields and several canals feeding agricultural lands (**Figure 2.6**). Water from these canals is also used for other purposes such as community bathing and washing; however, the water is not potable. Because of its proximity to the sea, salt water often flows in the canals during flood tide and that makes it unsuitable for drinking (**Figure 2.7**). A little further west from Polavaram is Ghantasala—the site of a second-century brick Buddhist stupa—situated in close proximity to the river Krishna. Further west from Ghantasala is Srikakulam, on the bank of river Krishna. This site is considered holy for the worshippers of Lord Vishnu. The Srikakulam temple dedicated to Andhra Vishnu is believed to be in active worship for centuries. After its mention in Vijayanagara ruler Krishnadevaraya (1471-1530)’s literary work *Amuktamalyada*, this site gained more historical importance.<sup>299</sup> In addition to the network of river and canals, the Bandar region also has an abundance of ponds and ground wells. The canals, ponds, and ground wells in Gulabpura and Polavaram are the resources of readily available water for agriculture as well as dyeing.

### **The Cycle of Washing and Drying**

A close examination of the dyeing practices in Polavaram allows us to consider how the availability or presence of water is perceived and utilized by the local dyers. The accounts of Mukkanti garu and his fellow dyers and printers present an alternative narrative of water and dyes to the early works—that of the early modern traveler W. H. Moreland, colonial botanist William Roxburgh, and dyer Thomas Wardle.

When I asked Nageswara Rao about the dyestuffs used for printing and washing, he replied,

All vegetable and natural colors are used in our workshop. The materials are mostly from outside [of Bandar], *the most important local resource is water* [my emphasis]. Indigo cakes are used for shades of blue and are supplied from Tindivanam.<sup>300</sup> Indigo, along

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<sup>299</sup> Vijayanagara king Krishnadevaraya is one of the most venerated figures for the Telugu and Kannada speaking people. Krishnadevaraya ruled from Hampi or Vijayanagara, which is presently part of the state of Karnataka. His court produced a number of literary works in Telugu which are valued for their linguistic richness and historicity. Krishnadevaraya’s literary work *Amuktamalyada* is composed in Telugu. For these reasons, Krishnadevaraya is intrinsically connected with the history of Telugu language and literature. In *Amuktamalyada*, he expresses his deep respect for Andhra Vishnu, the presiding deity of Srikakulam temple (Krishna district). I am thankful to Harita Koya for pointing out the relationship between Andhra Vishnu, Srikakulam, Krishnadevaraya, and the history of Telugu literature.

<sup>300</sup> Tindivanam, a town in Viluppuram district, Tamil Nadu, is a major cultivator of dyestuff in India. Eiluned Edwards has noted that many indigo farmers started selling dried indigo leaves to corporate companies such as

with some other dye materials are cultivated near Tindivanam. Dried skin of pomegranate is transformed into pink pigment. This pigment comes from Chennai. Myrobalan seeds [locally available] are used for tanning and also making yellow pigment. Red is a crucial color in the process. The color black is made through an elaborate process, involving not only vegetable but also iron and other materials. Once these colors are ready, they are combined and made into various shades. For instance, green is made out of *anār* [pomegranate] and solution of black. For light shade of pink, sometimes diluted alizarin solution is used. Grey is acquired from a lighter solution of black. We go to Vijayawada to collect necessary materials for preparing colors.<sup>301</sup>

Nageswara Rao also said that printed cloth should not be washed immediately. When kept for a few days, iron in the dye oxidizes in the presence of natural oxygen and transforms into oxides of iron and enriches the depth of color. Nageswara Rao learned about this practice from his father. Additionally, his studies in science supplied him with information on chemical reactions and provided him with the language of Western science for communicating with visitors, researchers, and potential buyers.

The washing unit of Rao's workshop is situated at the edge of the residential areas in Polavaram (**Figure 2.8**). The lush green paddy field next to the washing unit reminds us of the transaction between agricultural and dyeing works. This region is considered among the most fertile lands in the country and a significant producer of rice. A pond, fed by a small canal is the heart of the washing unit. In the rainy season, the canal overflows and the excessive water fills this pond. The canal marks the boundary of the washing unit. The boundary is fenced; the other side of the fence is a lush agricultural field. The pond almost dried up in early 2017 due to a poor rainy season the previous year which forced the dyers of this workshop to find a suitable waterbody at a distance of approximately 90 km.<sup>302</sup> Dyers and dye activists agree that the methods of washing play a pivotal role in the depth of color.<sup>303</sup> Washing dyed textiles takes place in a few steps. Apart from washing the fabrics in cold water, fabrics are boiled and dried in the

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Godrej who produce hair dye from those leaves. Eiluned Mair Edwards, "Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk," *Textile History* 47, no. 2 (2016): 161.

<sup>301</sup> Interview with Nageswara Rao in September 2015.

<sup>302</sup> Interviews with Mukkantieswarudu Rao and Nageswara Rao in June 2017. For another example of the scarcity of water and its impact on the *Ajrakh* textile making in Dhamadka, Gujarat, see Eiluned Edwards, "Ajrakh," 160.

<sup>303</sup> Interviews with Mukkantieswarudu Rao in June 2017 and Uzramma in July 2017.

sun. The washing unit consists of three sections to facilitate these stages of washing. The cold pond water is used for preliminary washing and a vast open field beside the pond is used for sun-drying the washed items. Mukkanti garu stated that the stagnant water of the pond is better than river water.<sup>304</sup> The boiling unit is comparatively complicated in comparison with the other two areas (**Figure 2.9**). This unit is a covered area where the ingredients for boiling are gathered, fabric is boiled, and then hung until the excess water drains out. The rectangular room is divided into three areas (**Figure 2.10**). The first space is reserved for rice husk—a locally available resource which is used as fuel for boiling. The second consists of the boilers which are large copper vessels. The vessels have a bulbous body with a narrow opening; this shape helps keep the water warm. A copper vessel is preferred since iron-based dyestuff does not react with copper. The two vessels are embedded in the earthen floor. Attached to the vessels are two earthen ovens where heat is generated. The ovens are also embedded in the floor. Rice husk is thrown into the oven and lit. Areas around ovens and vessels are coated with clay and then embellished with *muggulu* (ముగ్గులు), floor drawings made with rice flour. A huge chimney attached to the boiling unit carries away the smoke during the boiling process.

Sheikh Mastan, a dyer from Rao's workshop, guided me to this unit and explained how the entire process takes place:

As you see rice husk is piled up at the corner of this room, it is used for making a fire to boil cloth. We cannot use other material, but rice husk. Rice husk makes slow fire which helps to have the boiling temperature under control. After that, the burnt rice husk is bought by locals for agricultural usage. All fabrics in the workshop need to be boiled except the ones with only indigo or shades of indigo. Indigo is applied cold and the cloth need not be boiled. The other colors need boiling. The two primary colors used in this technique are black and red. Usually, all fabrics except the ones to be printed only in indigo, are treated with myrobalan and buffalo milk solution before printing. Red and black are achieved through labor and time-intensive processes. While printing on fabric, the iron-based dye is used for black, and alum solution is used for red. However, additional temporary colorants are used with the dye solution for the workers' convenience. Once printing is done, they are sun-dried. Then, they are kept for few days before washing. This way the color becomes *gehra* [گہرا, deep] on fabric. After that, they are taken to the pond for washing. Usually, washing does not happen everyday. Printed textiles are collected over few days extending to a week and then taken to the pond for washing. During this day, only washing takes place. When washing is done, the temporary colorants [for red and black] are washed off from the fabrics leaving faint marks of the dyes. They are sun-dried, and then collected in the boiling unit. Boiling needs to be done separately for each color except red and black. For example, if one cloth

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<sup>304</sup> Mukkanti garu did not explain his preference for stagnant water for dyeing.

has red, black, and one more color, then black is printed in the first go. Then it is dried and prepared for printing red. After that, it is dried again, washed in cold water, sun-dried, boiled, and sun-dried again, before printing the next color.<sup>305</sup>

Pichchuka Subramanyam was in charge of the boiling activity and Mastan helped me in translating my queries to Subramanyam who only spoke Telugu. Mastan, like other Muslims in Polavaram, spoke Urdu or Dakhni, as well as Telugu. Dakhni, with its several variations, is spoken widely by Muslims and Hindus in southern India. In major cities, Dakhni is spoken by several communities; however, in this part of the region, only Muslims speak Dakhni. Dakhni connects Mastan with the world outside Polavaram and the Bandar region and allows him to interact with visitors who speak Hindi or Urdu. The nature of the verbal interactions between Subramanyam, Mastan, and me made me aware of the importance of mediation and its importance in social interactions. The act of listening to the narrators, according to Rustom Bharucha, is also part of an embodied practice which builds upon sharing “communicative energy” between the narrator and the listener.<sup>306</sup> Through this mediated practice, narrators or the carriers of knowledge present histories to an audience. Bharucha also suggests listening is not only the act of following a narration but also observing the narrator, being attentive to the variations of tones and pauses between words and expressions. Moving from one language to another and being attentive to the expressions and bodily movements were consistent features of the conversations between us. Both Mukkanti garu and Nageswara Rao are well versed in Telugu and English. With Mastan’s fluency in Dakhni, Rao’s workshop is capable of interacting in all three major languages: Telugu, Dakhni, and English; they are capable of interacting with Hindi/Urdu speaking people from other parts of India, as well as the buyers and visitors overseas. Earlier, I had elaborated on the fluid community engagements in these workshops. Multilingual exchanges in this workshop, after Rodman, is integral to the identity of the dyers as well as the spatial specificity of this site.<sup>307</sup> Rodman states that the rootedness of the identity of a certain community is specific to the sites where they practice their knowledge. Rodman’s theorization is relevant to understand the extent of the knowledge practice at the dyeing

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<sup>305</sup> Interview with Sheikh Mastan in Polavaram, September 2015.

<sup>306</sup> Bharucha. “Listening to Komalida,” in *Rajasthan: An Oral History, Conversations with Komal Kothari* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003), 7.

<sup>307</sup> Rodman, “Empowering Place,” 650-1.

workshops. The inter-communal participation in dyeing works at the contemporary workshops recalls the inter-regional movement of artisans under the economic conditions of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries.

After Mastan translated my questions about the boiling process to Subramanyam, he pointed to a heap of dried leaves at the corner of the room and explained its utility. These leaves are locally known as *jaji āku* (*Memecylon edule*) and look similar to bay leaves. These leaves were put in the water while boiling cloth (**Figure 2.11**). Jaji leaves help to keep a controlled temperature inside the vessel.<sup>308</sup> For boiling, the temperature is first kept high and then brought down to a medium temperature. In his description of the dyeing process of red, Roxburgh noted, “It may be proper to observe, that in dyeing with these roots the heat is always gentle...,” which resonates with the measured temperature for boiling in this unit.<sup>309</sup> The cloth is not put inside the vessel until the desired temperature is reached. In a high-temperature, the water inside the vessel dries up fast and causes damage to the fabric. The sun-dried cloth, lightly tinted with the myrobalan solution with muted black and red prints over them, were put into the vessel. After the water reached the desired temperature, Subramanyam took a handful of alizarin powder in a plastic mug and slowly diluted the powder in warm water. Thick bamboo poles are used for stirring the fabrics continuously. After some time, faint areas of black and red color began transforming into brighter shades of black and red (**Figure 2.12**). Subramanyam and others monitor the development of colors carefully. After that, boiled fabrics are taken out of the vessel. The fabrics were transferred to the third register of the unit, essentially a fenced area where those are hung until excess water runs out. The fragrance of rice husks mixed with jaji leaves and dyestuff filled the room. This boiling process continued for the entire day. Subramanyam and his fellow workers in the unit rested briefly and resumed their work.

The process of boiling cloth, its sights, and smells bears much resemblance to cooking practices in India. For both these actions, ingredients are gathered around the oven, and then carefully added to the pot one after another. The end result of both these processes not only depends on the quality of ingredients but also proper temperature, an order of pursuing them, and tremendous patience to carry out these actions. The sequential order is certainly the result of a

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<sup>308</sup> Varadarajan, “Chapter Three,” 57.

<sup>309</sup> Roxburgh, “Oldenlandia Umbellatta,” in *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel*, 5.

long trial-and-error process. These factors signal the close ties between dyeing and cooking. Adding to these, the *muggulu* ornamentation around the ovens to attend prosperity in work also brings this activity close to cooking activities in India. The earthen ovens for cooking in southern India (similar to several other parts of India) are ornamented with muggulu and worshiped on specific occasions since prosperity and well-being are closely related to food and cooking. The relation between cooking and dyeing is also relevant as both these processes involve a balance between saltiness and sweetness of water.

The presence of salt in water affects the permanence and brilliance of the colors on textiles. Mukkanti garu added,

Water contributes to the richness of color. Yes, of course, the presence of salt makes a great deal of difference. As you see, we are situated close to the sea, canal waters often carry salt and the artisans need to be careful about using them for dyeing needs. That does not mean salt is harmful to colors; however, the usage of salt after a certain degree could harm the colors and textiles. For that, while making dyes, especially black dye, we need water that is in-between; neither salty nor sweet.<sup>310</sup>

Mukkanti garu's comment about the in-betweenness of water is perhaps a key idea for understanding why the coastal textile workshops have been able to initiate and continue the practice of dyeing textiles. Both Polavaram and Machilipatnam are coastal settlements and yet not situated on the sea.<sup>311</sup> These are "in-between" the coast and mainland area, salty and sweet water is available there. Accessibility to water is certainly a condition which is responsible for the dyeing activities to flourish. However, it is crucial to recognize that the dyers' engagement with the salty and sweet water is also "affective" which is empathetic and bodily at the same time.<sup>312</sup> The affective relationship between the coastal water and dyers made the dyers thoughtful and respectful of this resource. Mukkanti garu's caution about the salty water signals that the dyers are knowledgeable of the material qualities of coastal water for dyeing works and respectful of the "in-betweenness" of it. The dyers' use of coastal water and understanding its

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with Mukkantieswarudu Rao in September 2015.

<sup>311</sup> The closest beach from Machilipatnam is Manginpudi, which is around twelve km from the town centre. The closest fishing port named Gilakaladindi is located at a short distance connected by a canal flowing to the Bay of Bengal. From Koneru Centre, a major crossroads at Machilipatnam, Port Road goes south-east towards the sea to the fishing port.

<sup>312</sup> Uzma Rizvi, "Crafting resonance: Empathy and belonging in ancient Rajasthan," 255.

material qualities often involve smelling, touching, and tasting, which is in contrast with the institutionalized scientific methods of measuring the acid and alkaline balance of water.<sup>313</sup> These sensory involvements of the dyers are responsible for developing awareness about their immediate environment as well as viable lifestyles.

The importance of local water is different for the practitioners of natural dyeing and chemical printing. Continuation of historically informed natural dyeing techniques is much more complex than the dyers' choice. Modes of training provided to the dyers and the patronage are two crucial factors behind continuation and discontinuation of natural dyeing. By training, I point to both the apprenticeship under master dyers and training programs or workshops organized by the Indian Govt. The month-long workshop prior to the *Festival of India* at Polavaram strengthened dyers' knowledge of natural dyes as well as provided them an exposure to the India-wide market. Fabrics produced in Mukkanti garu's workshop are shipped to textile organizations in Hyderabad and New Delhi, among other places. Organizations dedicated to natural dyed products in India and elsewhere have also conducted business with them. The skill of the dyers and the reception of textiles produced in Mukkanti garu's workshop are two crucial factors to continue natural dyeing. For many other dyers in the Bandar area, fast production and the permanence of color on textiles are central to sustaining their livelihood which prompted their use of chemical printing. Sajja Maheswara Rao (M. Rao)'s workshop in Polavarapu pet, Pedana, has both natural and chemical printing units and a sales counter attached to his residential house. M. Rao had a mixed opinion about natural dyes. He explained, "natural yellow [turmeric] goes off pretty fast. Also, considering the high price of indigo, it is not possible to use it for all the works. We have textiles which are made of natural colors and others from both natural and chemical colors."<sup>314</sup> Two of the printers from M. Rao's workshop, Bithal Kumari and Radha Devi were at ease to pursue both block printing and silk screen printing.<sup>315</sup> The dyers and printers in this workshop possess the skill to alternate between natural and chemical dyeing. M. Rao's workshop is not situated by a waterbody and that meant M. Rao had

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<sup>313</sup> Jagada Rajappa mentioned the ph tests of water in Govt. and educational institutions. Interview with Jagada Rajappa in Hyderabad, July 2017.

<sup>314</sup> Interview with Sajja Maheswara Rao. The use of natural dyes in their textiles is determined by patronage. Upon request, M. Rao produced natural dyed cottons. The organizations who commissioned them are based in Hyderabad, New Delhi, and Bengaluru.

<sup>315</sup> Interviews with Sajja Maheswara Rao, Bithal Kumari, and Radha Devi in Pedana, October 2015.

to rely on the local washermen and washing units, such as the one situated in the Brahmapuram area near Pedana. This unit consists of two open boiling areas, one covered hall, and the residence of the owner, Venkateswara Rao (V. Rao), and his family. While V. Rao supervises washing activities, Rao's wife does printing on fabrics with chemical dyes. Bigger workshops disseminate their workload among such families. Despite the close proximity to water, natural dyeing is not carried out in V. Rao's workshop for the lack of necessary skill and patronage.

Alongside the water from the canal, pond, and wells, atmospheric vapor nourishes the development of dyed textiles. Nageswara Rao, Sheikh Mastan, and M. Rao agreed that a sunny and humid day is good for both dyeing and washing. February to June every year is considered the best time for these works when the temperature during the day rises from thirty to thirty-eight degrees celsius. Drizzling is considered disadvantageous for printing, dyeing, and washing, while torrential rain is preferred over drizzling. Nageswara Rao stressed that sun-dried fabrics are brighter than the ones dried in the shade or the ones dried during overcast days. Moreover, water remains the most crucial factor in bringing dyes into life and colors to shine in the Coromandel region.

### **The Significance of Black Dye (*Kasim*)**

The preparation of black dye, called *kāsim* (కాసిం) by dyers, painters, and printers in the Telugu speaking regions underscores the significance of the idea of “in-betweenness” of coastal water. According to Mukkanti garu,

Black dye [kasim] is the most important of all colors for us. Black is used for making outlines; outline forms the base for the images over textiles. During printing, black is usually the first color being printed. For making black, both mineral and organic resources are used. An essential ingredient is rusted iron; we collect rusted iron from the scrap sellers in Vijayawada. Once rusted iron is collected, it is mixed with jaggery [cane/palm sugar] and other ingredients and kept for at least twenty-one days for fermenting. The water used here is not-too-salty and not sweet; we fetch water for this purpose from a nearby well. That well is not situated on our property, but the owners always allow us to use water from there.<sup>316</sup>

Nageswara Rao guided me to the small well from where water for making this solution is drawn, situated in the front yard of a residential house (**Figure 2.16**). Since the water is not potable, the

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<sup>316</sup> Interview with Mukkantieswarudu Rao in Polavaram, September 2015.



owners did not have objection for the dyers to use it. The water tasted slightly salty.<sup>317</sup> Continuing the conversation around black dye, Nageswara Rao added, “salt is necessary to prepare the solution. In the rainy season, water becomes sweet from rainfall; therefore [to maintain the balance] we have to add powdered salt to the solution. Also, the jaggery used for this purpose needs to be sour and not completely sweet.” The solution is prepared in large earthen pots, also used for storing drinking water across India. The ingredients for making black solution are at least three different tastes: sweet, salty, and sour. These ingredients are mixed in a certain proportion and kept at room temperature. Once the solution starts fermenting, the smell becomes stronger. The solution also starts changing color over time. With each passing day the solution looks darker and towards the end of two weeks the solution turns dark black. This solution is used for making various dyes. The first and most important of all is black. Then the solution is diluted with water to make variants of gray. For the color green, a solution of pomegranate is mixed with black. Nageswara Rao further noted that preparing mordant with alum solution requires drinking water to be mixed in. The water used for the black solution is not effective.

Among all the colors used in dyers’ workshop, preparing black requires maximum effort and care. Mukkanti garu stated,

Making black is always challenging. Even after putting [together] all the ingredients the color might not turn out as expected. Our printing work relies hugely on how black is turning out. While making the solution, we worship goddess Durga as well as the earthen pot containing the solution.<sup>318</sup>

A ritual of encircling the neck of the pot with mango leaves tied in a string takes place for preparation of the kasim dye, which is done once in a few months. There is no auspicious day for the ritual, instead, the shrinking reserve of black dye in workshops prompt this process. The pot is also smeared with yellow turmeric and red *kumkuma* (organic powdered red made from turmeric, tamarind twig, and lemon), which are considered auspicious in Hindu rituals. As noted earlier, Mukkanti garu belongs to Devanga community of weavers and they are worshippers of goddess Durga. Identifying Durga with the black solution is significant. The color itself is not symbolized as the goddess, but the power and uncertainty of the solution are symbolized as her.

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<sup>317</sup> Tasting water and dyestuff during the process are common practices among the dyers in southern India.

<sup>318</sup> Interview with Mukkantieswarudu Rao in Polavaram, September 2015.

Once all the ingredients are mixed in a pot, there is not much the dyers can do to control the quality of the solution. The solution could either turn into the dye which the dyers eagerly wish for, or it could bring disappointment to their effort. The power of this solution is highly respected by the artisans and worshiped. Durga is often addressed as the one who playfully turns impossible possible and mundane into unexpected. Durga is also the one who is beyond reasoning; the solution of black dye resembles the goddess in this aspect too. Artisans can only put their best effort to approach the dye and be patient about the outcome of the process. Mukkanti garu's effort in producing black dye and acknowledging the limitations of human actions strongly suggest that Polavaram dyers engage with this technique physically, intellectually, and spiritually.

In contrast with the significance of black dye to the contemporary dyers, scholarship suggests that the usage of black dye during the early modern period was limited. Crill and Cohen indicate that madder and indigo were often overlapped to produce darker tones in the early modern Coromandel textiles.<sup>319</sup> However, they do not deny the use of black in these textiles. Irwin and Hall claimed that the deterioration of discrete areas in the seventeenth-century dyed fabrics is a visual sign of the use of iron mordant for black (**Figure 2.17**).<sup>320</sup> Gittinger states that alum and iron-based mordants are used for making red and black dyes in India and the combination of these mordants result in producing a variety of shades.<sup>321</sup> Dye specialist Bessie Cecil stated that these textiles from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have dark purple or red outlines, not black; more importantly, Cecil claimed that the artisans did not use black the way they use it now.<sup>322</sup> Returning to the late eighteenth-century account by Roxburgh is useful here. Roxburgh mentioned a solution called *cassim*:

Cassim is the Telinga [Telugu] name of a solution of iron in a vegetable acid, and is prepared as follows. Take Palmira toddy (juice of *Borassus flabelliformis*) one gallon, into which put some broken pieces of the vitrified matter of a blacksmith's forge, and

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<sup>319</sup> Conversation with Rosemary Crill and Steven Cohen in Toronto, June 2018. I am thankful to the Dr. Sarah Fee for facilitating the three-day workshop on Indian dyed, painted, and printed textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM).

<sup>320</sup> John Irwin, and Margaret Hall, "Early Coromandel Group," in *Indian Painted and Printed Fabrics*, 14-16.

<sup>321</sup> Gittinger, "Master Dyer's Skills," 20.

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Bessie Cecil in Chennai, November 2015.

some bits of old rusty iron, let the whole stand exposed to the sun for ten days; then pour off the liquor clear for use.<sup>323</sup>

Roxburgh's description of making cassim has close resemblance with the process of making black dye as observed in Mukkanti garu's workshop. The contemporary dyers prefer to keep the solution for more than twenty-one days; whereas Roxburgh's description indicated that the solution is fermented for ten days only and the consistency of the solution appeared different. Roxburgh's documentation established that the use of "cassim" or black was part of the existing practice in the late eighteenth century. The significance of black dye for the dyers has transformed over time but the technique of making kasim persisted. Exploration of the use of black dye in the early modern and contemporary Coromandel textiles allows us to understand its significance among the dyers. This comparative case study also reveals that the dyers made conscious decisions about using kasim in textiles.

The outlines marking the various forms and figural motifs is considered pivotal by the dyers, painters, and printers; the early modern textiles show the use of red or brownish red for the outlines whereas black outlines are prevalent in the contemporary ones. Darker tones or black are not absent in the early modern textiles, those are used to emphasize small sections such as hair, details of dress, and interiors. This suggests that the textile makers were aware of the possibilities of using both red and black during the early modern period and chose these colors to serve specific functions in the pictorial space. I will examine this further by focusing on the use of these tones in the seventeenth-century Golconda hanging (**Figure 2.18**) and Golconda floor spread (**Figure 2.19**) from the Calico Museum, which were acquired from the Amber Palace, Jaipur.<sup>324</sup> These two large scale textiles show elaborate narrative scenes which required a controlled use of dark tones. Excessive use of black could disrupt the narrative organization of the textiles; perhaps that triggered the dyers and painters' decision for delineating the contours with red or brownish red. Use of black or dark tones for outlines, observed in the contemporary textiles, attributes to the vigor and prominence of forms and figures.

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<sup>323</sup> Roxburgh, "Oldenlandia Umbellatta," 5.

<sup>324</sup> Detailed discussions of the format, theme, and organization of similarly dyed and painted cottons from the Coromandel and Golconda regions appear in Nina Gwatkin's "The Brooklyn Museum Hanging" and "Wall Hanging" in Mattibelle Gittinger, *Master Dyers to the World*, 89-108, and 112-3.

In the Golconda hanging, produced around 1640-1650 (See **Figure 2.18**), outlines of architecture and contours of vegetal motifs, animals, and human bodies are drawn with red.<sup>325</sup> Irwin and Hall presented detailed descriptions of the colors used in this floor spread which is relevant since the later studies in this field did not comment on the use of colors in this floor spread from the Calico Museum. Irwin and Hall suggested that some of the outlines in this hanging are also drawn in black. By this, perhaps they meant that some of the outlines were over-painted with black/darker tones. Red is used here to mark outlines, the background of the large arched panels, and the minute patterns in textiles and architecture. There are at least two dark tones used in this hanging and none of them is pure black. Dark tones are used to convey recesses in the hanging, especially in the six smaller arched panels. The dark tones in this work are greenish in tone, which might be achieved by the combination of black/dark gray overlapped with yellow, or indigo topped with yellow. The tone used for rendering hair is darker than the earlier one. Limited and careful use of these darker tones emphasizes the tonal variation in red and green.<sup>326</sup> Varadarajan comments on the “muted tones of vegetable colours” and identified them as the salient features of the Coromandel textiles. Clearly, in this hanging, dark tones are achieved by the combination of dyes. However, it is still possible that iron-based dyestuff was used for achieving the dark tones.<sup>327</sup>

In the floor spread the use of dark tones and black is remarkable. This rectangular floor spread shows a forest landscape with a range of animal and human figures surrounded by wide ornamental borders. In this textile, similar to the hanging, outlines of the forms are drawn with red, or brownish red, and not black. The outlines were possibly painted with mordant and then red is achieved through washing and boiling the cloth.<sup>328</sup> In this floor spread, outlines of forms do not make a high contrast with the background. Various forms on these textiles emerge and merge with the matrix of the fabrics. However, black is used profusely to tint flowers, vegetal branches, and in borders. Floral patterns, which Irwin and Hall identified as Persian-style

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<sup>325</sup> Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel Group: 17<sup>th</sup> century,” in *Indian Painted and Printed Fabrics*, 19.

<sup>326</sup> Varadarajan, “Chapter Three,” 65.

<sup>327</sup> Jagada Rajappa emphasized the use of iron-based dyestuff and tannin substance for achieving dark tones. Interview with Jagada Rajappa in Hyderabad, June 2017.

<sup>328</sup> Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel Group,” 16.

“palmette” motif, are placed against a dark violet or black background in the borders.<sup>329</sup> The calculative use of black in the borders is employed to bring attention to the central part of the spread. The areas where black is used appeared worn out and replaced by bluish black fabric carefully stitched from the backside. Viewing this floor spread in the Calico Museum, I could observe the intricate lines of plants and creepers containing black dye which are worn out whereas the surrounding areas are intact. The iron content of black dyes is the reason behind fracturing of the textile fibers. The hanging, on the other hand, seemed to be in a significantly better condition as black is not used directly on the textile. My intention for bringing up this comparison is to suggest that black dyes were in use during the seventeenth century. Perhaps, it was not used for outlining or marking dark patches, but the knowledge of using black was not unknown to the artisans.

Today, black is profusely used for drawing outlines. I read the emergence of black to mark the outline of the forms on textiles as perhaps the dyers’ choice to establish their position in the contemporary market system. Crisp black outlines readily draw viewers’ attention to these textiles. During post-independence, the dyers had to assert their presence in the rapidly mechanized textile sectors. The dark, pronounced outlines emerge as the artisanal decisions to respond to this socio-economic situation. As indicated above, Mukkanti garu’s father, Rao practiced both hand drawing and printing, which relates closely to the historical textiles presented above. A hanging featuring a seated Buddha figure, possibly intended for exhibitions, was made by Rao during the 1980s. The contours of the Buddha figure, tree, and other works of Rao are a combination of hand drawing, stencil drawing, dyeing, and printing (**Figure 2.20**). The outlines are drawn in black and brown. Brown is achieved by the mordanting process used in the Golconda hanging and floor spread. For the presence of sharp outlines, the figures and forms in Rao’s work are bold and robust. The muted block prints depicting a landscape in the background enhances the presence of the central figures. The printed background features domed and towered architectural structures, hunters, animals, and plants (**Figure 2.21**). Even though the visuals in both the Calico Museum pieces and Rao’s works are dominated by sharp pronounced lines, the choice of color for outlines make a great difference.

The utilization of red and black dyes in the early modern and contemporary textiles for outlines are reflections of the dyers, painters, and printers’ conscious responses to their

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 19.

immediate socio-cultural and economic conditions. The historical hanging and floor spread were made for royal courts (possibly the Amber Fort, Jaipur) and the dyers' choice of colors reflect the demands of their patrons. The Buddha hanging by Rao was not produced for a specific patron but possibly for display during expositions. Consideration of the patronage and reception of these textiles allow us to rethink the changing significance of red and black dyes for the dyers.

Whereas the techniques of preparing and utilizing red and black dyes continued, the cultural significance of these dyes transformed as a result of the continuous changes in artisanal livelihoods. Among all these socio-economic transformations, the dyers consistently nurtured the transformative qualities of the coastal water for the sustainment and betterment of their practices.

## Conclusions

This chapter has underscored that Mukkanti garu and the dyers of Polavaram have acquired an intimate, tactile, and localized knowledge about the water, dyestuff and other resources in the coastal Coromandel region. This provides a potentially new framework to reconstruct the agency of the early modern dyers, who engaged with dyed textile making empathically, physically, and spiritually. Whereas the traveler, trader, and colonial officials stressed the prominence of chaya roots, the dyers' accounts indicated the importance of black dye for their practice. Uncertainties around the production of black dyes also reveal how dyers respect the material quality of the resources as well as actively engage to overcome the effects of unpredictability. These efforts remind us of the conscious decisions made by the dyers during the various stages of producing dyed textiles.<sup>330</sup> Mukkanti garu's persistence on natural dyeing during the era of rapid mechanization of textile sectors reflect conscious artisanal decision making. This can also be observed in the use of local water, dyes, and other local resources to serve aesthetic, socio-cultural, and economic purposes, prevalent in both the early modern and contemporary dyers' practices.

The dyers' thoughtful usage of local resources such as rice husk demonstrates their commitment to sustainable practices. The rice husk, bought from the farmers are used for fuel and then the ashes are sent back to the fields as fertilizers. Continuation of these practices has

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<sup>330</sup> Greru and Kalkreuter present accounts of the block printers from Sanganer to show how socio-economic conditions impact upon their decision making. Greru and Kalkreuter, "Design and the Evolving Tradition," 150-3.

also been possible by individuals, such as Jagada Rajappa who has relentlessly promoted natural dyeing and supported dyers' activities. Through their practice, the dyers of Polavaram demonstrated the overlapping of dyeing, environmental awareness, and their abilities to "think."

## **Repetitive Actions and Mimetic Practices: Approaching Early Modern Imagery through Contemporary Block Making**

A shared pool of visuals found in the early modern Coromandel textiles, south Indian murals, Deccani architecture, and artifacts allow us to assess the histories of the artisans who engaged with cross-cultural, interregional, and intermedial mobilities. Images on Coromandel textiles were mediated, often supplied by their patrons. This, in turn, compelled the painters, block makers, printers, and dyers to explore the fullest possibilities of their knowledge by means of mimetic actions, which are generally misunderstood as “copying” or “imitation”.

Contemporary woodblock making in Pedana present examples to reflect on these actions as a component of the knowledge practice of early modern textile makers. Through an examination of a set of early modern imagery in relation to contemporary block making, I suggest the layered actions of mediating and reproducing images are deeply informed by artisanal decision-making and thus offers up a site to potentially retrieve their histories. In the recent scholarship on mimesis, the reciprocity of mimetic flow is established. Building on them, I propose the reciprocity is a result of artisanal decision—a controlled act informed by artisanal resistance enabling transmission of visual knowledge. In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss the relevance of the concept of “copying” or “imitation” in terms of developing repositories of artisanal knowledge.

Reassessment of “copying” remains crucial to understand the maneuvers of the early modern as well as the contemporary textile makers. I will initiate this discussion with a quote from Irwin and Brett’s analysis:

It had not occurred to anyone at this stage that an ‘oriental’ style of art combining features of the diverse and varied art traditions of Asia had never existed in the East itself and could only have originated as a concoction of the European imagination. The study of Indian chintz confirms this and that the exoticism which had long characterized these designs in the popular imagination derived ultimately from sample-patterns sent out from England and Holland for the Indian cotton-painter to copy or adopt. It was only the process of



copying or adopting that they were sufficiently transformed by the Indian sensibility and imagination to be received on their return to Europe as something exotic.<sup>331</sup>

Irwin and Hall expressed their astonishment around the portrayal of “foreign” motifs by the textile makers and attempted to trace their origins. In this statement from 1970, much stress is given on the sample-patterns sent from Europe for copying and the involvement of the Coromandel dyed textile makers is marginalized. Artisanal actions have often been described as an act of imitation, as noted in the above quote, but as scholar Matthew Potolsky notes, the term “inadequately” addresses the significance and scope of mimetic practices.<sup>332</sup> Mimetic practices, in terms of block making in Pedana, thrive on the use of reference drawings, stencils, templates, and transfer methods, alongside repeated bodily actions. Block makers demonstrate this more than the kalamkari painters.<sup>333</sup> In this chapter I interrogate the idea of mimesis by focusing on the workshop of contemporary master block makers Gangadhar garu and Narsaiah garu.<sup>334</sup> A brief description of the intermediate steps for preparing a woodblock will introduce my discussion on repetitive actions and mimetic practice.

Narsaiah garu was running a drafting pencil on a tracing paper placed on a photocopied image of an ornamental plant (**Figure 3.1**). His left hand was employed in prohibiting both the papers from moving and his right hand was controlling the movement of the pencil. The pencil should move freely on the image surface. For that, controlling pressure of the right hand on the pencil is essential. His hands take control of diverse actions, from the delicate handling of pencils on paper to the hammering of iron tools on a wooden block in order to carve the blocks. The monochromic photocopied image was characterized by the strong presence of lines and different tones. Narsaiah garu’s pencil was transforming this shaded image into a linear image.

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<sup>331</sup> John Irwin and Katharine B. Brett, “Authors’ Preface,” in *Origins of Chintz* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1970) vii. This publication predates publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977). Here, usage of the terms, such as, orient and exotic, appeared without a caution.

<sup>332</sup> Matthew Potolsky, “Introduction: Approaching Mimesis,” in *Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>333</sup> The majority of contemporary kalamkari painters based in Srikalahasti claim that their drawings are “free-hand” as opposed to images guided by templates or stencils. Interview with J. Gurappa Chetty and Niranjan Chetty in Srikalahasti, November 2012 and November 2015.

<sup>334</sup> The block carvers in the Machilipatnam area have settled down from the Telugu speaking region and beyond and continued this practice. The 1961 census listed two block makers—Gujjaram Rukmaji and Gadireddi Narayana from Malavollu in Machilipatnam. To make a comparative case study between the Gujarati and Telugu carvers, Edwards interviewed Gangadhar and Narsaiah garu in the 2000s. See Eiluned Edwards, *Imprints of Culture* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016).

The contour lines of the plant were being drawn more prominently than the internal details. Once the plant was drawn completely, he put the photocopied image aside. The journey of that image, for the time being, was over. He placed a clean sheet of paper underneath the tracing paper, flipped the tracing paper and started working on the reverse side. He then traced the linear image of the plant. Working on the reverse of the image requires more attention than the primary stage. Narshaiah garu followed the linear image patiently and carefully. Each line created during the primary stage of drawing was replicated as well as the width of every line. Narshariah Garu thus, prepares the drawing from the photocopied images for a woodblock, to provide a pattern for the next step: carving the woodblocks.

Since Narsaiah garu was guided by a photocopied image, can we call this activity “copying” or “imitation”? The consideration of mimesis as an imitative act played a role in the formative scholarship on Coromandel textiles.<sup>335</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars in the field were guided by the trading records of English, Dutch, and French companies and presented their views based on archival records. Irwin and Brett, cited above, established that the Coromandel dyed textiles were a melting pot of a wide range of visual imagery that arrived with traders from Western Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia; however, they suggested Indian artisans dependence on European designs, models, and pattern-books. This resulted in perceiving artisanal contributions to mediating visual knowledge as essentially a technical process. This approach continued in later works as well. Designer and scholar Nelly Sethna identified the early modern traders as the mediators of images. Sethna acknowledged that the artisans were able to “transform” the visuals brought by the English or Dutch traders by copying or adopting. The Western European samples still stay as the “model” or source to be copied.<sup>336</sup> Alongside portable samples brought by traders from Asia and Europe, south Indian murals have been considered as models for the compositional integrity and visual language of these textiles. In recent studies, specifically from 2003, the intricacies and nuances of interregional connections are more fully considered as a multifaceted process where the linear relationship between a model and its copies

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<sup>335</sup> See John Irwin and Katharine B. Brett, “Chapter 3: “Technique and Conditions of Manufacture,” in *Origins of Chintz* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1970), 9.

<sup>336</sup> Nelly H. Sethna, “Kalamkari- History and Development,” in *Living Traditions of India Kalamkari: Painted & Printed Fabrics from Andhra Pradesh* (New York: Mapin, 1985), 12.

are questioned.<sup>337</sup> This approach overturns the earlier understanding of “copying” associated with dyed textile making and compel us to comprehend this process as an exchange between cultures and visual forms. John Guy’s 2013 study underscores shifts in thinking about the mimetic relationship between imagery on textiles and murals. His analysis draws from a variety of visual resources to imply a fluid transaction and attempts to question the hierarchical model of mediation as a one-directional process.<sup>338</sup> However, Guy’s study could not completely break away from this model of establishing architectural ornamentation as the “origin” for textile imagery.<sup>339</sup> Historian Josefine Baark stresses that the textile makers were often guided by the “musters” sent by Europeans but she points out that the artisans also made alterations while mimicking them.<sup>340</sup> Baark also notes the shared visual vocabulary of imagery in Coromandel textiles and Vijayanagara murals.<sup>341</sup> These recent studies reject a simplified explanation of “copying” and have expanded the scope of research in this area.

The interconnections between South Indian textiles, murals, and architecture have been advanced by scholars such as Mark Zebrowski, George Michell, K. Reddeppa, and Anna Dallapiccola.<sup>342</sup> Michell and Zebrowski examine composite animal figures on dyed and painted textiles as well as Golconda miniature paintings and architectural elements to trace the

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<sup>337</sup> In 2003, a symposium titled *Textiles from India: The Global Trade*, took place at the Indian Museum, Kolkata, organized by Sutra, a non-profit organization based in Kolkata. The papers from the symposium were collected into a publication with the same title.

<sup>338</sup> John Guy, “One Thing Leads to Another: Indian Textiles and the Early Globalization of Style,” in *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013) 12-27.

<sup>339</sup> While tracing the histories of fifteenth-century Gujarati painted textiles, Guy states, “Together with the painted textiles of this period, they share a common visual language whose origins can be traced to the architectural ornamentation of the Solanki dynasty of eleventh-century Gujarat.” John Guy, “One Thing leads to Another,” 17.

<sup>340</sup> Josefine Baark, “The Tranquebar Palampore: Trade, Diplomacy, and “a little amusement” in an Early Modern Indo-Danish Textile,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018): 72.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-2.

<sup>342</sup> See Mark Zebrowski, *Deccani Painting* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1982); George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, *The New Cambridge History of India: Art and Architecture of Southern India, Vijayanagara and the Successor States 1350-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); K. Reddeppa, *Material Culture Depicted in Vijayanagara Temples* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2000); Anna L. Dallapiccola, *South Indian Paintings: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection* (London: British Museum Press, 2010); Anna L. Dallapiccola and Rosemary Crill, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings* (Ahmedabad and London: Mapin, 2015). Prior to these studies, Sivaramamurti did a thorough and in-depth analysis of south Indian paintings. See C. Sivaramamurti, *South Indian Paintings* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1968).

transmission of visuals across media.<sup>343</sup> They also note that the visual cultures of Deccan Sultanates (1527-1686), the Vijayanagara kingdom, and the Mughals (1526-1857) informed the diverse range of craft practices in southern India.<sup>344</sup> The significance of textiles has also been addressed by other scholars. Reddeppa, for example, closely examines the representation of costumes in the imagery of Vijayanagara murals to point to the keen interest in depictions of fabrics and garments.<sup>345</sup> The design affinities between bands and registers in painted textiles and murals was explored by Michell and Dallapiccola.<sup>346</sup>

K. Gandhirajan, however, warned us against simplifying the relationship between temple murals and Coromandel textiles.<sup>347</sup> He drew attention to the technical difference between textiles and murals in the use of pigment versus plant-based colors. Art historian Anna Seastrand points out the lack of “critical and prolonged art historical engagement” with south Indian paintings and argues for exploring the socio-political factors, patronage, and function of these paintings.<sup>348</sup> Seastrand also notes that subtle hints are left by the mural painters in the long narrative scenes for viewers to comprehend the beginning and end of a particular episode.<sup>349</sup> By this, she indicates an active presence of the mural painters in paintings. She emphasizes the prominent presence of textiles in the murals of Lepakshi and Tadipatri and observed that the ends of fabrics

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<sup>343</sup> Michell and Zebrowski, “Textiles, Metalwork and stone Objects,” in *The New Cambridge History of India*, 226-9.

<sup>344</sup> See Michell and Zebrowski, “Introduction,” and “Historical Framework,” in *The New Cambridge History of India*, 1-2, and 4-22.

<sup>345</sup> Reddeppa, “Costumes,” in *Material Culture Depicted in Vijayanagara Temples*, 28.

<sup>346</sup> Michell, “Painting,” 249-58. Anna L. Dallapiccola, “Vijayanagara and Nayaka Paintings,” in *South India Under Vijayanagara*, ed. Anila Verghese & Anna L. Dallapiccola (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2011), 274.

<sup>347</sup> Interview with K. Gandhirajan in Chennai, November 2015. K. Gandhairajan is a Chennai based scholar and photographer, who travels extensively in South India for research and interest. In 2015, he worked for Tamil Virtual Academy to set up a website of Tamil visual culture. He was also a PhD candidate at the University of Madras and his unfinished thesis on Tamil murals has been useful to several scholars in the field. Independent scholar Vaishnavi Ramanathan was instrumental for introducing me to Gandhirajan. I am thankful to both Ramanathan and Gandhirajan for their sharing their insights.

<sup>348</sup> Anna L. Seastrand, “Praise, Politics, and Language: South Indian Murals, 1500-1800” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), 3. Seastrand states that the study of the south Indian paintings [and art] has been neglected. The available studies tend to categorize artworks according to site and styles.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

[at Lepakshi] seem to be intentionally extended so that viewers are able to see patterns clearly.<sup>350</sup> Attention to the technicalities of production and socio-cultural determinants underscores the mediation between dyed textiles, murals, and other practices.

### **Theorizing Mediation and Mimesis**

There is a robust body of interdisciplinary scholarship on the topics of mediation and mimesis. In his 1992 book *The Mediation of Ornament*, art historian Oleg Grabar describes the role of “intermediaries” as the journey of recognizable visual motifs to abstraction that happens through a mediated process.<sup>351</sup> To follow the interplay of representation and non-representation, he proposes considering socio-cultural factors of image-making alongside formal analysis.<sup>352</sup> Grabar’s theorization establishes the necessity of considering the mediation of visual imagery as a multifaceted, socially informed action. It allows us to contextualize the role of block makers within a larger socio-cultural milieu. The sociological aspects of mediation in the “cosmopolitan contact zones” are analyzed by Finbarr Barry Flood.<sup>353</sup> Through a series of provocative case studies such as “Cultural Cross-dressing,” Flood’s 2009 book *Objects of Translation* focuses on the role of circulation through “mediation, negotiation, and translation.”<sup>354</sup> Mediation and translation, according to this scholar, are also responsible for altering the signs and meanings of social actions and for redefining histories.<sup>355</sup>

Homi Bhabha’s seminal text on mimicry established the complexity of this mimetic action which is productive to reassess the contribution of the kalamkari makers. Bhabha argued that mimicry is the “sign of a double articulation” through which both similarities and

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>351</sup> Oleg Grabar, “A Theory of Intermediaries in Art,” in *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 9-46.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 9-14.

<sup>353</sup> Finbarr Barry Flood, “Cultural Cross-dressing,” in *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 61.

<sup>354</sup> Flood, “Conclusions,” 262.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 262-3.

dissimilarities are transmitted from one to another.<sup>356</sup> According to him, mimetic process continually produces its difference or excess; for that, two entities in a mimetic process are “almost the same, but not quite”.<sup>357</sup> This difference is also interpreted as resistance to the process of assimilation which eventually contributes to the formation of a new identity. In other words, the identity constructed through this process is hybrid which denies its identification with one source but multiple. This consideration allows us to observe the complexities of the mimetic actions performed in the block makers’ or printers’ workshops. Since both resemblance and differences are created during the mimetic process, one entity cannot be considered a “source” for another. When block makers follow images provided by their patrons, they not only copy but also infuse their resistance in the traced drawings.

Art historian Natasha Eaton emphasizes the complexities of mimetic actions in visual and cultural encounters between South Asia and Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>358</sup> Eaton’s theorization of mimesis draws on the ideas of Rene Girard, Homi Bhabha, and Michael Taussig.<sup>359</sup> Eaton notes that mimesis was employed as a tool of dominance and also as a weapon of resistance. Eaton’s exploration of the potentials of mimetic actions to alter dominant power structures is informed by Taussig’s theorization.<sup>360</sup> Through her examination, Eaton argues that mimesis as a strategy is used to “act upon the world” and not merely represent it.<sup>361</sup> The consideration of mimesis as a productive strategy is crucial in acknowledging the contribution of block makers and makers of dyed textiles in general. Eaton also argues to take account of the multidirectionality of the mimetic acts, through which, a reciprocal relationship

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<sup>356</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 28 (1984): 126.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> Natasha Eaton, *Mimesis across Empires: Artworks and Networks in India, 1765-1860* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013). Eaton’s exploration of the mimetic encounters between the British colonists and the indigenous rulers in India during the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries was the topic of an earlier publication as well. See Natasha Eaton, “Between Mimesis and Alterity: Art, Gift, and Diplomacy in Colonial India, 1770-1800,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 4 (2004): 816-44.

<sup>359</sup> Eaton, “Introduction,” in *Mimesis across Empires*, 9-12.

<sup>360</sup> Eaton, “Art and Gift in India: Mimesis and Inalienability,” in *Mimesis across Empires*, 153.

<sup>361</sup> Eaton, “Introduction,” 8.

between different representational media are set up.<sup>362</sup> Eaton's argument can be productively implemented to comprehend the reciprocal relationship between the dyed textiles and murals.

Taussig's earlier theorization of mimesis in relation to alterity focuses on the concept of "sympathetic magic" which could transmit the power of the "original" into reproductions.<sup>363</sup> He also stresses the senses to consider mimetic practice as an intrinsically sensuous and bodily activity<sup>364</sup> by foregrounding the bodies of the mediators who transmit mimetic knowledge as embodied knowledge.<sup>365</sup> Drawing on Walter Benjamin's discussion of redemption and mimetic faculties in the production of histories, Taussig posits mimesis as a process that brings the invisible into the visible realm.<sup>366</sup> In the mimetic process, the invisible reflects into the visible thus setting up a relationship between visible and embodied knowledge.<sup>367</sup> Taussig's recognition of mimesis as transmission of knowledge and power has implications for the subjectivity of the makers of dyed textiles; the copying and imitating of images—a generational practice of the block makers—emerges as an active knowledge practice and a manifestation of their agency.<sup>368</sup>

The mediation between tangible image sources and intangible bodily knowledge of the block makers and textile makers is represented in the visually complex and technologically

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>363</sup> Michael Taussig, "A Report to the Academy," in *Mimesis and Alterity: A particular history of senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xviii.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., xvi-xix.

<sup>365</sup> Taussig, "In Some Way or Another One Can Protect Oneself from the Spirits by Portraying Them," in *Mimesis*, 8-10.

<sup>366</sup> Taussig, since the beginning of his career, engages deeply with Walter Benjamin's theories, and situates them in the post-colonial context. Among Benjamin's work, essays such as "The Storyteller: Reflections of the works of Nikolai Leskov," and "Thesis on the Philosophy on History," in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 83-110, and 253-64 are especially helpful to observe correspondences between Taussig and Benjamin's writings.

<sup>367</sup> He theorizes the role of chanters—in our case, the mediators—following Benjamin's take on the "storyteller", who mediate between the invisible and the visible world. Taussig, "Spacing Out," *Mimesis and Alterity*, 33-43.

<sup>368</sup> The idea of mimetic transmission emerged earlier in artist and art historian Abanindranath Tagore's discussion of likeness or similitude. According to Tagore, evoking the essence of a *rūpa* (रूप in Sanskrit, indicating visual form, appearance, and likeness, among many other meanings) is mediated through another visual form. In other words, the invisible "essence" is made visible into the representations. By comparing this process with echoing of sound, he theorized similitude as the echoing of essence from one to another. See Abanindranath Tagore, "Sadrishya," in *Bharat Shilper Sadanga* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1948) 38-40.

sophisticated dyed textiles of the Coromandel region. At the outset of this chapter, I noted the use of transparent tracing paper to transmit a plant motif from one surface to another. Recognition of the intermediate steps of transmitting an image from a photocopied paper to a wooden block draws attention to the intangible actions in this process which often are not apparent in their end results.<sup>369</sup> Recognizing the mimetic interplay between intangible practices and tangible objects is a step towards recognizing artisanal subjectivity.

Scholarship in craft theory and art history also calls attention to repetitive actions and mimetic practice as a form of knowledge. Sociologist Roma Chatterji's study of the contemporary *pata* (scroll painting) painters of Bengal establishes repetitive actions as instrumental for practicing "collective creativity".<sup>370</sup> Drawing on Gilles Deleuze, Chatterji proposes that artisanal learning takes place through habitual practices and repeating those of other practitioners.<sup>371</sup> In her discussion, habit and memory emerge as links between the past and ongoing craft practices; through habit and memory, the past is manifested in the present.<sup>372</sup> Natasha Eaton also argues that artisanal agency is constructed through repetitive actions. Repetition as a way of underscoring the makers' relationship with other masters and traditions has also been pointed to by Molly Aitken, in her study of the Mewari court painter Chokha.<sup>373</sup>

Theorization of mediation and mimesis is central for a better understanding of the coexistence of different cultural forms in the early modern kalamkaris. The artisans responded to specific market demands and produced textiles according to them. Barnes and Guy note the dyed textiles produced for the Southeast Asian market; Crill presents the account of the chintz textiles

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<sup>369</sup> Louise Cort and Leedom Lefferts describe the importance of "preform" in making earthenware in mainland Southeast Asia which I find similar to the intermediate steps of block making. Preform is the initial and essential step for making pottery and yet, it does not leave any mark in the finished product. Louise Allison Cort and Leedom Lefferts, "Pots and how they are made in mainland Southeast Asia," 5.

<sup>370</sup> Roma Chatterji, "Repetition, Improvisation, Tradition: Deleuzian Themes in the Folk Art of Bengal," *Cultural Analysis* 15, no. 1 (2016): 114.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>372</sup> I find Chatterji's discussion of habit and memory to be similar to Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of *habitus*. Both of them find habit or *habitus* to be a link between the past and present. However, Chatterji does not refer to any connection between her discussion and Bourdieu's theorization.

<sup>373</sup> Molly Emma Aitken, "Repetition and Response," in *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 155-70.



exclusively produced for the European market. The negotiations between the patrons' demands and the acquired knowledge of the textile makers imply that the mediation of visuals in kalamkari workshops was multidirectional. This is observed in the mediations between kalamkari, murals, and Deccani architecture too. To retain my focus on Deccan and the interrelations between the craft communities in this region, I limit my discussions to textile, mural, and architecture.

Building on the ongoing scholarly discussions on the impact of mimetic actions in artisanal practices, I will emphasize the role of mimesis to form artisanal decisions and create their knowledge repositories.

### **Mimetic Transmissions and Artisanal Decisions**

Mimetic transmission of images and knowledge materializes through negotiations and considerations of the artisans; in other words—through artisanal decision making. The choice of a set of images, templates, stencils, or techniques over others is formed through negotiations between the possibility and impossibility of executing an image and the translation of unfamiliarity to the familiar realm. In this section, I reflect on artisanal decisions to portray intermedial images on early modern Coromandel textiles by drawing on decisions made by contemporary block makers during the block-making process.

The Golconda hanging from the Calico Museum, ca.1640s, presents a compelling set of mediated images by using reference drawings, stencils, and masterful workmanship (**Figure 3.3**). An elaborate palace scene is portrayed where each compartment of the architectural complex imbibes a sense of controlled theatricality. In this meticulously populated hanging, the use of line and color hold the balance between forms and the diverse range of visual elements.<sup>374</sup> To the viewer's left, a portion of a large single-storied arched structure is seen; this actually represents the centre of what was originally a much longer hanging. Both the broad and narrow structures are crowned by domes and miniature pavilions. In the double storied structure towards the right, the pointed arched entrance extends beyond its ceiling allowing more visual space for the figural compositions that include royal figures with attendants, courtiers, foreign ambassadors, birds, and a set of composite creatures. The space beneath the palace complex is marked by a thick

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<sup>374</sup> I discussed the red and dark outlines of this hanging in Chapter 2 and how they support the overall compositional arrangement.

intricately drawn border against a light green background, displaying a varied range of vegetal, animal, and human motifs. The space above the architecture is populated by a range of flora and fauna. Several human figures are shown seated on carpets, which gives a suggestion of ground; at the same time, there are flying birds which resists a reading of the space as one dimensional.

John Irwin and Margaret Hall presented a detailed analysis of the composition of this hanging.<sup>375</sup> They noted the use of stencils for drawing outlines of the forms in these large scale textiles.<sup>376</sup> They also concluded that the architecture is “reminiscent” of the seventeenth-century Deccani Islamic style and the background decorations of garlands and flower balls are depicted in a style “inherited from” the Vijayanagara murals.<sup>377</sup> Nina Gwatkin analyzes a set of Coromandel textiles and commented that the presence of horizontal registers recalls a similar pictorial arrangement of the Vijayanagara murals.<sup>378</sup> Gwatkin also comments on the use of stencils to draw individual forms in the hanging and also similar ones. She suggests that a stencil was possibly reversed for portraying a turban in the hanging (Wall Hanging, V&A, A/C no. 687-1898).<sup>379</sup> however, it is not viable to use separate stencils for turban and the head; reversing one stencil will require adjusting all other visual elements around them. Traced drawings, or stencils for making these figures resulted in the consistent shape and detail of the figures. It is most probable that the painters used a reference drawing or template for the six narrow arches which resulted in the uniformity of form and overall design arrangement (**See Figure 3.3**). Patterning in the costumes suggests stenciling as well. The exponential growth of the patterns is controlled by the contours of the dress. From this observation, it can be said that artisans used reference drawings for both portrayals of individual forms and implementing the compositional format of murals.

The portrayal of a range of people and costumes from South Asia and Europe in the six smaller niches also indicate the utilization of reference drawings, supplied by traders. This range

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<sup>375</sup> Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel Group 17<sup>th</sup> Century,” in *Indian Painted and Printed Fabrics*, 19-21.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>378</sup> Nina Gwatkin, “Wall Hanging” in Mattibelle Gittinger, *Master Dyers to the World*, 112. This is further supported by recent scholars as well. See Aurelie Samuel, “Hanging,” in *The Fabric of India*, ed. Rosemary Crill, 136-7.

<sup>379</sup> Gwatkin, *Ibid.*

of people are inscribed through dress and hairstyle. The westernized figures are clothed in a gown, waistcoat, and breeches. Sitting postures further articulate the individual identities; for example, the Portuguese man in the bottom left is depicted on a chair, whereas the Deccani courtier in the bottom right is shown on a *takht* (a couch, bench in Urdu and Dakhni). Irwin and Hall identified European style furniture, costume, Deccani swords, South Asian costumes, and patterns in these niches.<sup>380</sup> Irwin, Hall, and Baark noted that European “musters” served as reference for delineating these figures and forms. The lower central niche shows a Dutch couple engaged in a conversation (**Figure 3.4**).<sup>381</sup> Dressed in a gown with a tipped collar, an untailored fabric tied as a cloak, and sandals, the woman offers a flower to the man who is dressed in doublet, breeches, and hose, and flaunts long and wavy hair.<sup>382</sup> Considering the simplicity of the man’s costume and hairstyle, Irwin and Hall identified him to be a Dutch Protestant. In the lower left niche, another Portuguese couple is depicted. The lady wears a petticoat, blouse, and a long scarf fashioned as a sash; the man wears a hat, waistcoat, bulbous breeches, and stockings. Gathered around a wine flask, the couple in the upper left niche are dressed in long robes. Whereas the man’s robe is left loose, the patterned robe of the woman is tied at the waist. The pointed beard adds to the individuality of this man. Artisans certainly relied on reference drawings and templates for the portrayal of interregional figures.

As noted above, scholars have pointed to the visual transmissions between the Vijayanagara murals and kalamkaris. To emphasize the reciprocity of mimetic flow between these media, I will compare the hanging with the murals of Lepakshi. Sites of the best-preserved murals from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are located at Lepakshi and Tadipatri in Southern Andhra Pradesh and Tirupudaimarudur in Tamil Nadu. The temple dedicated to the fierce form of Shiva, Veerabhadra, at Lepakshi is known as Veerabhadraswamy temple and constructed during the reign of Vijayanagara king Achyutadevaraya (**See Figure 0.8**). Anna Dallapiccola identifies the typical three-quarter profile for human figures (frontal for deities), a slight slant in the body to suggest movement, and a tendency to create textile patterns as

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<sup>380</sup> Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel Group,” 20.

<sup>381</sup> Gwatkin comments on the hats, knee breeches, and shoes worn by Portuguese in Goa. She also indicates that these costumes were worn by the Dutch as well. Gwatkin, “The Brooklyn Museum Hanging,” 91.

<sup>382</sup> Irwin and Hall identified the man’s hairstyle to be Dutch. Irwin and Hall, “Early,” 20.

important features of paintings at Lepakshi.<sup>383</sup> The murals at Lepakshi, made in the Fresco-secco technique, are composed in long and horizontal scroll-like settings.<sup>384</sup> The paintings are characterized by sinuous lines, elegant figurative forms, and fluid organic patterns.

A painting from the ceiling of the *nāṭya mandapa* (a pillared hall in a temple complex used for performing rituals, music, and dance) depicts god Veerabhadra towards the left and being attended by two male figures on both sides (**Figure 3.5**). This mural painting, like the Calico Museum hanging, contains references to other visual media such as dyed textiles and temple architecture. Dark-skinned Veerabhadra embodies the fierceness of Lord Shiva by being portrayed with large rounded eyes, fangs beside his lips, and his distinguishing attributes—a *triśūla* (trident), *kapāla* (a bowl made of a human skull), and a *khadgam* (sword). The panel is framed within horizontal borders depicting full lotuses. Folded half-circular curtains hanging from the upper border imbibe theatricality to this scene. The prominence of theatre and performing arts during the Vijayanagara period was reflected in the paintings.<sup>385</sup> The cloth curtains and other textiles depicted in this painting are intricately adorned with a variety of patterns recalling the dyed textiles of Coromandel. For example, the royal figure on the right side of Veerabhadra is adorned with a high towering crown, a *dhota* (an untailored length of cloth used as man's lower garment), also known as *panche* (పంచె, in Telugu), and a wide sash. A set of repeating motifs indicate the folds of the *panche*. The sash is brightly colored, ornamented with flower motifs, and wrapped around the courtier's waist. The loose end of the sash is marked with an off-white horizontal strip, and wavy patterns in its border suggest folds. Each curtain is attributed with a different set of floral patterns, all found in the printed textiles from this region. The present-day block makers in Pedana carve similar patterns in their wooden blocks. The lotus motifs depicted in the textiles are depicted in a more intimate scale than the outer borders. A prominent painterly presence of dyed textiles is found in the *natya mandapa* of this temple complex.

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<sup>383</sup> Dallapiccola, "Vijayanagara and Nayaka Paintings", 273-5.

<sup>384</sup> D. Hanumantha Rao, *Lepakshi Temple: A Cultural and Architectural Study* (Delhi, Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2004), 70.

<sup>385</sup> See R. N. Saletore, "Painting and other Fine Arts," in *Vijayanagara Art* (New Delhi: Sandeep Prakashan, 1982), 213-58.

In her analysis of these murals, Seastrand notes that the representational space draws from architecture and landscape and should not be considered “illusionistic.”<sup>386</sup> The depiction of architecture in this mural is useful to read these references. However, subtle clues in this painting also suggest that the painters subverted the architectural forms to fit them in the narrative. The temple structure at the centre of this painting illustrates this. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this one-storied shrine (*vimana*) is situated on a high plinth.<sup>387</sup> The *kuta* or domed tower with a *kumbha* (a pot for ceremonial water), placed on top of a stepped roof is not only a representation of the Dravidian, or south Indian, temple type but also a simplified depiction of the Veerabhadraswamy temple (**Figure 3.6**). The pillar (on the left) situated next to the royal figure is slightly tilted and departs from actual architectural forms. It seems tilted drawing of the pillar is a visual strategy employed by the painters for avoiding the overlappings of the figure and the temple structure. The representational strategy of this panel shows the painters were not only mimicking individual forms and figures and but also making adjustments to assimilate them into a coherent narrative which is also observed in the Golconda hanging. The mural painters also possessed a keen knowledge of a range of images collected from various sources.

Doubling of spatial experiences created by the imbibing tactile presence of both textiles and architecture is also reflected in the ornate prayer space of the Jami Mosque in Bijapur (**Figure 3.7**). The mosque was first erected by Ali I (1558-79), an Adil Shahi king of Turkish and Persian origin, during 1576, but was never completed.<sup>388</sup> The *Mihrāb*, the arched niche in the prayer hall, holds an inscription with the name of Allah, was completed in 1636.<sup>389</sup> The mihrab faces the *Kāba* in Mecca as indicated by the *qibla*. Made in low relief and richly painted

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<sup>386</sup> Seastrand, “Praise,” 8.

<sup>387</sup> The Dravidian or South Indian temple is discussed by Gopinatha Rao, M. A. Dhaky, Michael Meister, Adam Hardy, George Michell, and Anila Verghese among others. The terminology for Hindu temple architecture comes from both South and North Indian texts. Architectural historian M. A. Dhaky notes *prasada* as the “temple proper, generally northern Indian (Nagara) class” and *vimana* as the “temple proper, Early pan-Indian, Dravidian, and Dravida-derived.” M. A. Dhaky, “Glossary,” in *The Indian Temple Traceries* (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies and D. K. Printworld, 2005), 471 and 474.

<sup>388</sup> George Michell and Mark Zebrowski, “Mosques and Tombs,” in *Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 88.

<sup>389</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture* (3 ed.), s.v. “Mihrab,” by James Stevens Curl and Susan Wilson, accessed January 10, 2019, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199674985.001.0001/acref-9780199674985-e-5783>.

with colors and gold, this mihrab is “one the grandly proportioned and sumptuously decorated in the Islamic world.”<sup>390</sup> The mihrab draws heavily on both the structure and ornamentation of the Adil Shahi buildings. The central archway is topped by a smaller archway, two domed pavilions on the sides and minarets thus replicating the symmetry of the built prayer hall. The interior of the domed pavilions is brightly painted in white and features hanging lamps. The tiered pavilions between the central archway and frame of the mihrab are represented as especially elongated, possibly to fit them within the narrow compositional space. With the interplay of slightly recessed and projected sections in the mihrab an illusion of a physical architecture is created. The meticulous depiction of architecture to create an outdoor space within the interior of the mosque creates a mirroring experience of spaces in the mihrab. The organization of the magnificent archway, minarets, hanging lights, and tiered building structures are similar in the Golconda hanging and this mihrab; only, the crowd in the textile is replaced with the serenity of the mihrab. Since both the hanging and the mihrab were made during the first half of the seventeenth century, it is possible that the dyed textile makers and the architects were aware of each others’ practices; if not via direct correspondence, they were connected by intermediaries such as reference drawings and templates.

The intermedial references in textiles are not only confined to narrative hangings but also to Islamic prayer mats, where the mihrab is the central motif. A ca. seventeenth/eighteenth-century prayer mat from the Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad contains an intricately printed single cusped archway or mihrab with elaborate vertical borders on two sides (**Figure 3.8**). A thin border featuring red roses and green branches frame the archway. A second, wider border of cherry blossoms with leaves and angular branches are depicted. The cherry blossom panels are framed by narrow vertical bands containing peony and foliage (**See Figure 2.17**). The inner rose panel emphasizes the centrality of the mihrab motif. The outer bands on either side of the prayer mat are not complete. This suggests that the prayer mat was not produced individually or as a single piece but originally printed in multiples and later cut into pieces for individual use. A portrait of Sufi-Makhdum Jahnian from the Salarjung Museum depicts the saint seated on a prayer mat (**Figure 3.9**). This eighteenth-century painting on paper shows Jahnian, draped in a loose-fitting long robe, shawl, and turban, holding prayer beads. It also shows how the body, like the mihrab, is oriented to Mecca. The prayer mat in this painting follows a visual

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<sup>390</sup> Michell and Zebrowski, “Mosques,” 88.

organization similar to the Salarjung prayer mat: the void in the centre of the prayer mat is to be occupied by devotees during prayers, as seen in the painting. This relates to the etymological roots of the term mihrab, signaling the space occupied by men of religious and political authority.<sup>391</sup>

The mediation between Coromandel textiles, Vijayanagara murals, Adil Shahi architecture, and Golconda miniatures reinforces the reciprocity between practices, which is also reflected in Eaton's discussion of multidirectional mimesis. To further this, I will stress that the reciprocity of mimetic flow has made possible by the artisanal decisions. To illustrate this issue, I will present a study of block-making at the Kondra brothers' workshop.

### **Mediation in the Block Makers' Workshop**

In the workshop of the Kondra brothers, wooden blocks are prepared from the cross sections of teak, a hardwood tree. Teak is indigenous to India but not this specific region. Wood is brought from Kothagudem (Telangana), Palasa (Andhra Pradesh), and Bastar (Chhattisgarh). The texture and durability of the wood improve with aging. Massive blocks of wood are found piled up in a corner of the Kondra brothers' workshop. There is a small covered space adjacent to the workshop where the wood is cut and trimmed. Before working on the blocks, artisans check if the surface of the block is even. The unevenness of blocks affects the quality of prints. After ascertaining that the upper surface is even it is painted with zinc oxide and adhesive solution. The solution transforms the surface into a white background to execute images. The block makers in the workshop come from varied communities, and they learn to work under the supervision of the Kondra brothers.<sup>392</sup> Around twenty workers work at the workshop; even though their work is divided, they are trained to do all kinds of work required in the workshop. The skill of block carving is not hereditary; rather, interest and willingness are key to learn and continue this craft.

In order to follow the process of preparing a block, I presented a printed image of a marigold plant-inspired motif which is found in many printed fabrics from the early modern Coromandel fabrics. Gangadhar garu studied the design before transforming the image onto a

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<sup>391</sup> See *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture* (3 ed.), s.v. "Mihrab."

<sup>392</sup> Similar intercommunal gathering is observed in Mukkanti garu's workshop which I have discussed in Chapter 2.

wooden block (**Figure 3.11**). He placed a ruler vertically on the image at the centre and checked the symmetry of the design. He stated that the motif is essentially oval and demands symmetry. If symmetry is absent, then it will not work as a successful design. After making necessary measurements for the image, he placed a sheet of tracing paper over the block. Both tracing paper and parchment papers are used for tracing outlines. Excessive pressure and a hard grip cause damage to the papers. Also, the excessive pressure prevents free movement of the hand while drawing. From this act of tracing, the plant motif was replicated into a linear diagram. While Gangadhar garu was working, I asked if they have names to distinguish floral designs. He replied, “You name the flowers the way you want. We say *teen patte ka phūl* ya *panch patte ka phūl* [a flower with three or five petals].” My question was intended to see if he recognizes flowers or vegetal forms with nature. His response pointed to the structure of the form rather than botanical identification. Recognizing forms by their structures is embedded in the design principles. Once the traced image was ready, Gangadhar garu called a fellow block maker, Shanmukha Rao, to take charge of the next step—preparing the wooden block.

Each step in block making is informed by decisions made by the block makers. When Gangadhar garu handed the traced image to Shanmukha Rao, Rao took the image and searched through the pile of blocks finding the right one for this image. The thickness of the blocks is varied. For printing in large numbers, thicker blocks are required. Among many commissioned works in the workshop, they were preparing blocks for a bedspread. He said that the bedspreads will be printed in a large number, for which they chose blocks with great thickness. After Shanmukha Rao found a suitable block, he went back to his place. His work space is quite simple and consists of a toolbox, a small square base stool, and a few wooden blocks. He, along with several artisans, sits among unused wooden blocks. Rao put the reverse side of the traced drawing over the coated wooden block. The transparency of tracing papers makes the drawing visible from the reverse. He pinned the diagonal corners of the paper to the block so that the paper does not move while tracing. Instead of using a pen, he used his *kalams*—the engraving tools to trace its mark on the block. He held the *kalam* in his right hand and placed his baby finger near the tip of the tool for ensuring greater control over the movement of the tool. To engrave the drawing, he used a thin wooden shaft to beat it repeatedly over the tool. The engraving tool moved effortlessly to create minute indentations on the wooden block, piercing through the traced drawing. With his superb control over the movement of the tool, the paper



was pierced but not damaged. Throughout this exercise, the hand-drawn image morphed into an engraved drawing on the wooden block. After preparing the tracings on the block, he handed the block to his fellow artisan, Nilambar (**Figure 3.13**). The tracing paper was sent to Gangadhar garu's folio.

Ephemeral traced drawings are carriers of visual knowledge which are made and utilized by the block makers. In the early modern era, similar drawings were used by the painters, block makers, and printers to mimic images and representing them. Gangadhar garu's examination of the "workability" of the image or Shanmukha Rao's search for a suitable block for carving suggest each step in image making is shaped by their silent decisions. The representational and contextual mediation of visuals between Coromandel textiles, temple murals, and architecture were made possible by these decisions of the artisans.

Once Nilambar received the block, he did not look at the printed image, which was referred by Gangadhar garu or the tracing paper, used by Shanmukha Rao. For him, the lightly engraved wood block was the starting point for his work. He started by scooping out the broader recessed areas in the block. He did not carve the exact outlines. He said that carving the outlines in the first go can harm the designs. For that, the outlines and the intricate curves are kept for the end. Carving requires observation of the minute details in an image, a close engagement with parts but also having an overall idea of the design. Once he finished the block, it was sent to another block maker who is lovingly called *bābāi* (uncle, in Telugu) by his fellow workers. He trimmed the sides of the block and beveled the edges of the upper surface (**Figure 3.15**).

After the block was ready, it was taken back to the Kondra brothers. This time, Narsaiah garu took charge; he put a piece of blank paper on the top of the block and attempted to take a rubbing print. For the print, he sharpened the lead of a color pencil. He sharpened to such an extent that the lead of the pencil took a long and narrow shape. He held the pencil almost horizontally over the block and paper and gently started rubbing (**Figure 3.16**). Slowly the marigold image of the block started appearing on the paper. The marigold, which started its journey from a printed image, was again being translated into a printed image. This test print is taken to check the various components of the print and examine whether the block is finished. While taking the rubbing print, the blockmakers check the evenness of the wood surface. In prints, a mirror image of the block is captured. In rubbing, it is not the mirror image. Rubbing, in this case, provides an immediate solution to check the carvings on the block. After the blocks are

considered finished, they are sent back to *babai* who attaches handles to the back. The blocks are sent to a temporary storehouse, where they are soaked in a vessel of mustard oil for a week. The pores of the wood matrix are sealed by the absorption of oil so that the block does not absorb color during printing; the oil coating also gives the block a longer life.

The role of tracing is essential to execute repetitive patterns. Sometimes a small unit is multiplied through tracing the same motif repeatedly on a paper (**Figure 3.17**). The paper is divided into horizontally parallel sets of lines keeping the height of the motif as a point of reference. Parallel vertical lines are drawn to intersect with the horizontal lines. This grid is employed by the artisans to measure the distance between motifs. Yet these intersecting lines are not seen in the final iteration of the wood block.<sup>393</sup> The spacing in the traced drawing is measured so carefully that the multiplication of the prints happens evenly.

Stencils are limited in the block makers' toolboxes but commonly found on the printers' tables (**See Figure 2.15**). In Mukkanti garu and M. Rao's workshops, simple stencils made out of folded newspapers are used as masking tools. To make a frame around the central image area in a bedspread, mehrab, or konia chakra, stencils are indispensable. They are used for making a seamless transition from horizontal borders to vertical ones. Used newspapers are widely used by printers. In some cases, a thin sheet of plastic is utilized too. The stencils require to be thin and remain on the same surface with the fabric. The use of stencils is evident in the historic textiles as well. For example, the borders of the Golconda floor spread are executed by using a stencil (**Figure 3.19**). In the Sarlarjung prayer mat, a large stencil in the shape of the cusped arch was possibly used for restricting the lotus motifs within the archway (**See Figure 3.8**).

The journey of the marigold motif from a printed photograph to a block can be compared to mimicking after the early modern "musters" to reproduce visuals. Insights drawn from the Kondra brothers' workshop enable us to envision the intermediate steps of examining and executing images and objects. Informed by artisanal decisions, this process of transmitting visuals is an active reflection of their subject-positions. Through this process, the sensual presence of the dyed textiles is captured in the Vijayanagara murals and visual elements of the murals are infused in these textiles; through mimesis, the fluidity and malleability of textiles are

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<sup>393</sup> Cort and Lefferts' discussion of "preform" is again relevant here to understand the relevance of these ephemeral steps of image-making.

actualized in the permanent temple structure.<sup>394</sup> Mimesis of sensory knowledge leads artisans to synthesize observational and embodied knowledge which opens up further scope to nurture their knowledge, the topic of the following section.

### **From Transmissions to the Synthesis of Knowledge**

The entire process of mimetic transmissions enacted by artisans leads to the creative synthesis of a wide range of visual, sociological, and cultural knowledge. The dyed textiles and murals visually present in the Deccani and Coromandel societies as multicultural and complex, formed through cultural and trade encounters between different communities co-existing in these regions and beyond.

Certain visual motifs are intelligently used to convey the diversity and synthesis of cultures; one such motif is a parrot or parakeet, prominent in both Hindu iconography and Islamic representations. In south Indian Hindu iconography specifically, the parrot is often considered as a symbol of wisdom. Goddess Meenakshi of Madurai (Tamil Nadu) and goddess Andal of Srirangam (Tamil Nadu) are depicted with parrots in their hands.<sup>395</sup> Another reference to parrots comes from the *Tutinama* (a compilation of tales told by a parrot), a Persian text which was made into an illustrated book in the early Mughal court. The parrot is also celebrated for its “verbal prowess and sweetness of speech,” for which poets and literary figures were compared.<sup>396</sup> Parrots, among other birds and animals, were also popular trade items in early modern South Asia.<sup>397</sup> The motif of the “talking-parrot” linked South Asian literary and visual culture with the Persianate world.<sup>398</sup> A woman holding a parrot or myna is a much-explored

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<sup>394</sup> Taussig’s attention to the sensory aspects of mimesis which goes beyond appearance is particularly useful to consider the transference of sensory knowledge between the Coromandel textiles, south Indian murals, and architecture.

<sup>395</sup> Goddess Meenakshi holds the parrot in her right hand, whereas Andal holds the bird in her left hand.

<sup>396</sup> Amir Khusrow proclaimed himself to be the “parrot of India.” Jane Mikkelsen, “Of Parrots and Crows: Bidil and Hazin in Their Own Words,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 3 (2017): 116.

<sup>397</sup> Heather Dalton, “A Sulphur-crested Cockatoo in fifteenth-century Mantua: rethinking symbols of sanctity and patterns of trade,” *Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 5 (2013): 676-94. Indian parrots were traded to Europe during the fifteenth century and that was reflected in European oil paintings. Dalton noted presence of an Indian Ringneck Parakeet in Andrea Mantegna’s painting *Madonna della Vittoria* or *The Virgin of Victory* (1495–1496). *Ibid.*, 678.

<sup>398</sup> John R. Perry, “Monty Python and the Mathnavi: The Parrot in Indian, Persian and English Humor,” *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2003): 64.

theme in Deccani and Mughal miniatures. In the Golconda hanging, the parrot is the only bird or animal included in the large narrative panels (**Figure 3.20**). Parrots are portrayed with the minutest of detail: a red patch and alternating dark green and light green stripes on the wings mark their distinctive characters. The large rectangular panel in bottom right depicts a princely man being attended by four women dressed in a blouse, sari, and skirt; the woman in the left corner holds a parrot in her hand. The motif of a woman holding a parrot evokes layered meanings associated with south Indian Hindu iconography and Indo-Persian cultural exchanges. Towards the right of the upper red panel at the centre, a prominent parrot is represented on a small platform. The independent parrot is a reminder of the “talking parrots,” celebrated in the Indo-Persian literature and paintings. The pronounced presence of the bird reminds viewers of the synthesis of intercultural knowledge in the Coromandel and Deccan regions.

The synthesis of cultures is also reflected in the clothing of the Vijayanagara court during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A mural from the Veerabhadara temple depicts a group of courtiers (**Figure 3.21**). Like textiles, this painting is framed by prominent floral borders and features swagged curtains evoking theatrical settings. The central portion is largely damaged and leaves few traces to speculate what might have been painted there. Towards the right, five people are depicted in two groups; two royal figures face the centre whereas the other three face right. The second left and the second and third right figures are seen wearing *kullayi* (a tall conical cap made of cotton or silk). *Kullayi* and *kabayi* are Perso-Turkic attire which were appreciated by the Hindu Vijayanagara kings. Art historian Philip Wagoner presents a compelling argument about the transformation of the Hindu culture of Vijayanagara through its interaction with Islam by tracing the history of *kullayi* and *kabayi* (a long tunic) as Vijayanagara courtly attire.<sup>399</sup> Wagoner argues that the Hindu court culture of Vijayanagara was “deeply transformed” by the interactions with Islamic cultures.<sup>400</sup> Flood responds to Wagoner’s argument about the cross-cultural dressing in the Vijayanagara court and proposes that the cross-cultural encounters were not restricted to the realm of the courtly elites but also artisans, workers, and soldiers.<sup>401</sup> The Vijayanagara

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<sup>399</sup> Philip B. Wagoner, ““Sultan among Hindu Kings”: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996): 851-80.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 852.

<sup>401</sup> Flood, “Cultural Cross-Dressing,” in *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) 61-88.

kingdom in southern India was considered a Hindu kingdom that prevented the spread of Islam to their territory. Since the 1990s, scholars including Wagoner, George Michell, Mark Zebrowski, and Anila Verghese have strongly argued against this earlier assumption. Wagoner and Flood's discussions are useful to reflect on the position of the dyed textile makers within the theme of early modern cross-cultural interactions.<sup>402</sup>

In the temple mural, the courtiers are depicted wearing the conical cap but not the tunic. I find this painting relevant for discussion since the male figures are wearing the Perso-Turkic *kullayi* and an indigenous Indian garment the *dhoti*. Dhoti or panche with a scarf was worn by Hindu kings and courtiers all over south India, whereas the *kullayi* was introduced only during the Vijayanagara era. The *kullayi* is not represented here as a contrasting element to the Vijayanagara wardrobe but assimilated into the cultural fabric of courtly clothing. The dark-skinned courtier towards the right faces back to another male courtier wearing a towering crown, worn by both Hindu gods and kings. By putting the Hindu crown next to the *kullayi*, a visual similitude is created between them that suggests *kullayi* is not an alien costume for the Hindu kings, but a close counterpart to the crown. This visual dialogue between these two distinctive headdresses is a marker of mediation that is manifested in the other elements and composition of this group. The composition, use of textiles, and the arrangement of forms and figures are the evidence of mediations between narratives, cultures, and practices.

A striking feature of the varied range of costumes and hairstyle represented in the Golconda hanging is hybridity (**Figure 3.22**). Gwatkin points to the “international character” of the dresses found the large Coromandel hangings.<sup>403</sup> She notes that many of these dresses show an amalgamation of European and south Indian clothing styles.<sup>404</sup> However, she also points out the inherent confusions within these dresses—as most of the time the dresses do not belong to a specific culture but multiple. Whereas the silhouette of European dresses is recognizable, details were altered by the *kalamkari* painters.<sup>405</sup> In the upper left niche of the hanging, a woman is

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<sup>402</sup> Vijaya Ramaswamy's argument addressed in Chapter 1 is useful to understand how the migration and mobility within artisanal communities in south India enabled them to participate in cross-cultural interactions. Vijaya Ramaswamy, “Vishwakarma Craftsmen in Early Medieval Peninsular India,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 4 (2004): 548-82.

<sup>403</sup> Gwatkin, “The Brooklyn,” 90.

<sup>404</sup> Gwatkin, “Wall Hanging,” 113.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

depicted in a gown seated on a “European type of stool.”<sup>406</sup> She wears a topknot adorned with jewelry and a short, vibrant, red veil. A topknot is commonly found in south Indian Hindu iconography but that is not paired with a gown. Similar to the Lepakshi murals, the depiction of costumes in this hanging reflects how the artisans have served as mediators of cultural interactions.

As discussed above, the early modern synthesis of intercultural knowledge resulted in composite motifs and arrangements which have roots in both Hindu and Islamic cultures. The composite motifs are continually being used by the contemporary block makers in the Bandar region. Upon presenting an image of the mehrab textile (**See Figure 0.17**) from Mukkanti garu’s workshop to Gangadhar garu, he explained,

We call the central motif *pandu* [ripe fruit or mango, in Telugu] since it resembles a mango. The vase-like motifs in either side of the central motif are called *dhuni stambham* [incense burner, in Telugu]. Smaller and slightly elongated *pandu* motifs spring from the *stambham*.<sup>407</sup>

The *pandu* motif for Gangadhar garu is also well known as a cypress which is intrinsically connected to Islamic visual culture as a symbol of longevity. Gangadhar garu’s intervention demonstrates how this motif was renamed and absorbed into the Telugu-speaking artisanal communities. The same applies to the *dhuni stambham* or incense burner which can also be interpreted as a vase, as Gangadhar garu notes above. The specific meaning of these widely circulated images for the block making community indicates synthesis of localized knowledge of artisans with interregional imagery. The local or regional names of these motifs also establish how the block makers participate in cross-cultural encounters. Their endeavors did not stop at the creation of the images; their engagement prompted renaming the motifs thus infusing their subject-position into these widely circulated visuals.

The synthesis of knowledge perhaps led the early modern textile painters to transform architectural structures into “in-between spaces”, seen in the Golconda hanging. The intersecting lintels and columns construct the architectural grid of this hanging and the visual dividers between various components of this textile. The vertical pillars/columns are also compartmentalized into small sections and topped with bulbous domes. The domed structures

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<sup>406</sup> Irwin and Hall, “Early Coromandel,” 20.

<sup>407</sup> Interview with K. Gangadhar in Pedana, July 2017.

with battlements at the top of the wall reflect stylistic features of the Qutb Shahi, Adil Shahi, and Sultanate architecture of the Deccan. The upper edge of the arch extends beyond its roof. A flower bud motif appears above the apex of the arch, commonly found at the apex of arched entrances in Qutb Shahi architecture (**Figure 3.23 and 3.24**). The growth of the arch masks part of the miniature tiered structures behind. The depiction of tangible architectural structures in the textile suggests that the painters reassessed the function and meaning of architecture to suit their purpose. This renewal of images and meanings resulted in a gathering of representational styles and ideas.

The sense of “gathering” was extended to other dyed textiles from this era; one such example is a coverlet from the National Museum, New Delhi, India (**See Figure 0.22**).<sup>408</sup> Whereas the use of lines in the Golconda hanging is careful and restrained, the drawing of the coverlet appears more spontaneous, and closer to the fluid drawings of the Lepakshi murals. The building which contains elements of both enduring architectural structures and makeshift tent occupies the centre of the coverlet. Brick-like rectangular motifs (on the gable roofs) and red dotted textile-like surface—both co-exist in the central architectural structure. The tiered structure is topped with a pyramidal roof and four superstructures in each corner. The superstructures at the back appear almost attached to the central tower and that presents a complex perspectival view. People are dressed in court attire of the Islamic states of the Deccan and South Asia except for an Eastern Asian man around the upper right corner.<sup>409</sup> The man is characterized by a conical Eastern Asian hat commonly associated with farmers and labors, a checkered waistcoat, and a wrap. He smilingly gazes at the royalty, dressed in a Persianate turban, robe, sashes, and trousers. The bearded and fair-skinned man, leaning against a bolster, is cheerfully drunk to offer his drink to a bird. In contrast to the people in the palatial setting or in groups, a lone ascetic is portrayed towards the left border. He sits on a deer skin on a rocky ground and holds a pineapple in his left hand. His yogic status is confirmed by the *yogapatta* (a band used during yoga) around his legs. Most of the people in this image are associated with

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<sup>408</sup> See Anamika Pathak, “Coverlet,” in *The Many Arts of the Deccan*, ed. Preeti Bahadur Ramaswami and Kavita Singh (New Delhi: National Museum, 2015) 32-3. I explore the idea of gathering in a write up focused on this coverlet. See Rajarshi Sengupta, “Many Gatherings: The Cosmopolitan World of a Golconda Coverlet,” *Journal18*, vol. East-Southeast (October 2017).

<sup>409</sup> Pathak identified the Eastern Asian man to be Chinese but did not clarify the reasons for that. Pathak, “Coverlet,” in *Nauras*, 33.

various objects; however, the association between the ascetic and pineapple is striking. He turns away from the various narratives of the picture plane but engages with the fruit. A pineapple-like motif is also seen on the top of the pyramidal roof of the central building. The coverlet represents a gathering of inter-cultural and inter-regional elements and brings together the representational styles of mural painting and kalam drawing.

A closer analysis of the pineapple motif strengthens the discussions around the synthesis of cultures and regional beliefs. Pineapple was brought to the Deccan from the South Americas by Portuguese traders and that is reflected in the Hindi and Telugu terms: Pineapple or *Ananas* in Portuguese (in Hindi, अनानास, *Anānās*; in Telugu, అనాసపండు, *Anāsa pandu*, where *pandu* means fruit). The arrival of the overseas fruit to the Deccan via the Coromandel coast generated an immediate response in the visual culture of the region. Pineapple was revered in the Deccan during the Qutb Shahi era and found its way onto noted monuments of this era and textiles, among other media. “Exotic” fruits such as pineapple, melons, and pomegranates were presented as gifts which were documented in *waqais* (a form of newswriting under the Mughals) from the Deccan.<sup>410</sup> One *waqai* from Parenda Fort (presently in Maharashtra state) stated that fruits (melons and pomegranates) from Golconda were stopped there and then forwarded to Bijapur.<sup>411</sup> Many similar accounts of the exchange of precious fruits are found in the *waqais* of the Deccan. Why the pineapple became a favorite for rulers and artisans alike requires further research.<sup>412</sup> The pineapple figured prominently in Deccani architecture and textiles. For instance, the north doorway to Hayat Baksh Begum’s tomb in Hyderabad features a horizontal panel of pineapples (**Figure 3.25**). The doorway is adorned on three sides by three panels of geometric patterns. On the top, a separate horizontal panel of the pineapples is executed. The oval shaped pineapples, constructed out of individual fruits and a crown of five leaves, are possibly made from a mould.

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<sup>410</sup> A huge selection of the *waqais* from the Deccan are available in the Telangana State Archives (formerly A. P. State Archives). Yusuf Husain translated and published a book titled *Selected Waqai of the Deccan (1660-1671 AD)*, from the Central Records Office, Hyderabad, 1953.

<sup>411</sup> Yusuf Husain, *Selected Waqai of the Deccan (1660-1671 AD)* (Hyderabad: Central Records Office, 1953), 59-64.

<sup>412</sup> The pineapple motif does not hold any special significance to the contemporary block makers, dyers, or printers. However, in 2015, master ikat weaver Gajam Govardhana’s workshop represented the pineapple motif on a single ikat silk. The fabric was sold as dress material and the spare pieces were used for making file folders. As a response to a query about the motif, Govardhana said that he found the motif interesting. He did not mention any other association with the pineapple motif.



Pineapples are also executed at the apex of arches, seen on the Salarjung prayer mat (**See Figure 3.8**). On the tomb of Hayat Baksh, the pineapple is among the few representational motifs. Why does the pineapples appear over a doorway or at the apex of an arch, which is again a doorway? The pineapple has been long associated with good health and fortune in some parts of East (especially China) and Southeast Asia (Malayasia, Cambodia, and others). It is not unreasonable to think that beliefs in East or Southeast Asia associating pineapple with good fortune and health might have travelled to the Deccan. The city of Melacca was a prime trade port during the early modern era, along with Aceh in Indonesia, which were well-connected with the Coromandel and Malabar coasts in the Indian peninsula.<sup>413</sup> The use of the pineapple motif on the doorways of the Qutb Shahi architecture is mirrored in the mihrab of the Salarjung prayer mat.

Synthesis also emerges as a controlled act which is observed in the shawl featured in the upper red rectangular panel of the Golconda hanging (**See Figure 3.20**). In contrast with the flat patterned surface of the men's robes, the woman's shawl has a hint of three-dimensionality. It also gives a sense of roundedness of the wearers' body. Pronounced outlines are employed to define the body of the woman but the suggestion of three-dimensionality adds a controlled dynamism into it. Through this mode of drawing, flowing quality of fabrics is infused in the otherwise flat surface of the shawl. I read this image as a synthesis between visual languages which are consciously employed by the painters of the hanging. Promoting fluidity of cross-cultural information into textiles and at the same time controlling them—the simultaneity of these actions suggests a synthesis of knowledge in the workshop of the textile makers that was multifaceted. This strategy was essential for the early modern textile makers to make cloth for Deccani, Persian, Dutch, and Portuguese markets. Reading the cross-cultural and intermedial images as a result of synthesizing artisanal knowledge establishes the active presence of the makers in these textiles.

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<sup>413</sup> Economic and social historians have written extensively about trade relations between Southern India and Southeast Asia. Melacca, Aceh, Pegu, and Arakan emerge as some of the most important Southeast Asian trade ports on the Indian Ocean; those ports actively participated in the trading activities with Eastern Asia, South Asia, and Europe during the early modern era. See S. Arasaratnam, "Coromandel revisited: problems and issues in Indian maritime history," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 26, no.1 (1989): 101-10; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "By Way of Conclusion," in *Three Ways to be Alien: Travails and Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 173-8; Pius Malekandathil, "Indian Ocean in the Shaping of Late Medieval India," *Studies in History* 30, no. 2 (2014): 125-49.

### **From References to Repositories: the *Sampada***

While handling a rich resource of images, artisans carefully create repositories for their own use. It is generally the reference drawings, stencils, and templates, rather than written information, which are archived. These materials collected over time create a repository for the artisans which they can study, utilize, and in turn forward to future generations. Reference images are also crucial for executing unfamiliar images. Unfamiliarity is made familiar through these reference images in artisanal workshops to be carved on wooden blocks, drawn with kalam on cotton, and printed on textiles. The collection of traced drawings at the workshop of the Kondra brothers indicates the necessity of these resources for artisans and compels us to see the historicity of this practice. The study of artisanal archive is essential to understand how it prepares them to take up new challenges.

An effective example of this type of visual archive is the collection of transfer drawings and rubbing prints at the Kondra brothers' workshop. Gangadhar garu's stress on the symmetry and "workability" of designs led me to ask if they employ a system to assist with design decisions. In response, Narsaiah garu went inside one of their units and came back with a huge paper folder. The folder was a world in itself: a collection of hand-drawn patterns and rubbing impressions. Over the last forty years, they have successfully taken up all kinds of projects, executing diverse images ranging in scope from intricate and intertwined floral and geometric motifs to popular images and letter-based blocks. From the 1980s until 2017, more than seven hundred images have made their way to the Kondra brothers' archive. The images include initial drawings, traced drawings, and rubbing prints. Drawings intended for multiblock prints have colors in them (**Figure 3.26**). The block makers cannot afford to keep the woodblocks they produce as those are the prime source of income for them. In that regard, storing their drawings is the most viable way of record keeping.

I showed them a photograph of the prayer mat in the Salarjung Museum and asked about the symmetry in the cherry blossom border (**See Figure 3.8**). Narsaiah garu searched through their collection to find a design with a similar structural organization. Gangadhar joined him to find the design samples to be used for recreating it. Narsaiah garu explained,

When we receive orders for making blocks, we are usually provided with a rough drawing or printed images. Instead of directly replicating them to the blocks, we check whether the images will be successful as designs. Over the years [since the 1980s] we compiled designs in this folder for reference. These designs in this folder are successfully

made into blocks. By now, we covered all possible patterns which we could think of. When we receive orders for designs we compare those images with the ones which we already have. Through comparing these images we understand how the newly commissioned images could be developed into a successful design.<sup>414</sup>

I was intrigued by the idea of “success”. What defines the success of an image? He replied,

When a design is made into blocks, they are meant for printing multiple times. Some are individually printed on cloth but others are multiplied into continuous patterns. To confirm an uninterrupted growth of the continuous patterns some measurements and adjustments need to be done to the designs before carving the blocks.<sup>415</sup>

His explanation implied a design is only successful when it is symmetrical and rhythmic. Perhaps the ideas of the rhythmic flow of patterns guide the flawlessness of the continuous linear patterns in the Salarjung prayer mat. The discussion with Narsaiah and Gangadhar garu, prompted by the prayer mat, revealed how recreating a visual image is a mediated process. While recreating an image, artisans do not merely replicate it; the design is examined, compared to the already existing designs in their repository, and then recreated.

The process of examining a design, going back to references, and then recreating it is a process whereby the artisans engage with their visual archive and confront an unfamiliar or a new image through their existing knowledge. This process is a negotiation between an archive of images, which is developed over time, and the new challenges presented by consumers. This visual archive which Narsaiah garu addressed as their greatest *sampada* (సంపద in Telugu, meaning treasure) is the reference handbook for the artisans and provides them with support to form judgments. This block makers’ archive assists them to decide the structuring of motifs, division of space, and the feasibility of a pattern. It is an archive which is sedimented, an archive that is always in making, and an archive that is continuously in use. Repeating after the traced drawings does not push block makers to the past but allows them to see the future.

In the block makers’ workshop, newness is not confronted as alien, but a challenge which has some similarities with the existing image vocabulary of the artisans. Facing new visuals and executing them into wooden blocks is an issue which never leaves artisanal workshops. The neighboring printing workshops at Pedana and Polavaram, printers and designers from

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<sup>414</sup> Interview with K. Narsaiah in Pedana, September 2015.

<sup>415</sup> Interview with K. Narsaiah in Pedana, September 2015.

Hyderabad and other parts of India, and the Weavers' Service Centres all collaborate with the Kondra brothers for woodblocks. Some of the small local business units in the area commission wood blocks with their logos. Unlike textile blocks, logos are predominantly text based and both Telugu and English texts are used. The block makers in the Kondra brothers' workshop continually move from a text block to a block with complex designs. There are artisans who do not speak English or read English script but can effortlessly carve the words on a woodblock. The artisans' familiarity with lines allows them to approach words and expressions in a similar way to visual motifs. For these practitioners, no image or word is entirely alien. Their familiarity with lines and linear forms present the frame of references. These references, in the form of an image archive and in the bodily practice of making images, always mediate between artisans' experiences and new challenges.

The block makers' encounter with new motifs and strategies to incorporate those in their sampada are useful to reflect on the depiction of unfamiliar or foreign imagery in the early modern Deccan; to illustrate this, I will return to the cherry blossom border in the Salarjung prayer mat. Cherry trees are not native to southern India, although during the colonial period, British officials cultivated cherry trees in the Nilgiri Hills, south of the Deccan.<sup>416</sup> Cherry blossoms are rather found in abundance in Eastern Asia, namely Japan, Korea, and China. The execution of the angular branches of the tree and depiction of the bunch of flowers are reminiscent of Japanese scroll paintings and woodblock prints showing cherry blossoms. Trading activities between Japan and India during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries was predominantly under Dutch control.<sup>417</sup> On this Deccani textile, the "foreign" cherry blossoms are integrated into the picture plane by binding them into a continuous pattern. Adjacent to the cherry tree pattern is a curvilinear creeper in the narrow borders. Both are constructed in such a way that the foreign cherry blossom panel seems to mimic the indigenous creeper. Angular branches are rarely portrayed in foliate panels in southern Indian block prints; however, the mimetic connection between the peony and the cherry blossom panel eludes the "foreignness" of

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<sup>416</sup> Cherry blossoms are suited to colder climates. Earlier accounts, such as "Plants of the Coast of Coromandel" by William Roxburgh or the 19<sup>th</sup> century account of Robert Wright titled *Illustrations of Indian Botany; or figures illustrative of each of the natural orders of Indian plants* (Madras: J. B. Pharoah, 1840), did not mention the existence of cherry trees in South India.

<sup>417</sup> John Guy, "Strange Paintings: The Japan Trade," in *Indian Textiles in the East: From Southeast Asia to Japan* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 163.

the cherry blossoms. Setting up a mimetic connection between familiar and unfamiliar designs was also noted in Narsaiah garu's comment noted above. Their careful comparison between the cherry blossom design with an image from their archive was an example of it. Through this, the artisans retain the distinctive characteristics of the unfamiliar motifs but also project their localized knowledge into them.

### **Lepakshi Murals: An archive of the Artisans?**

The *sampada* of the Kondra brothers is an assortment of diverse images for future use. It might not be irrelevant to imagine an early modern repository of textile patterns. The range of motifs in the Lepakshi murals on textiles and borders raises question whether they were meant to serve as a visual repository. The scale of ornamental motifs on the beams or brackets is larger than the narrative scenes in ceilings. Despite the limitation of colors, the artisans created an extensive catalogue of lines, shapes, and patterns in these picture planes. The motifs are hand drawn and repetitive. Presently, textiles with repeated motifs are mostly printed not hand painted. The seventeenth-century textiles from our study have evidence of hand-painted repetitive motifs in their borders (See **Figure 3.19**). The motifs used in textiles starting from the seventeenth-century ones to the present have much resemblance with these painted murals. The scale and repetition of the motifs in the beams and brackets reinforce the presence of textiles. From the perspective of textiles, the ceiling murals appear as a patchwork of long narrative scenes and thick strips of ornamental motifs. This "patchwork" effect evokes the presence of an archive of assorted patterns.

The location of the paintings strengthens the consideration of these murals as an archive. Considering the overhead position of temple canopies, I consider that the Veerabhadraswamy temple murals were intended to give permanence to the transitory lives of temple canopies and textiles.<sup>418</sup> The patterns which are beyond the reach of touch might have served as an enduring resource for artisans to use. The temple canopies mimic the lasting presence of architectural ceilings. Here, the ceiling murals turn the temple ceiling into a patchwork canopy. A patchwork

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<sup>418</sup> Seastrand argues that the temple murals in south India possess the ability to engage the eyes of the moving viewers. Through the viewers' participatory act, these murals are enlivened. I find Seastrand's argument helpful to emphasize the relationship between murals and people. See Seastrand, "Praise, Politics, and Language," 251.

canopy, which serves a mediator between architecture and textile as well as an archive for artisans.

A knowledge repository is essential to remind the artisans of the relevance of their own practice. It is also crucial for providing necessary support to fellow artisans. In the Kondra brothers' workshop, the collection of images is not hidden away from the workshop members and shared with the fellow members when necessary. Building and using this archive thus entails sharing sedimented knowledge of the Kondra brothers with the immediate community. Through this, knowledge is continually preserved and renewed. This intriguing practice is not exclusive to the block makers. As I have already noted in the previous chapter, dyed textiles produced by Rao are preserved in Mukkanti garu's workshop. These textiles along with the collection of woodblocks acquired by Rao and then subsequently enhanced by Mukkanti garu form the knowledge repository of the dyers. And in Suraya apa and Umar sahab's weaving workshop in Hyderabad, the historical himroo fragments are utilized for reconstructing himroo. The gesture of record keeping and referencing across contemporary Coromandel and the Deccan indicate its deep historical roots. It is probably not extraneous to claim that cultivation and dissemination of artisanal records enabled the early modern dyed textile makers of Coromandel to represent early modern mobility and cultural exchanges.

## **Conclusions**

The structure of practice in the Kondra brothers' workshop—examination of designs, synthesizing their generational knowledge with new cultural forms, carving blocks, and collecting the leftover of the process as reference material and referencing—is presented in a sequential order to serve the purpose of this chapter; however, I must clarify the three intermediate steps are intertwined. For example, Gangadhar garu's examination of designs is informed by his continued engagement with their sampada; examining an image comes as the initial step in block making but not the primary point of their practice. The continuation of this working method is a conscious decision of the block makers rather than merely following their predecessors. The cyclical working process is an extension of the subject-position of the artisans. Foregrounding this process in the study of early modern Coromandel textiles thus work as a strategy to recognize the voices of their makers.

In the workshop of the Kondra brothers, this practice-based knowledge is learned, embodied, and applied. Through this, the “power” of the pre-existing visual archive is regenerated. Furthermore, the “power” embedded in these reproduced images is utilized by the block makers to train their eyes and hands and also train their fellow artisans. Trade accounts and the rich scholarship on Coromandel textiles established their relevance in societies across geographical boundaries. This study adds to this existing conversation by emphasizing how making and nurturing Coromandel textiles allowed the communities of makers to grow.

## Imprints of Time: On Layered Temporalities of Kalamkari Making

After carefully observing a photograph of the Salarjung prayer mat (See **Figure 3.8**), Gangadhar garu reflected,

The workmanship is minute and it [the images on the prayer mat] is made with woodblocks. There must have been around fifteen to twenty blocks used for making this hanging. The multicolored ones needed multiple blocks and each of them is perfectly overlaid. In those days, the block makers used to be patient and the patrons allowed them the time to execute these kinds of works. Nowadays, time is an issue as well as patronage. Time is definitely a big factor. That does not mean we cannot make blocks like these. *Zarūr* [certainly, in Hindi], we can. Early this year, we made around one hundred and sixteen blocks for a tree of life image for a customer from Vijayawada. It was a big project and we had to work very carefully. What I mean is, we need that time and the necessary support from the patrons for being able to execute these [large scale and ambitious] works.<sup>419</sup>

Gangadhar garu's emphasis on the role of time in the production of dyed, painted, and printed cottons of the Coromandel equally applies to many other craft practices. The issue around time is especially important in the context of textile making in this region since the line of work goes back to at least the early modern era. The practitioners' perspectives draw our attention to the idea of time that is specific to the medium and mode of production. In this chapter, I will examine the medium specificity and multiplicity of the notion of time to argue for the contemporary textile makers' abilities to inform our understanding of the early modern textile makers.

The patterns of time in Indian philosophy is cyclical and "inconclusive," which do not segregate past from the contemporary.<sup>420</sup> Scholars in the field have explored the potentials of studying ongoing practices to shed light on the "inaccessible" past.<sup>421</sup> Drawing a relationship between historical and contemporary craft practices in India has invited scholarly discussions in multiple directions. Through this causal framework, the idea of time in the South Asian context

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<sup>419</sup> Interview with Kondra Gangadhar in Pedana, June 2017.

<sup>420</sup> Joanna Williams, "From the Fifth to the Twentieth Century and Back," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (1990): 363-4.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.



is created, challenged, and restructured. Scholars such as Stella Kramrisch, Pupul Jayakar, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, among others have directly related the craft practices of the present times with the historical past.<sup>422</sup> For Jayakar and Chattopadhyay, addressing the continuity of historical craft skill in contemporary craft-making was a strategic tool for empowering the socio-economic situation of the craftspeople in India and popularizing handmade products. They intended to build on the worldwide recognition of historical Indian objects to find patronage for craftspeople in post-independence India. It was especially relevant at a time when “aggressive” technological advancement seemed indispensable for the economic growth of the country.<sup>423</sup> Whereas the initiatives of the AIHB and scholarship tended to focus on the continuity of textile making in southern India, in reality, the craft practices were never uninterrupted. While the strategy of positioning artisans in seamless continuity with historical practices may have been useful in the first decades of independence, continued reliance on this paradigm can lead to misunderstandings of craft practices and communities.

The changes in the post-independence craft sectors were not only an effect of rapid mechanization but also governmental efforts. The Weavers Service Centre, established in 1956, encouraged “innovations” in handlooms to respond to the “contemporary challenges” of resources, technology, and artisan-consumer relations.<sup>424</sup> Two vital changes highlighted are the marketing of essentially domestic products and the emergence of design institutes, NGOs, and designers in the craft scene. The effects of changes in patronage and resources are reflected in craft materials and techniques. Varadarajan lists at least three changes in kalamkari making that signal “departures” from the past:<sup>425</sup> first, printing of mordant uniformly with woodblocks;<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> See Stella Kramrisch, “Artist, Patron, and Public in India,” and “Traditions of the Indian Craftsman,” in *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, ed. Barbara Stoler Miller (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1994), 51-8, and 59-66; Pupul Jayakar, *The Earth Mother* (New Delhi and New York: Penguin Books, 1989); and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *The Glory of Indian Handicrafts* (New Delhi: Indian Book, 1976).

<sup>423</sup> Saloni Mathur, “Charles and Ray Eames in India,” *Art Journal* 70, no. 1 (2011): 43.

<sup>424</sup> Divia Patel, “Textiles in the Modern World,” in *The Fabric of India*, 196.

<sup>425</sup> Varadarajan, “Chapter Three,” 47.

<sup>426</sup> I believe she wanted to imply that mordant was painted earlier. However, historical textiles show mordant printing existed in the early modern and early colonial times.

second, disappearance of indigo vat dyeing in the coastal region after the 1960s; and third, replacing chaya roots and *seraver* (*Hedyotis umbellata*) with alizarin. These transformations in the textile sectors were acknowledged but simultaneously, scholars, curators, and designers emphasized the presence of historical craft skill in contemporary practices.

How did these changes affect artisanal livelihood? The traditionalist approach promoted by the Indian Govt. after independence tended to confine craft practitioners within regional boundaries and overlooked the transformations in the lives of the craftspeople informed by socioeconomic factors.<sup>427</sup> Historian Malini Bhattacharya calls attention to understanding craft practice as part of the social lives of the practitioners which are continuously evolving.<sup>428</sup> She states that in the neo-capitalist global economy, the products of rural artisans is taken out of their contexts to serve the metropolitan audience. Moreover, with changes in economic patterns and large-scale migration of rural craftspeople to India's urban centers, craftspeople came to represent a certain region and at the same time their experiences in urban spaces.<sup>429</sup> The removal of craft objects from their intended usage to serve the urban audience in India left a great impact on the modes of craft practices.<sup>430</sup> Before imposing machinery and plans to prepare craft communities for these changes, anthropologist Soumhya Venkatesan argues that it is crucial to consult with the artisans and consider their opinions.<sup>431</sup> Through her examination of the Labbai mat makers of Pattamadai, Venkatesan stresses that the mechanism for coping with societal changes is infused in craft techniques. All these nuanced readings of contemporary craftspeople

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<sup>427</sup> Paul Greenough, "Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi," in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 216-48.

<sup>428</sup> Malini Bhattacharya, "The Rural Artist and Secular Culture in the Era of Globalization," in *The Making of History: Essays Presented to Irfan Habib*, ed. K.N. Panikkar, Terence J. Byres, and Utsa Patnaik (London: Anthem, 2002), 515-29.

<sup>429</sup> Cristin McKnight Sethi, "Mapping Craft in Contemporary India: Dilli Haat and Dastkari Haat Samiti's Crafts Maps," *Journal of Modern Craft* 6, no. 1 (2013): 49-55.

<sup>430</sup> Katherine Hacker, "Traveling Objects: Brass Images, Artisans, and Audiences," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 37 (2000): 147-65.

<sup>431</sup> Soumhya Venkatesan, "Learning to Weave; Weaving to Learn ... What?," in *Making Knowledge: Explorations of the Indissoluble Relation Between Mind, Body and Environment*, ed. Trevor H.J. Marchand (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 162-5.

in India pose an important question—how do makers understand the challenges of their times and seek solutions through their practices? This question calls attention to the historicity of craft making and the makers’ ability to retrieve historical knowledge for their livelihood. My research participates in this multifaceted and important discussion of time, temporality and artisanal practices.

### **Historicity of Craft Knowledge**

To effectively incorporate both continuous and adopted traits of craft making and foreground artisanal agency in our investigation, it is crucial to revisit the notion of history. The chronological framework introduced by nineteenth-century Western historical studies not only separates the early modern dyed textile making from the contemporary practices but also undermines the material and practice specificity of time. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us that the perception of time is not constant across communities and cultures and “historicism” was used by colonialists as a tool to promote the political modernity of the West.<sup>432</sup> The so-called secular and linear concept of time—prevalent in western Europe in the nineteenth century—was projected as natural and universal.<sup>433</sup> Chakrabarty revisits Marx’s discussion on the relationship between capital and “universalist humanism” and concludes that the capitalist mode of production reduced the specificities of communities, production, and spaces into a homogenous unit “for measuring human activity.”<sup>434</sup> Marx establishes the emergence of a homogenous notion of time or universal historicism as a tactic to legitimize homogenous modes of production. Following a standardized notion of time and periodization thus perpetuates the colonial notion of time resulting in the marginalization of the temporalities of craft practices and communities. Chakrabarty’s consideration is especially relevant here as his focus was on “production.” According to Alfred Gell, the temporal relationship between materials, humans, and craft objects are condensed into objects and thus, understanding the historicity of a certain

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<sup>432</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Introduction,” in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought & Historical Difference*, 7.

<sup>433</sup> Chakrabarty, “Translating Life-Worlds into Labor and History,” in *Provincializing Europe*, 74.

<sup>434</sup> Chakrabarty, “Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital,” in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge et al. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 83.

community can initiate from understanding the cultural objects produced by them.<sup>435</sup> For understanding works of a community at a certain point in time, Gell prioritizes the community-specific “way of seeing” more than a period-specific approach.<sup>436</sup> In Gell’s theorization, the historicity of practice is closely intertwined with the perceptions of the practitioners. I suggest that consideration of the subject-position of the textile makers requires an understanding of the layers of temporalities embedded in their practices and objects. Learning from contemporary textile makers, in this regard, is yet another avenue to explore for possibly reconstructing agency of the early modern textile makers.

The multiple potentials of bodily practice to inform our perception of the past has been delineated in Walter Benjamin’s writings. He elaborated on the overlapping of “past” and “present” and expanded the scope of theorizing the relationship between craft and time. Benjamin’s writings developed against the background of post World War I when he felt several historical skills were disappearing. A deep appreciation for historical skills and lament on their loss are prevalent in his work.<sup>437</sup> He argued that history could yet be excavated from the neglected aspects of contemporary lives. Benjamin perceived history as the past but not completely disconnected from the present. In the essay titled “The Storyteller,” Benjamin examined the practice of storytelling through which the memories and past experiences of the storytellers manifest into the present.<sup>438</sup> He compared the storyteller’s skill with that of the artisan’s skill. For him, storytelling and craft making have complex relationships with the past and the present. He also considered objects or material remains to be the connection between history and the contemporary. It is the object which brings the past into the present or transmits the sensibilities of the present to the past. Benjamin’s writing is useful to foreground the importance of practice and the mediators or artisans to set up a dialogue between the past and the present.

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<sup>435</sup> Alfred Gell, “The Problem Defined: The Need for an Anthropology of Art,” in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (New York and Oxford: Clarendon press, 1998), 2-4.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>437</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections of the works of Nikolai Leskov,” “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” and “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 83-110, 155-200, and 253-64.

<sup>438</sup> Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations*, 83-110.

A scholarly approach of relating past and contemporary craft practices established contemporary artisanal practices as a gateway for venturing into the past. This methodology has been employed by scholars from a range of disciplines. Among them, archaeologist Jonathan Mark Kenoyer's study of the contemporary shell objects to reconstruct the social histories of the shell-working industries of Harappa and other Indus valley sites is crucial. Through a keen study of craft tools and the contemporary shell works on the Indian subcontinent, Kenoyer presents a fresh approach to analyzing Harappan artifacts and the socio-cultural networks around them. Anthropologist Samuel Parker brings the practice of contemporary Tamil *sthapatis* (temple architects and sculptors) in comparison with the written texts to show how artisans use historical knowledge for problem-solving and decision-making.<sup>439</sup> He points to two assumptions about the ongoing practices of the sculptors and sthapatis which often reduce their contributions. First, contemporary practice is unworthy and embodies "mindless conservatism."<sup>440</sup> Secondly, current practices are re-invented versions of the historical ones to satisfy the "transnational pop-culture" markets.<sup>441</sup> Based on his interviews with contemporary sthapatis, Parkar argued that the artisans draw on the past "social and manual practice" to reconstruct their traditions; in doing so, they construct their social identity and nurture their bodily reserve of knowledge.<sup>442</sup> Parker also points out how contemporary artisans embody knowledge of the written canonical texts as well as the insights derived from material practice. This also resonated in Louise Cort's study; she enables readers to read the beating marks of the Puri potters on clay pots as a practice informed by both history and religious ideas.<sup>443</sup> Pika Ghosh applies insights accumulated from studying the "lived experiences" around Bengali *kantha* to analyze historical kanthas.<sup>444</sup> Rather than reaching a

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<sup>439</sup> Samuel Parker, "Text and Practice in South Asian Art: An Ethnographic Perspective," *Artibus Asiae* 63, no. 1 (2003): 28-30.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>443</sup> Louise Allison Cort, "Temple Potters of Puri," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 7/8 (1984): 42-3.

<sup>444</sup> Pika Ghosh, "From Rags to Riches: Valuing Kanthas in Bengali Households," in *Kantha: The Embroidered Quilts of Bengal*, ed. Darielle Mason (New Haven and London: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2009), 50-1.

conclusion, her examination generated a series of questions about the historical kanthas which opened up new avenues of inquiry.<sup>445</sup> Even though the areas of research are different for three of these scholars, all of them have argued for destabilizing the boundaries between the past and the present and demonstrated the potentials of ethnographic study to reassess our understanding of the past.

Whereas Parker does not confine his examination within a specific time period, historian Pamela Smith argues that re-enacting craft techniques of the early modern era appears as an effective methodological tool to theorize craft knowledge and its entanglement with material histories.<sup>446</sup> Historical reconstruction for Smith is through material reconstructions or hands-on participation. The hands-on painting practice of contemporary Rajasthani painter Ved Pal Sharma compelled art historian Molly Aitken to see the embedded intelligence in the works of early modern Rajput paintings.<sup>447</sup> Period-specific studies further complicate the historicity of craft-making by tracing particular traits to a given time period. These studies are particularly beneficial in my project to explore the interconnections between the early modern and ongoing modes of kalamkari making and its embedded historicity. A historically informed process is an accumulation of certain developments in craft techniques during a given time frame; the historicity of the process is the accumulation of temporalities.

Art historian Rebecca Brown argues to read “temporal moments” in the larger network of relations, following Jacques Derrida.<sup>448</sup> By relations, Brown indicates the entanglements of moments with duration; acts with experiences. Building on this, Brown establishes that a “moment” cannot be separated from its immediate context as well as its association with the past. Her theorization is useful to contextualize contemporary craft making as an embodied practice constitutive of a range of “relations.” Further, she states that our interactions with historical objects embody “a range of small temporalities” which sets up a relationship between the past and the present.<sup>449</sup> These temporalities are inherently “fluttering” and unstable, which breaks

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 51-2.

<sup>446</sup> Pamela H. Smith, “In the Workshop of History: Making, Writing, and Meaning,” *West* 86<sup>th</sup> 19, no.1 (2012): 4-31.

<sup>447</sup> Molly Emma Aitken, “Introduction,” in *The Intelligence of Tradition in Rajput Court Painting*, 7-9.

<sup>448</sup> Brown, “An Interruption,” in *Displaying Time*, 24.

<sup>449</sup> Brown, “Flickering Light, Fluttering Textiles,” in *Displaying Time*, 5.

away the linear idea of the flow of the past into the present.<sup>450</sup> According to Brown, these temporalities are “gathered, pitched, and broken down,” during our interactions with historical objects.<sup>451</sup> Brown’s stress on our interactions with objects is a reminder that the perception of temporalities is non-linear and subjective.

Insights drawn from the artisans themselves contextualize our analysis of time and subjectivity. In this chapter I focus on the practices of master dyer Muhammad Salim Pasha, and artisan Bhikshamayya Chary, master block carver Gangadhar Kondra, and master dyer Mukkantieswarudu Rao.

Breaking down the idea of a “process” into an accumulation of actions and temporalities speaks to the specificity of time for the communities of textile makers. To retrieve the agency of early modern textile makers, reinstating the process is pivotal. This action underscores the notions of continuation and transformations of historical craft techniques from the practitioners’ point of view. Gangadhar garu’s comment about recreating the motifs from the prayer mat enriches our discussions on historicity, specificity of time, and foregrounds artisanal willingness and ability to retrieve these embedded temporalities. His statement also enables us to see the artisanal will in continuing or rupturing historical techniques. Continuation and alteration are not mere conditions for working; instead, they are reflections of decisions made by the artisans. The issue of adaptability in craft resulted from socio-economic changes—emphasized in recent scholarship—is the strategy to either continue or redefine established practices. Gangadhar garu’s statement reminds us that history continues to be exercised in the artisanal workshops through both the continuation of a historical process and transformations. In other words, both perpetuation and change in a certain practice possess the possibilities of informing its past.

### **Temporality and Textile Making**

When a set of actions, skill-set, and resources employed in the early modern textile making of the Coromandel is re-enacted, this embedded historical knowledge is brought into conversation with the present. These actions enhance the significance of technical specificities in reconstructing agency and perpetuating the knowledge of textile makers.

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

The division between past and the contemporary, according to art historian Dan Karlholm, is a result of periodization and the creation of a singular notion of history in western Europe during the nineteenth century.<sup>452</sup> As an antidote for that, Karlholm draws attention to “anachrony” which disrupts the chronological approach.<sup>453</sup> Art historian Keith Moxey, on the other hand, suggests “heterochrony” or the simultaneity of different temporal systems to be recognized for accessing the layered temporalities of objects and artworks.<sup>454</sup> Identification of the community or culture specific notions of time is enmeshed with the recognition of their voices.<sup>455</sup> Time in the South Asian context is the accumulation of overlapping notions projected by different cultural systems. For which, a linear understanding of time cannot account for the subject-position of the indigenous communities from this region. In other words, to theorize the relationship between textile making from the past and the ongoing practice in the Coromandel region, perspectives from the maker communities are indispensable. These insights perhaps do not provide us definitive answers for a problem but allow us to envision the ways through which the communities preserved and represented their past for future usage.<sup>456</sup> Karlholm and Moxey argue that the materials used in a specific practice bear the traces of the temporal systems they are part of.<sup>457</sup> Through “making,” imprints of ephemeral time are captured into materials and actions. Karlholm and Moxey’s stress on the specificities of historical knowledge and temporality embedded in materials strengthens the rationale for gaining insights from contemporary dyed textile making. The collaborative venture between dyers, painters, block makers, and printers in contemporary workshops brings different temporal systems together during the production of dyed textiles. The ongoing modes of dyed textile making in the Coromandel are rich resources of the layered temporalities of the material, techniques, and

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<sup>452</sup> Dan Karlholm, “Is History to be Closed, Saved, or Restarted?,” in *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, eds. Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 15-6.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>454</sup> Keith Moxey, “What Time is it in the History of Art?,” in *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, 27-8.

<sup>455</sup> Partha Mitter, “Colonial Modern: A Clash of Colonial and Indigenous Chronologies: The Case of India,” in *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, 66-9.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>457</sup> Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey, “Introduction: Telling Art’s Time,” *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, 4.



bodily actions. My stress on historically informed processes is not to promote a traditionalist approach to craft but to argue that artisanal histories can be retrieved from the materials and associated techniques which were employed in early modern textiles.

The temporalities of materials and techniques come together in the sequential flow of performing a process. Consideration of textile making as a repository of histories can only be effective when we understand the artisanal rationale behind sequential actions. The Coromandel textiles are produced by a complex set of actions and those processes are often described in accounts on dyeing, for example, as a chain of reactions leading to the execution of vibrantly dyed cottons. During her fieldwork with Labbai mat makers, Venkatesan notes that the artisans would verbally provide her with condensed and sequential versions of the process; however, over time, she observed the intricacies and complexities of these steps.<sup>458</sup> Perspectives drawn from hands-on involvement with textile making are indispensable to identify the intermediate steps between two actions which complicate the notion of time.

A consistent framework which often comes up in projects on Coromandel textiles and dyeing techniques is a sequential order. An impressive and ambitious project on natural dyeing processes in India—*Natural Dyeing Processes of India: Studies in Contemporary Textile Crafts Series*—published by the Calico Museum in 1987, presents an enormous repository of dyeing techniques and serves as a useful example for our discussion.<sup>459</sup> The dyeing processes are described in detail with photographs and several textile fragments. The descriptions follow a sequence and much attention has been given to the chemical analysis of each step leading to the achievement of a certain color. This strategy of explaining the functions of dyestuff remains useful for researchers and non-practitioners to comprehend the techniques of using natural dyes; however, these standardized versions of the dyeing processes may or may not correspond to the actual dyeing works. In this book, the emphasis remains on the molecular configurations of dyes and the chemical reactions during the dyeing processes. The employment of sequence here echoes the sequential order of the laboratory experiments. Whereas laboratory experiments and the results are always done under controlled atmospheric pressure, temperature, and other conditions, the dyeing works are conducted in lived spaces.

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<sup>458</sup> Ventaksean, “Learning to Weave,” 161-2.

<sup>459</sup> See B. C. Mohanty, K. V. Chandramouli, and H. D. Naik, *Natural Dyeing Processes of India: Studies in Contemporary Textile Crafts Series*.

## Master dyer Pasha and the Role of Sequence in Indigo Dyeing

The dyers' priorities for successful dyeing make us consider that they utilize atmospheric determinants rather than strictly control them. Master dyer Muhammad Salim Pasha's account of indigo dyeing emphasizes the intangible aspects of production which could not be contained in the scope of standardized recipes.<sup>460</sup> In these standardized recipes, the sequence of adding materials to the vat is prioritized. In Pasha's account, he focussed on the use of atmospheric heat in preparing an indigo vat which he thought was pivotal.<sup>461</sup>

In the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, indigo vat dyeing is mostly done in a cold vat (**Figure 4.1**).<sup>462</sup> The heart of the Deccan plateau is known for its harsh summer, which, according to Pasha, is a favorable condition for indigo fermentation. First, indigo cakes are ground into dust before being added to water. Large earthen storage pots with narrow openings are used for the indigo solution. The role of atmospheric heat is crucial in fermentation. Fermentation of indigo does not require boiling but a sustained heat. The balanced heat is felt and measured. Pasha explained if the heat is not sufficient during the rainy seasons, the pots are covered with cow dung and rice husk and left in closed spaces or underground pots. Rice husk and cow dung are used in master dyer Mukkanti garu's boiling unit too (**Figure 4.3**). These organic and local materials are known for providing sustained heat.

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<sup>460</sup> One of the oldest dyes from the Tropics, indigo is widely used in Indian cottons. Jenny Balfour Paul's research on this dye material and its relevance during the colonial period in India, especially Bengal, reflects on the intertwining of dye material, society, and political histories. Prakash Kumar and Michael Taussig also investigate the history of indigo plantations in colonial Bengal. See Jenny Balfour Paul, *Deeper than Indigo* (Surrey: Medina Publishing, 2015); Prakash Kumar, *Indigo Plantations and Science in Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Michael Taussig, "Redeeming Indigo," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 3 (2008): 1-15.

<sup>461</sup> Master Dyer Muhammad Salim Pasha was introduced to me by Uzramma and Prof. Sharada Devi in Hyderabad. I am grateful to them for their support and kindness. I am also thankful to Jagada Rajappa for accompanying me to the trip to Pasha's workshop and sharing her insights.

<sup>462</sup> The cold vats are prepared without direct boiling or heating. Several colors require boiling or heating in their making, but indigo is usually not. However, for making indigo cakes, the indigo paste is heated for the evaporation of excess water and then the paste is dried into indigo cakes. Once the cakes are produced, they are not heated again. When the dyeing works are conducted with indigo paste, no heating is involved in this process. In contrast, in northern Thailand, for example, a few indigenous communities including Lua people, directly boil indigo and put yarns and fabric in the pot to achieve a greyish blue tint. This practice is limited within these communities.

The result of fermentation is detected through its smell. The dyers can distinguish the smell of a freshly fermented vat from continuous ones.<sup>463</sup> In Pasha's workshop, a narrow rectangular room is dedicated to the underground vats. The room has around thirty circular openings in the floor. Pasha and Jyotamma, Pasha's daughter and a dyer, elaborated on the construction of these underground vats. There are around thirty pots placed underground and the spaces between them are filled with cow dung, dried rice husk, and mud to ensure a consistent temperature. The pots are covered by lightweight lids. In between two rows of vats, a flat rectangular or square shaped stone is placed. After the yarns or fabrics are dyed in the vats, they are rinsed and beaten against the stone slabs (**See Figure 4.2**). The fermentation of indigo during summer usually takes up to seven days or more. Every step in the process is felt, touched, smelled, and even tasted by dyers. The progress of a process is often felt rather than observed. Pasha's narrative about the change in atmospheric heat and how artisans cope with these changes point to the flexibilities of a process, which does not quite respond to a standardized way of production. Also, sensing the results of fermentation is a reminder of the role of sensory knowledge in dyeing and craft making in general. A sequence of action is followed in Pasha's workshop too, but that is also dependent on the surroundings. The functioning of the vat is entirely dependent on the fermentation process and that relies on atmospheric heat. The sequence of actions can only fall into place once the heat is favorable. Pasha's stress on heat draws attention to the ephemeral condition which can support or disrupt the sequence of vat preparation. In Pasha's workshop, a sequence is followed but the sub-steps are often molded according to the need.

Dyers' keen awareness of unpredictability and uncertainties in vat preparation prompted them to make room for flexibility in the sequence.<sup>464</sup> By ignoring the uncertainties in craft making and giving priority to a strict sequence of actions, the scope for acknowledging artisanal insights in craft production is diminished. The seasons, weather, humidity, heat, availability of water and source materials are responsible for obtaining certain colors and their depth. Successful indigo dyeing and tonal gradations not only depend on performing a set of actions in

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<sup>463</sup> Continuous indigo vats are ones where the dye solution is never discarded. Indigo powder, acidic, and alkaline substances are added to the solution according to the need to keep the vat active. One such set up is maintained in Auroville, Pondicherry.

<sup>464</sup> I discussed uncertainties in the black dye making and the dyers' attempt to counter that by praying to goddess Durga in Chapter 2.

sequence but being cognizant of the changing climatic conditions and taking actions to employ the effects of the environment in dyeing work.

Early modern Coromandel textiles visually demonstrate the dyers' sound knowledge in indigo dyeing. Pasha's practice suggests that proficient indigo dyeing not only depends on performing a recipe but understanding how each step in the process can be thoughtfully employed to achieve the desired tones. Tonal variations are usually achieved by dipping cloth in indigo vats—a practice that is still relevant among dyers.

A textile fragment from the Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, possibly from the late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth century, shows tonal variations in indigo accomplished through vat dyeing (**Figure 4.4**). This dyed, painted, and resist-drawn textile depicts winged *Garuda* (the animal mount of Hindu god Vishnu) in the central medallion flanked by smaller winged figures in medallions on either side. In this fragment, at least three variations of blue have been achieved: the water-like blue in the smaller medallions, medium blue in the borders, and blue overlapped with yellow in the central medallion and creepers. For obtaining these tonal variations, the textile would have been dipped in an indigo vat multiple times. The color becomes deeper and more intense with every dip in the vat. Before immersion, areas not intended for indigo dyeing are carefully resisted by an application of beeswax.<sup>465</sup> Areas with lighter tones are resisted after one or two dips. Halting between dips requires drying the fabrics and resisting them before taking them back to the vats. Understanding these intermediate steps in indigo dyeing breaks from the linear notion of sequence and creates space for the dyers' interventions in achieving these different tones. Halting between actions and at the same time following the sequence of dyeing indicate the dyers' deep involvement with time. Mapping Pasha's exercise on to the Salarjung fragment enables us to comprehend the ways early modern dyers halted and continued the dyeing process to achieve the desired gradations of indigo.

Pasha dyes yarn instead of cloth but his practice closely follows the historical methods for preparing indigo vats and dyeing in southern India. For dipping cloth instead of yarn, the opening of the vats needs to be bigger. Today the resist technique is not practiced in Pasha's workshop or anywhere in southern India. It is still unknown how the dyers managed to dip large wax-coated textiles in indigo vats without disrupting the wax surface. Cracks in the wax surface would allow indigo dye to penetrate into the resisted areas. Only a handful of the historical

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<sup>465</sup> Stephen Cohen, "Materials and Making," in *The Fabric of India* (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), 43 and 50.

Coromandel textiles I have observed in the museum collections show crack marks that confirm the use of wax resist. Contemporary yarn dyeing represents a facet of the complex indigo dyeing of historical Coromandel.

### **Printing: Trial, Errors, and Following Masters**

Halting and movement—observed in indigo dyeing—are also manifested in trials, errors, and preventive measures in textile making. The notion of trial and error in a process disrupts the sequential flow of actions and allow us to consider the logic of sequences.<sup>466</sup> Error in a process is unintended which momentarily stops a set of actions and compels practitioners to develop tactics to overcome that. Error represents a span of time within the sequence which compel artisans to reconsider their immediate steps. Reconsideration of the immediate step provides an opportunity for the artisans to think through their past experiences to find a solution for the error; recalling the past is employed to plan the future steps.

Without a hands-on understanding of materials and making, it is difficult to be attentive to the uncertainties in craft practices. To more fully understand the role of sequential actions, trials, and errors in craft making, I decided to enroll myself in a month-long training program to learn woodblock printing at the Weavers' Service Centre in Hyderabad (**Figure 4.5**).<sup>467</sup> By incorporating my experience into my study, I do not attempt to elude the boundaries between craftspeople and the researcher; instead, I intend to provide readers the trajectory through which I have come to develop a tactile understanding of dyed textile making.<sup>468</sup> As I emphasized earlier in this chapter, the theorization of time in this context is deeply dependent on materials and techniques involved in kalamkari making. It informed my decision of going through the dyeing

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<sup>466</sup> Richard Sennett, "Material Consciousness," in *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2008), 125; Pamela H. Smith, "In the Workshop of History: Making, Writing, and Meaning," *West 86<sup>th</sup>* 19, no.1 (2012): 5.

<sup>467</sup> The centre in Hyderabad is known as *Chenetha Bhavan* (చెనెత భవన, "the house of handlooms") and has several State sponsored handloom stores on its first and second floors. The Weavers Centre office and workshop are located on the third floor. The entire space is divided in several sections—offices, conference and display room, storage, and workshop spaces. I enrolled in the training program in May 2017.

<sup>468</sup> Ranajit Guha reminds us that acknowledgement of all participants in a historical study is crucial. Following Guha, I strongly believe the involvement of the researchers in a study should be clearly stated. Ranajit Guha, "The Small Voice of History," in *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009), 316.

and printing training. My exposure to the program enabled me to develop a bodily understanding of the significance of trial and errors in printing. The experience also allowed me to reassess the printing set up at Mukkanti garu's workshop, which attributed to a better understanding of the problem solving skill of the artisans.

As noted earlier, India's Weavers' Service Centres were established in 1956 to provide technical assistance to textile artisans. Over time, these centres expanded their activities and reach; they teach courses to college students and enthusiasts for a minimal charge and conduct periodic workshops and seminars. The dyeing workshop at the Centre facilitates both natural and chemical dyeing. Kalamkari artists J. K. Reddayya and M. Kailasham had been actively involved with this institute and presently, the institute holds a collection of their works produced during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>469</sup> The dyeing and printing workshop is essentially a large rectangular hall attached to a storage area of printing blocks.<sup>470</sup>

My lesson in printing started with washing cotton cloth. Washing was a step among many other steps in printing but I had not quite paid much attention to it. The step of washing is further broken down into a series of steps. First, the cloth is soaked in regular water, rinsed, and washed to remove dirt; then, water is boiled in large aluminum or steel pots. Once the water reaches boiling temperature, the heat is lowered and soda ash and soap are added. When the materials are diluted, the fabric is put in the water and brought to a low boil. Kamtikar read the measurement from a file that contained recipes for most of the natural and chemical dyeing techniques practiced in the centre. I was given a measurement for the soda and soap to be added in water but that was not exactly followed during the boiling process. A handful of soda ash was added later. It is a reminder that the written instructions might be altered during practice. The amount of time for boiling depends on the quality and density of fabrics; for example, coarse cotton will require a longer time than finely woven ones. Afterward, the fabric is kept in the warm water for around

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<sup>469</sup> Kailasam's hanging at the Weavers Centre depicts a *Yali* (a composite mythical lion-like creature) against a red background. Either this textile or an identical one is featured in *Handcrafted Indian Textiles: Tradition and Beyond*, ed. Martand Singh (New Delhi: Lustre Press, 2000), 32.

<sup>470</sup> I am thankful to the staff of the centre, B. M. Kamtikar, M. C. Murali Krishna, and Tapas K., for their guidance and especially to Murali Krishna for the extended discussions about the use of kalam. I am grateful to my friend, Anindita Chakraborty, an art practitioner based in Hyderabad, for her assistance and support. Also, I am thankful to a friend of both Anindita and I, Sharmistha Kar, an artist presently based in London, Canada, for her suggestion to take a course at the Weavers' Centre, Hyderabad.

forty-five minutes to an hour. Then it is dried and treated with a myrobalan solution made from the powder of dried myrobalan fruits diluted in water. Myrobalan contains tannin which helps bind the dye pigments to the fabric. This process also requires sustained heat.<sup>471</sup> The Centre's recipe book suggested the boiling time of an hour, but it was the smell that indicated when the solution was ready. The fabric was kept in the myrobalan solution overnight so that the solution penetrates into the fibres evenly. After the myrobalan treatment, the fabric is sun-dried for two days before being ready for printing. The time for drying is most likely to differ during the rainy and winter seasons. This hands-on exercise emphasized the difference between recipe books and practice and how time manifests differently in written instructions and practice.

The printing set up at the Weavers' Centre is not entirely modeled after printing workshops in south India; however, they bear certain traces of them. For instance, the task of printing before the 1980s in Polavaram took place on *chauki* or small rectangular stools with short legs and the printers sat cross-legged on the ground while working.<sup>472</sup> For printing, one requires a surface that allows the maximum absorption of dye into the fabric. Today, the small stools in Mukkanti garu's workshop have been replaced by large tables similar to the Weavers' Centre (**Figure 4.6**). The wooden top of the table is covered with several layers of thick, recycled fabrics. In Polavaram and Pedana, similar strategies to cover the printing tables are found. Before printing, I was advised to pin the fabric properly on the table as printing on creased fabric can result in interrupted or incomplete prints. This step is not strictly followed in the printers' workshops. This step at the Centre is probably tailored to the beginners whereas it is redundant for the printers. After carefully pinning down the fabric on the printing table, colors are prepared for printing.

Understanding the technical details of the printing set up is necessary as it is employed to support the sequence of printing. A high stool on wheels is used as a printing bed. The top of the stool, made of thick layers of commercial sponge, is used as the printing pad. The pad is basically a square-shaped filter with high wooden rims. Above the filter, a piece of rubber sheet and two layers of loosely woven jute fabric are kept. For the top layer, a piece of washed and undyed cotton fabric is used. From my observations of the printing works, I gathered that the

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<sup>471</sup> In Chapter 2, I noted the requirement of sustained heat for washing and boiling in Mukkanti garu's workshop.

<sup>472</sup> Interview with Nageswara Rao in Polavaram, July 2017.

layering of material allows high absorption of dyes. The layers of thick sponge and metallic mesh provide a stable and yet slightly elastic base for printing. The dye mixed with gum Arabic is poured on the rubber sheet and then the layers of jute were held against it. After that, the cotton piece was added on the top. An ideal situation for printing exists when all the layers are damp but not too wet. There were a few times when I poured excessive dye on the pad; more layers of jute were added to bring back a favored consistency of the printing pad. Recognizing my errors in this process made me considerate of the habitual practices of printers and their abilities to overcome accidents.

The flexibility of the printing bed is required for the unchallenging continuation of printing. I observed a variation of this structure of the printing pad in Polavaram and Pedana. Often plastic trays are used as printing bed there. The plastic base of the tray is harder than the metallic mesh base. In this case, a thick layer of sponge or piles of used cotton is kept on the printing tray to prepare a flexible base for printing. Even though different techniques are used in these two cases, they are intended to provide a stable and yet flexible base for printing.

A woodblock with an oval-shaped motif was allotted for the printing. The motif is commonly found in the kalamkari woodblocks (**Figure 4.7**).<sup>473</sup> I was advised not to press the block hard on the printing pad which allows the color to penetrate into its recessed areas. After I slightly pressed the block against the pad, the pad sunk a little. If the hard block is continually pressed against a hard surface, dyes in the printing pad move from the central area and gather on the sides which is not desired during printing. After the block surface was evenly tinted, I printed it on the myrobalan treated fabric. Through this exercise, I ascertained that the piece of cotton fabric used in the printing pad controls the absorption of dyes by the wooden block. Later, I was allotted another block for printing the fillings, also called *gad*. For printing *gad*, loosely woven cotton or net are used in the printing pad. The top layer of the printing pad controls the flow of dye to the block surface. A porous layer allows easier flow of dye to the block and a dense layer allows only finer particles to pass through it. Both the fine contours of the carved block and the fillings are achieved on fabric surface by following these methods.

The technical skill, multiple actions, and time required for obtaining fine contours or outlines, rehearsed above, gave me some understanding of such sophisticated and controlled

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<sup>473</sup> Interview with Muktantieswarudu Rao in Polavaram, September 2015. Muktanti garu commented that for him, kalamkari motifs are characterized by unbroken linearity.



contours on historical dyed and printed textiles such as the Salarjung prayer mat (**See Figure 2.17**). As discussed in chapter three, this seventeenth/eighteenth-century prayer mat features an intricately printed single cusped arch or mihrab with elaborate borders on two sides. The prominently printed motifs are characterized by fine dark contours. Initially, I thought the fineness of the contour lines is an achievement of the block makers who managed to create the sharp and sinuous lines on the surface of the printing block. However, my hands-on experience with block printing changed my perspective. Printers are responsible for transferring the impression of the blocks on the cloth surface. The minute characteristics of the linear work of blocks emerge on the fabric when printers pay attention to the differences between contour lines and fillings.

The consistency and fluidity of printed lines in the prayer mat call attention to the printers' ability to control the process. When the first printed motif emerges on the fabric's surface, it stays as a reference for the subsequent images to be printed. There is always a possibility of improvising, but the repetitive process teaches one to sustain the action and its results. For printing repeatedly on the fabric surface, a sound knowledge of the pictorial space is required. The printers envision measurement of the spaces between motifs and the placement of the blocks while pressing the tinted blocks against fabric surface. The amount of dye in the printing bed reduces with each printing and the surface of the pad also requires a periodic check. The printer is responsible for monitoring these changing circumstances and continuously restoring them to the optimum condition for printing. The action of printing might seem repetitive but for a practitioner this same repetitive action comes with several challenges—from controlling the absorption of dye both on the block and fabric to ensuring the consistency of the printed motifs. A sequential description of the process alone cannot adequately capture all these intricacies crucial for sustaining the printing activities as well as the printers' involvement.

When a printer is trained under a master, the issues around error and accidents work differently from the exercise at the Centre. In block making or printing workshops, the apprentices are being trained under master artisans. The reasoning behind the use of certain tools, specific hand movement or bodily actions is slowly revealed through performing it repeatedly. In her work with contemporary painters in Rajasthan, Aitken suggested that more than verbal instructions, painter Sharma demonstrated knowledge through “examples.”<sup>474</sup> Often, verbal

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<sup>474</sup> Aitken, “Introduction,” 8.

conversations are not sufficient or necessary to convey an idea which is action-oriented. The sequence in a practice plays the role of unfolding the rationales behind each technique over time. The repetition of actions and sequences for apprentices act as preventive measures to avoid errors. This very characteristic is an intrinsic part of learning block making, drawing, and dyeing as well. Following the masters, in these cases, is a culturally informed practice among the artisans which train them to develop their problem-solving skill and sustain the knowledge repositories of the previous generations.

When I asked about sequential actions and the role of errors in a process, Bhikshamayya Chary seemed surprised. He responded,

When the younger family members learn a technique from the elder members, why should there be a scope for making mistakes? The elder members guide the younger ones through the processes to avoid errors and that is how the suited process of making objects is taught. This is how I learned from my father and uncle and have taught my children.<sup>475</sup>

I noticed apprentices in the workshop of Gangadhar garu and Narsaiah garu being trained under the artisans. They are not given a different set up for practice but rather work alongside senior artisans. Apprentices observe the working techniques of other members and interact with them. Apprentices are usually given easier tasks—such as carving bold designs—than more experienced practitioners. This working method continues until an apprentice acquires the necessary skill for pursuing complex tasks. Even though each block maker performs a certain set of work, they are trained to handle all other works in the workshop.

Chary considers the sequence in craft as a response to the trial and error process. This way of learning does not diminish the possibilities of encountering an error but puts emphasis on foreclosing mistakes by following the elders. The experiments which in the past might have taken longer are shortened when a suitable approach to the problem is found. The preventive measure then becomes a moment which holds the layers of exercises. Instead of considering these actions as a fragment of a linear sequence only, it is crucial to understand each action in craft making as a compression of a series of exercises over time informed by the artisans' social and cultural setting. These actions unveil the layered temporalities employed in craft-making.

Going through the printing exercise at the Weavers' Centre was crucial for me to develop a practical understanding of the interactions between materials, techniques, and human bodies. I

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<sup>475</sup> Interview with Bhikshamayya Chary in Hyderabad, June 2017.

have stressed the significance of carrying out an action in order to make sense of it which was implied in Chary's statement too. The exercise at the Centre enabled me to comprehend that performing these actions repeatedly over time is an effective way to trace the layered temporalities embedded in printing and dyeing. Through this practice, I began to realize the interdependence between tools, techniques, and sequences; recovering the embedded temporalities of textile making depends heavily upon the study of tools and techniques. The training at the centre also provided me the lens to see the historical textiles from a practitioners' point of view. This informed my analysis throughout the thesis.

### **Multiple Ways to Perceive: Transformations and Continuity in Textile Making**

An intrinsic characteristic of time, according to Rebecca Brown, is rhythmic movements through which time returns but does not repeat.<sup>476</sup> By keeping her emphasis on "return," Brown reminds us that not all features of the past are replicated in the present; instead, certain traces connect the past with the present. In Karlholm and Moxey's theorization of time, "material" emerges as the link which carries these traces. They argue that artworks "seethe" with the confusion of multiple forms of time in their very material and the materials themselves bear the remnants of those temporalities.<sup>477</sup> The unstable temporalities of a material practice are observed through the return of similar materials and actions. While the unstable temporalities of early modern dyed textile practices cannot be experienced, the textiles carry these traces. These historical traces co-exist with transformations that have taken place over time. As noted earlier, Benjamin stressed that the continuity of past practices or experiences co-exists with altered actions. Both continuities and transformations allow us to recognize artisanal abilities and socio-economic and cultural changes around them.

The notions of continuities and ruptures in the context of South Asian crafts have shaped our understanding of artisanal histories and their subject positions. Ananda Coomaraswamy's last publication *Time and Eternity*, a comparative study of time across religions and cultures, is relevant in this regard. His theorization reflected on continuity and transformation by examining

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<sup>476</sup> Rebecca Brown, "Colonial Polyrhythm: Imaging Action in the Early 19th Century," *Visual Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2013): 270.

<sup>477</sup> Karlholm and Moxey, "Introduction," 4.

a varied range of religious philosophies and languages. He defined “time” as “either all or any part of the continuum of past and future duration; or that present point of time (*nunc fluens*) that always distinguishes the two durations from one another.”<sup>478</sup> His theorization depended on dualities and thus signified the relativity of time. He positioned the “present” as breakage or disruption into the flow of past time to the future. If the “present” is not present, then the past flows into the future. In other words, the past or the future is considered from the relative standpoint of the present. In his argument, “present” is not a fixed time frame and perhaps an indication of our own position. The idea of the past depends on the standpoint of the present. The duality in the perception of time, according to Coomaraswamy, came from metaphysical and temporal experiences.<sup>479</sup> The metaphysical strand implies the everlasting presence of time whereas the temporality perception focuses on the element “now.”<sup>480</sup> A sum of numerous “now” adds up to constitute the idea of time. As an explanation of the term “now,” Coomaraswamy implied that it is not a fixed duration but “a matter of relativity.” He transcended the barrier between time and lived experience while explaining “now.” The relativity of time in his theorization is useful to see how the notions of time and history could be different from the point of view of lived experiences. His attention to embodied experience also suggests that the entanglement of temporalities manifest differently to different people. Multiple ways of perceiving and experiencing “time” are foregrounded in Coomaraswamy’s thesis which expands the scopes of employing this concept in regard to embodied practices.

The factors on which the question of continuity and alteration in crafts rest are the use of materials, tools, processes, and their relationship with the livelihood of the artisans. While theorizing time in the Islamic context, Coomaraswamy noted even though motion seems to be “continuous,” it consists of a series of “leaps and rests,” after Maimonides.<sup>481</sup> Coomaraswamy implied that the notion of continuity contains disruptions; also, he did not establish continuity and “discontinuity” as binary opposites. In craft studies, continuity is often linked to the use of material, the execution of motifs, and the employment of certain skills. The craftspeople’s

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<sup>478</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy, “Introduction,” in *Time and Eternity* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1947), 1.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 3-5.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>481</sup> Coomaraswamy, “IV: Islam,” 62.

perspectives question the notion of “discontinuity” and compel us to consider how a practice is transformed rather than discontinued. Taking my lead from the craftspeople, I will refrain from using the term “discontinuity” and rather point to the transformative nature of craft practices.

Artisan Bhikshamayya Chary’s view about the transmission of craft knowledge is useful to further this discussion:

One must learn every possible skill from their elders or teachers. After that, it is up to them, what skill she or he would take up further. However, the knowledge of many skills impacts whatever craft work they end up doing. I learned carpentry and block making from the elders of my family but employed these skills in making looms or assembling machines which were not taught to me.<sup>482</sup>

Craft skill and knowledge, according to Chary, is what enables artisans to adapt to the demands of one’s surroundings and to survive. Continuity not only points to the continuous employment of the materials, processes, or tools used by their ancestors but to the intangible knowledge of working with all of them. Moreover, Chary’s comment is a useful reminder of how traces of one practice can be found among shared practices. In the following sections, a close examination of the use of indigo and resist dyeing in early modern and contemporary textiles provides an opportunity to reflect on the intertwining of traces, transformations, and continuity.

### **Indigo and Resist Dyeing**

My first case study focuses on indigo and resist dyeing. The textile fragment from the Salarjung Museum, discussed earlier in this chapter, shows the use of resist dyeing in indigo (**See Figure 4.4**). Similarly, many other early modern Coromandel dyed cotton from museum collections show highly sophisticated and skillful use of resist dyeing. *The Census of India 1961* was one of the few sources which acknowledged the practice of resist dyeing in the south.<sup>483</sup> It presented photographs of individually identified dyers and detailed diagrams of tools alongside thorough documentation of dyeing and printing.

The Census monograph provided an excellent record of selected crafts in Andhra Pradesh, including kalamkari in Srikalahasti and Machilipatnam. The section on kalamkari cloth

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<sup>482</sup> Interview with Bhikshamayya Chary in Hyderabad, July 2017.

<sup>483</sup> A. Chandrasekhar, *Census of India, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-A (1), Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1964).

printing of Machilipatnam presented a description of the wax resist process practiced in master artisan Vinnakota Venkataswamy Naidu's workshop.<sup>484</sup> The activities of Venkataswamy Naidu's workshop are compared to the printing methods adopted by Parthasarathy Naidu. According to data collected for the Census, Naidu took up chemical printing and fast-paced production to keep up with the market demands.<sup>485</sup> Venkataswamy Naidu was not the only practitioner of the wax resist process as the Census records at least sixteen households that were practicing wax resist during the early 1960s.<sup>486</sup> Interestingly the majority of the resist dyers were women from *Kāpu* (a Hindu agrarian community in Telugu speaking regions), Muslim, and ex-toddy palm tapper communities (**Figure 4.9**). Today, women work predominantly in printing units. It seems that the disappearance of the wax-resist process in present-day workshops affected the role of women in producing textiles. Unfortunately, the census records remain the only archival source to trace the practice of wax-resist in coastal Coromandel workshops and the active role of women in this work during the post-independence era.

The Census also documented a few tools which are indispensable for wax-resist: an earthen pot, a three-legged bench, and a *kalam* for applying wax. For the resist process, beeswax was used, which is an integral material in several other crafts in south India, including bronze casting. This bench described in the records is essentially a low portable table with a rectangular top supported by three diagonal legs. (**Figure 4.10**).<sup>487</sup> Three legs, instead of four, make the table top less rigid; this flexibility, according to the records, is a favored condition for wax drawing. The resist process takes place around a cooking pit or earthen oven. A broken earthen pot is used for melting wax, which is placed in the oven. The broken neck of the pot makes it easier for the artisans to dip their *kalam* into the molten wax.

The *kalam* used for resist technique structurally resembles the *kalam* for applying dyes; however, the tips and receptacles for wax or dye are different, as shown in the detailed drawing from the Census (**Figure 4.11**). The initial stage of the wax resist *kalam* shows its fundamental difference from the *kalam* for drawing; whereas the bamboo stick continues until the tip for the

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<sup>484</sup> Chandrasekhar, "Kalamkari Cloth Printing of Machilipatnam," in *Census of India*, 52-64.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>486</sup> A. Chandrasekhar, "Section VI: Craftsmen," *Census of India*, 59-60.

<sup>487</sup> The dimensions of the bench are: 45 inches (114.3 cm) in length and 12 inches (30.48 cm) in width. Ibid., 62.

kalam for drawing, it is discontinuous in the resist kalam. For resist drawing, two half-circular iron wire loops are fixed at one end of the bamboo, forming an oval base for the tip of the pen. A thick layer of human hair is wrapped around the loops and then secured with cotton thread much like the kalam for drawing. The layers of hair and thread build up to create a bulbous form at the end of the slender bamboo pen. When the tip is dipped into molten wax, these layers of hair and thread absorb the wax and allow it to flow between the two ends of the iron loops. The area between the two loops controls the flow of molten wax onto the fabric, thus the quality of resist drawing.

The descriptions, diagrams, and photographs presented in the 1961 Census records aid in reconstructing the sequence of wax resist application in the context of V. Venkataswamy Naidu's workshop and perhaps other workshops in the Bandar region during the early 1960s. It is unclear if there were other resists used for printing in southern India. In western India, especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan, mud-resist is used. In this process, clay is mixed with water, and additive medium, and processed by hand until the clay reaches the elastic consistency. Considering the technical details, it seems there were either multiple ways to resist techniques or effective means of producing red dye in a cold vat in the Coromandel region. The narrative in the 1961 census records presented a lesser-known aspect of the resist-dyeing histories of Coromandel.

It is possible that resist drawing and kalam drawing are related to each other since both techniques employ a similar tool.<sup>488</sup> Handling of the kalam might or might not require a skill similar to drawing with dyes. Drawing with dyes is not practiced in the Machilipatnam area today but in the temple town of Srikalahasti (**Figure 4.12**). These kalamkari painters practice drawing with dyes on treated cotton to produce narrative temple hangings and wearable fabrics.<sup>489</sup> Numerous households in and around Srikalahasti practice drawing with the kalam, where the bulbous grip needs to be squeezed and pressed in such a way that a controlled amount of dye flows through the tip (**Figure 4.13**). The process of applying dyes or wax to textiles is

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<sup>488</sup> Both resist drawing and direct drawing on textiles are done with kalam. However, in my text, I refer to drawing on fabric as kalam drawing.

<sup>489</sup> The kalamkari of Srikalahasti has been researched by a number of scholars. See Lotika Varadarajan, *South Indian Traditions of Kalamkari* (Bombay: Perennial Press, 1982); Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *The Glory of Indian Handicrafts* (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1985); Anna L. Dallapiccola and Rosemary Crill, *Kalamkari Temple Hangings* (London: V&A Publishing, 2015); Paola von Wyss-Giacosa, "Myth and Cloth from India: The Kalamkari Collection in the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich," *Narrative Culture* 5, no. 1 (2018): 34-69.

similar. Even though wax-resist has not survived in the south, drawing with the kalam in Srikalahasti bears the traces of its shared practice.

Another aspect for considering the correlation between practices is the use of heat. Rice husk was used as fuel which allows sustained and low heat during wax-resist drawing. In this process, the wax must be liquid to flow on to the fabric; however, if the wax becomes too hot it will catch fire. Even though wax resist is not practiced, the very character of rice husk to generate controlled heat is still utilized in the washing and boiling unit at the dyers' workshops in Bandar. Rice husk transformed into the "trace" or connecting link between the past practice of resist-dyeing with the ongoing practice of cloth printing and dyeing.

The coastal town of Chirala, approximately 100 km from Machilipatnam, practiced another type of resist dyeing for centuries.<sup>490</sup> In this process known as ikat, designs are resisted or reserved in warp and/or weft threads before dyeing, unlike the practice on dyed cottons of the Bandar region. The practice of ikat is a reminder of the many resisting techniques used in this region.

The vat dyeing at Muhammad Salim Pasha's workshop, discussed earlier, closely follows the method of resist dyeing in indigo (నీలము or *nīlamu* in Telugu) practiced in the Bandar region. Yet the discontinuity of resist dyeing in the Bandar region urged the dyers and printers to adapt by finding alternative methods of using indigo in textiles. In the dyeing and printing workshop of Mukkanti garu, indigo solution is used directly for printing (**Figure 4.14**).<sup>491</sup> In this process, caustic soda is added to the indigo solution and then gum Arabic is added. Then the color can be directly printed on fabric. Nageswara Rao stressed that the caustic soda washes out and does not remain in the cotton fibers.<sup>492</sup> It is unclear when indigo for printing was introduced in Polavaram. The ongoing practice of indigo printing shows an active effort of the dyers and printers to bring back the presence of indigo in their textiles.

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<sup>490</sup> See Rosemary Crill, *Indian Ikat Textiles* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1998); Marie-Louise Nobholz-Kartaschoff, "The Same—Yet Not the Same: Similarities and Differences in Some Textile Techniques and Textile Products from India and Bali," *Textile History* 30, no. 1 (1999): 46-68; Carol Bier, "Patterns in Time and Space: Technologies of Transfer and the Cultural Transmission of Mathematical Knowledge across the Indian Ocean," *Ars Orientalis* 34 (2004): 172-94; Ruth Barnes, "Ikat," in *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion*, ed. Valerie Steele, vol. 2 (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), 231-3.

<sup>491</sup> In the historical Coromandel textiles, only small areas with light blue are hand painted with indigo solution. To obtain dark and dense tones, it is indispensable to dip the fabric in the indigo vats.

<sup>492</sup> Interview with Nageswara Rao in Polavaram, June 2017.



The evidence of wax resist in historical textiles urged Bhikshamayya Chary to make a tool for fluid wax drawing (**Figure 4.15 and 4.16**). Chary was aware of the kalam used for wax resist at the Weavers' Centre but was dissatisfied with its performance (**Figure 4.17**). He mentioned that the flow of wax from the kalam is discontinuous which negatively affects the quality of drawing. The tool he made is less than 30 cm in length and constructed of a cylindrical wooden shaft joined to an iron funnel. The funnel has a minute opening at the bottom for allowing molten wax to flow. The funnel could be dipped in molten wax and used for making resist drawing. Wood being a poor conductor of heat prevents the high temperature of molten wax to affect the worker's hand. The basic working principle of Chary's tool has some resemblance to Sri Lankan and Indonesian resist drawing tools.<sup>493</sup> The Indonesian tools are finer and smaller in shape; however, the construction follows a similar logic using a metal repository and wooden/bamboo holder. It was not clear how Chary decided to make this tool. He is an avid reader, especially books on astrology, traditional medicine, and machinery making. However, he did not mention any specific source as a reference to his redesigned tool. Chary thought through materials and tools to envision past practices. His tool does not resemble the historical kalam for wax drawing in the south, but his intentions and material engagement help us to envision how the historical wax resist makers thought about the applicability of their tools. Chary's decision for a design change also indicates how the artisans' disagreement with the existing practice can prompt innovations.

The practices, such as indigo and resist dyeing in the Bandar region, which have transformed over time, bear traces of past practices in materials and intangible actions. Through my analysis, I also pointed out that the traces can be found from the related practices which have emerged from the shared pool knowledge resource.

### **The Early Modern Salarjung Prayer Mat and a Contemporary *Mehrab***

The Prayer Mat from the Salarjung Museum, discussed above, serves as a compelling example to explore the continuation of early modern imagery into contemporary textile making.

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<sup>493</sup> Wax resist dyeing—also known as Batik—is widely practiced in parts of South and Southeast Asia. See *Building on Batik: The Globalization of a Craft Community*, eds. Michael Hitchcock and Wiendu Nuryanti (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Marshall Clark, "The Politics of Heritage," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 41, no. 121 (2013): 396-417; *Batik : drawn in wax : 200 years of batik art from Indonesia in the Tropenmuseum collection*, ed. Itie van Hout (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 2001).

The *Mehrāb* textiles at Mukkanti garu's workshop show close compositional resemblance with the historical prayer mat.<sup>494</sup> By mehrab, artisans in the workshop refer to a specific kind of textile which is used as both hanging and bedspread (**Figure 4.18, see Figure 0.17**). In both the prayer mat and mehrab, the archway motif is the key. Whereas the prayer mat displays an economic use of design elements, the mehrab textile from Rao's workshop celebrates an extravagance of curved lines and colors. The central part of the prayer mat is empty, to accommodate an individual during daily prayer. In mehrabs, the highly ornate central area becomes the focus of viewers' attention.

The intricately adorned multi-colored mehrabs are printed from a large set of blocks of varying sizes. In contrast with the early modern Prayer Mat, there is almost no empty space on this contemporary textile. The brilliant color distribution, emphasizing the prominence of some motifs over others, makes a fine balance between flat areas and patterned surfaces. The borders, motifs, and space are brought to life through a series of multi-colored impressions from the woodblocks. An elaborately executed mehrab motif constitutes the centre of the textile, framed by three borders of varying sizes; this entire area is then surrounded by thick panels marking the edge of the textile. The use of darker palette for the bordering panels is intended for creating a prominent frame around the central area. The characteristic cusped archway appears at the centre flanked by two vertical panels depicting cypress motifs. At the bottom, a triangular hill formation—printed from small diamond shaped blocks—makes a prominent appearance which creates the base of a large cypress or pandu motif. The stylized hill is a visual characteristic found in the early modern dyed cottons from this region in both hand-drawn and printed forms. In these formations, a series of varied and identical rocks are put together to recreate the characteristic landscape of the Deccan plateau. The printed diamond shaped motifs in the mehrab do not immediately evoke rock formations. However, viewers who are aware of the triangular rock formations in the early modern textiles can readily relate this formation to the historical ones. Above this formation, a large cypress or pandu motif appears as the centrepiece. The motif consists of several inner layers or large floral and intricate geometric patterns. Above the

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<sup>494</sup> In Chapter 3, I used the standard spelling for Mihrab that indicates the prayer niche in a qibla wall of mosques and prayer halls. However, in Rao's workshop, they use the term "Mehrāb" to designate these specific textiles. Per their designation, I use Mehrab when referring to the textiles from their workshop.

pinnacle of the centrepiece, rises the cusped archway, a visual reminder of the mihrabs from mosques and Islamic prayer halls.

Use of repeated block prints to re-create a seemingly built architectural form is observed in both these textiles. The large and well-structured archway, which has a strong architectural presence, is constructed out of smaller elements or templates. The outer frame of the motif is created by the borders of the horizontal and vertical panels around it. The two edges of the cusped arch are created by the calculated usage of paper stencils. A separate set of blocks are used for producing the borders of the cusped arch. At the apex of both, a flower motif, strikingly similar to Deccani archways, is found. The blocks used in making the architectural form are used for making running fabrics. That is to say, the blocks are not used exclusively for the mehrab textiles. A certain arrangement with this set of blocks creates this archway motif: an architectural form made of fragments, templates, and artisanal insight.

The visual similitude and the technical resemblance in producing the prayer mat and mehrab suggest that the dyers and printers did not merely follow the visuals of early modern textiles but engaged with the historical process of producing them. This understanding enabled them to carry out further experimentation with the forms and colors. A variation of the mehrabs, produced during the 1980s, shows a rather subtler color scheme and calculated use of dark tones (**Figure 4.19**). Whereas the arrangement of the motifs in this textile is standardized, the color scheme is not. The striking use of dark tones in the central cypress motif and border is noteworthy. The dark border is framed within two sets of borders executed in medium dark tone; in contrast, the central motif is set against a floral background printed in light brown and yellow ochre. This tonal arrangement—less common in mehrabs—is an example of how the dyers engaged with the existing scheme and also projected their choice onto it. The potentials in comparing the prayer mat and mehrabs lie in unfolding the layered understanding of histories embedded in the dyed textile makers' practice.

Whereas my discussion around these two textiles focused on continuity, it is not disconnected from transformations.<sup>495</sup> The prayer mat is placed on the floor whereas the mehrab

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<sup>495</sup> While addressing the transformations in kalamkari making during the 1970s, Yashodhara Dalmia emphasized Nelly Sethna's contribution in it. Dalmia noted that Sethna suggested the dyers in Machilipatnam from bleaching fabrics at the final stage of production. Sethna introduced new compositional formats incorporating traditional woodblocks which helped the kalamkari makers to reach out to the contemporary audience. Whereas Dalmia's essay contextualized Sethna's contribution to the field, it also disapproved the endeavors of the artisans. The contemporary kalamkari making (before Sethna's intervention), she noted, carried the "worst remnants of the ancient tradition."

textiles are used as vertical hangings, and as bedspreads; in other words, the prayer mats are always used horizontally whereas the mehrabs are used both horizontally and vertically. This change in the usage of the textiles possibly indicates a set of overlapping factors including patronage, change in trade patterns, consumer reactions, and value systems, among others. Whereas the prayer mats served everyday needs, mehrabs are treated as special items by a Delhi-based furnishing company that acquires them for their “Diwali Collection.”<sup>496</sup> A limited number of mehrabs are also sold at Suraiya Hasan’s sales outlet in Hyderabad.

Mehrabs represent the continuity of visual motifs from early modern Coromandel textiles in several ways, but the continuity is not seamless; the continuity, in this case, is established through assimilation, appropriation, elimination, and synthesis of materials and visual motifs. The patchwork of traces, transformations, and continuity remind us of the synchronicity of many temporalities embodied in the dyed cottons of Coromandel. Continuation of past techniques and motifs and transformation of established practices—both these aspects of historicity are manifestations of artisanal decisions more than the results of socio-economic conditions. The contemporary textile makers actively reclaim their past by retaining or reviving craft processes. Their endeavors enable ephemeral “return” of the early modern modes of kalamkari making, such as vat dyeing, utilization of rice husk, and kalam drawing.

## Conclusions

Karlholm and Moxey ask an important question, “what if the work does not necessarily belong to its own time, but was born prematurely or belatedly, disjointed with respect to a chronological axis?”<sup>497</sup> Their question underscore the inherent confusion of time objects embody which challenges the chronological approach to analyzing historical objects. This confusion is a

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Yashodhara Dalmia, “Kalamkari: Transformation by Nelly Sethna,” in *Homage to Kalamkari*, ed. Martand Singh (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1979), 115.

<sup>496</sup> Interview with Nageswara Rao in Polavaram, September 2015. He mentioned that around one hundred mehrabs are made for this Diwali collection every year.

<sup>497</sup> Karlholm and Moxey, “Introduction: Telling Art’s Time,” 1; Art historian Alexander Nagel also proposes understanding art objects outside a given time frame. By doing so, objects are not made ahistorical but their presence in multiple temporalities is explored. Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art out of Time* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012).

productive strategy to consider the role of objects outside a given time span. Confusing the boundaries between the past and the contemporary is useful to churn out further questions about the livelihood and knowledge practice of the early modern artisans. As I have noted in my examination, many facets of the early modern textile makers' practices are unknown: resist drawing techniques and large scale resist dyeing, for example. Questioning chronological boundaries allows us to project the decision of choosing a set of motifs by Mukkanti garu and the innovative approach of Chary to simplify wax resist as the possible ways early modern textile makers intervened in kalamkari practice. Chary was doubtful that the wax-kalam at the Weavers' Centre could produce free flowing drawing as seen in the historical textiles. His attention to this difference and thoughtful approach to developing a new tool for resist drawing indicates the complexity of artisanal decision making. By considering these multifaceted artisanal endeavors outside the timeframe of the "contemporary," we can envision how the textile makers with similar capabilities have produced technically complex and visually sophisticated dyed cottons of the Coromandel.

## Conclusion: Research-Practice Interface as Methodology

The argument to support handmade products and craft communities against the fast paced industrial growth in India has been raised throughout the second half of the twentieth century—a question that was masterfully confronted by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Through policy implementations, the establishment of the All India Handicrafts Board, and sustained scholarship, Chattopadhyay strongly argued for what craft has to offer for their producers and beyond. Far from endorsing a rather romantic view of securing a collective or national identity, studies in crafts provide us with critical tools to comprehend and contribute to our immediate socio-economic and cultural surroundings. In an essay entitled “Do Hands Have a Chance?,” artist and educator K. G. Subramanyan draws attention to the “time-tested” practices of craftspeople and argued that understanding the intellect of craft techniques makes us critical of capitalist economic structures.<sup>498</sup> It goes without saying that Subramanyan is not against mechanization, as he recognizes its importance in the growth of the Indian economy; his stress on handwork was rather a decolonizing act. In his lucid delineation of the rise of industrialized economy leading to colonization, Subramanyan argues that the marginalization of handwork was a strategic stand.<sup>499</sup> Subramanyan’s engagement with craft practices, producers, and the All India Handloom Board (1959-61) enabled him to conclude that handicrafts are infused with “personal innovations” achieved through the “extended encounters between man [craftspeople] and material.”<sup>500</sup> Denial of the merits of handwork limits the innovative approaches of craftspeople to interact with their environment. Reducing craft knowledge to techniques not only undermines the contributions of craftspeople to society but also constrains the expanse of critical thinking around culture and economy.

Through my investigations to retrace the kalamkari makers’ histories predating industrialization, I demonstrated the interconnectedness of artisanal decisions and environmental determinants. I have also stressed for recognizing the localized knowledge resources of textile makers to complicate our understanding of early modern cosmopolitanism. While drawing

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<sup>498</sup> K. G. Subramanyan, “Do Hands Have a Chance?,” in *The Magic of Making: Essays on Art and Culture* (Calcutta and New Delhi: Seagull; distributed by Cambridge University Press, 2007), 196-8.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 194-7.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 197.

attention to the repetitive bodily activities of the artisans, I emphasized the close correlations between mimetic practices and innovation. In this thesis, I also signaled the deep interconnections between historical and contemporary modes of kalamkari making by analyzing the multiple temporalities embedded in this practice. Sensory perceptions of the craftspeople remain at the crux of these issues. Understanding craft as merely manual or less effective than the fast-paced and increasingly mechanized production is the retrieval of the oppressing strategies colonists had taken.

Today, textile producers and craftspeople in India form the second largest occupational sector following agriculture. Although craft making is not always a choice but a necessity, there is tremendous potential in this field for developing individual skill sets and empowering communities. For example, acquired skills can enable individuals to be self sufficient while developing a deep understanding of ecology and their immediate environment. However, the efficiency of handlooms and handicrafts are periodically questioned by advocates of faster and homogenized modes of production. In 2015, a possibility to repeal the “The Handlooms (Reservation of Article for Production) Act” issued by the Government of India in 1985 stirred discussions around safeguarding predominantly manually produced textiles.<sup>501</sup> This act resisted the indiscriminate copying of handmade textile motifs in mechanized production units, such as powerloom. Even though it could not entirely restrict the appropriation of handcrafted textile motifs, its existence for securing the rights of textile makers cannot be denied. Repeal of this act will not only mean dissolving the boundaries between handmade, powerloom-made, screen, offset, and digitally printed textiles but encouraging a large scale homogenization of textiles in India.<sup>502</sup> If representing a handmade visual motif by means of a faster production technique gains prominence then the relevance of historically informed techniques are denied. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, the dyers’ localized knowledge and ecological awareness are acquired and heightened through the cycle of washing, boiling, and preparing dyed cottons. Compressing these carefully sequenced techniques into offset printed images, for example, is a denial of the intricacies of dyers’ accumulated knowledge. Safeguarding handloom production is

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<sup>501</sup> Laila Tyabji, “Revivalism and Revivalists,” *Marg* 67, no. 4 (2016): 40.

<sup>502</sup> Pedana Kalamkari was recognized under the Geographical Indications Registry (GIR), Govt. of India, in 2013. However, the artisans I interacted with have not mentioned its direct or indirect effect on their practice.

thus allowing the current and future textile makers to contribute to the knowledge repositories their ancestors have built.

Underscoring the intangible nature of kalamkari makers' histories further establishes the need to consider craft making separately from centralized manufacturing systems. In other words, tracing the routes through which the artisanal subject position is constructed allow us to be critical of centralized modes of production. Diversity—a concept I have explored through the discussions around materials, processes, and community engagement in the kalamkari workshops—emerges as a potent antidote for this problem. As Uzamma has stated, the geographical, regional, climatic, and cultural diversity in India resist a homogenized and centralized production agenda; multiplicity and decentralized craft making have enabled the innumerable variety of cultural expressions since historical times.<sup>503</sup> Being critical of homogenized production modes thus reinforces the multiplicity and simultaneity of historical accounts. It urges us to acknowledge the strategies employed by artisans to record, sustain, and improvise historical information and their differences from formalized, institutional modes of archiving.

In this thesis, I have demonstrated the crucial role of time in the continuation of historically informed methods in Coromandel textile making. Time also emerges as the key to differentiate handmade from centralized modes of production. It is certain that block makers or printers cannot compete with the fast pace of producing screen or offset printed fabrics. But the accelerated production techniques also come with their consequences; often, the faster techniques leave long term effects on communities and environment. During my fieldwork in Pedana in 2015 and 2017, I noticed a considerable number of screen printing workshops (**Figure 5.1 and 5.2**).<sup>504</sup> Screen printing is somewhat dependent on sunlight but not saline or sweet coastal water. The fabrics are not required to be pre-treated, washed, or boiled and printing is done with oil based ink which fastens color to cloth. The excess or unused printing ink and other residue from printing are usually disposed of in the nearby canals and water channels. Discarding nonsoluble oil-based ink into the water results in long term ecological issues in the coastal

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<sup>503</sup> Interview with Uzamma in Hyderabad, June 2017.

<sup>504</sup> During my visit to Pedana in 2017, I did not notice any new development in screen printing activities but the workshops I visited during 2015 were functioning.



region.<sup>505</sup> Fast production, in this case, leaves a prolonged effect on the coastal environment; in contrast, natural dyeing encourages recycling and careful utilization of the local water reserve. Given these circumstances, “slow fashion”—characterized by “longer production times, use of local materials and a focus on quality and sustainability”—seems an effective solution to the problem.<sup>506</sup> Instead of faster production modes, it promotes considerate consumption of fabrics. Slowness, in this regard, is not synonymous with decelerating production but being aware of the impact of production on the producers, material, and ecosystem.<sup>507</sup> Importantly, slow fashion also thrives on the reciprocity of decisions made by textile organizations and consumers. It compels consumers to make responsible decisions; also, consumers actively take initiatives to support slow fashion. The commitment to know the details of production and involvement of the artisans prompts moving beyond the comparison between fast-paced industrial production and time consuming craft making.

Undermining the craft makers’ integrity is the result of a gap in communication between producers and consumers—prompted by the capitalist mode of production which alienates products from the complex process of production. Activists, scholars, artists, and designers have periodically intervened and advocated for improving the standard of living for artisans and have drawn consumers’ attention to these long-standing issues. In this thesis, I have elaborated on the role of kalamkari makers as mediators between ideas, imagery, materials, and people. To take this further, I also acknowledge the role of individuals who have mediated between the producers, consumers, and policy makers. Curator Martand Singh communicated the aims and parameters of the *Visvakarma* exhibitions to the artisans and provided the necessary infrastructural and curatorial support for the artisanal endeavors during the displays and beyond. Uzramma, Annapurna M., and Jagada Rajappa mediated between master indigo dyer Yellappa and the weavers of Chinnur to renew handloom weaving and to initiate *doria* or striped cotton

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<sup>505</sup> For more on this issue, see Sana Khan and Abdul Malik, “Toxicity evaluation of textile effluents and role of native soil bacterium in biodegradation of a textile dye,” *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* 25 (2018): 4446–58; S. K. Dubey et al., “Contamination of Ground Water as a Consequence of Land Disposal of Dye Waste Mixed Sewage Effluents: A Case Study of Panipat District of Haryana, India,” *Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology* 85, no. 3 (2010): 295–300.

<sup>506</sup> Jenny Hall, “Digital Kimono: Fast Fashion, Slow Fashion?,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 22, no. 3 (2018): 284.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

saris in the 2000s in this region.<sup>508</sup> Suraiya Hasan revived himroo fabric of the Deccan in the 1980s by collaborating with master weaver Umar Syed; her major contribution was to set up a conversation between Syed's bodily knowledge and the historical himroo textile fragments from her family collections. An instance of the lack of mediation translating into a problem was the case of designer Rajesh Pratap Singh's ajrakh "inspired" jacket, featured in *The Fabric of India* exhibition (**Figure 5.3**).<sup>509</sup> The jacket, imprinted with human skull motifs against an ajrakh background, was executed in digital print. Singh's disregard for the ajrakh printer's practice and the museum's decision to continue with the display caused grief among the Khatri printers in Gujarat.<sup>510</sup> From reviewing initiatives of the conversation-facilitators in the Coromandel region and South Asia in general, I contend that mediation between the artisans and other sections of societies requires a multisensory involvement with craft making; through this, research and concerns about artisanal livelihood are brought in alignment with practice and learning. These commitments sustain the alliances with the producer communities and open up scope for viable collaborations between artisans, artists, and designers. Further work is required to convey the need for sustainable artisanal practices and to generate meaningful collaborations in the field. As a practitioner and art historian, I am committed to sustaining these mediating practices.

An opportunity to convey Gangadhar and Narsaiah garu's rich resources to the public emerged during our conversations when the Kondra brothers approached me to publish their sampada of traced drawings.<sup>511</sup> At their suggestion, I have started the initial documentation of twenty five images out of their collection of more than seven hundred drawings. With the financial support of the IARTS Textiles of India Grant from the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, I produced a bilingual English-Telugu booklet representing a glimpse of their archive of drawings and their importance in the Kondra brothers' practice in 2018.<sup>512</sup> Copies of this booklet

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<sup>508</sup> Uzramma was one of the founders of Dastkar Andhra in 1989—an organization which practices sustained relationship with the artisanal communities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

<sup>509</sup> Divia Patel, "Rajesh Pratap Singh Ajrakh Jacket," *The Fabric of India*, 218-9.

<sup>510</sup> Personal correspondence with Eiluned Edwards in Toronto, June 2018.

<sup>511</sup> Gangadhar garu, Narsaiah garu, and I discussed the possibilities of publishing their drawings during my fieldwork in Pedana in 2015 and 2017.

<sup>512</sup> Kondra Gangadhar, Kondra Narsaiah, and Rajarshi Sengupta, *Sampada: A Block Makers' Archive* (Kolkata: Innomedia, 2018). I am grateful to Kiran Kumar, Jagadeesh Reddy, Kathleen Wyma, Rajesh Lokkoju, and Sherena Razek for their support to execute the booklet.

were given to the block makers in Pedana to use and distribute. During a recent correspondence, Gangadhar garu stated that he has presented these booklets to students and professionals who visit his workshop.<sup>513</sup> Building on this experience with master block maker Gangadhar garu, I will be carrying out further research on these drawings and studying their deep impact on the Kondra brothers' livelihood to explore effective ways to strengthen practitioner-researcher alliances.

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<sup>513</sup> Correspondence with Kondra Gangadhar in May 2019.

## Figures



Figure 0.1: Qanat or Tent with Five Panels, Deccan, mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed and painted cotton, 451x223 cm, National Museum, New Delhi, A/c: 48.7/29. Image courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.

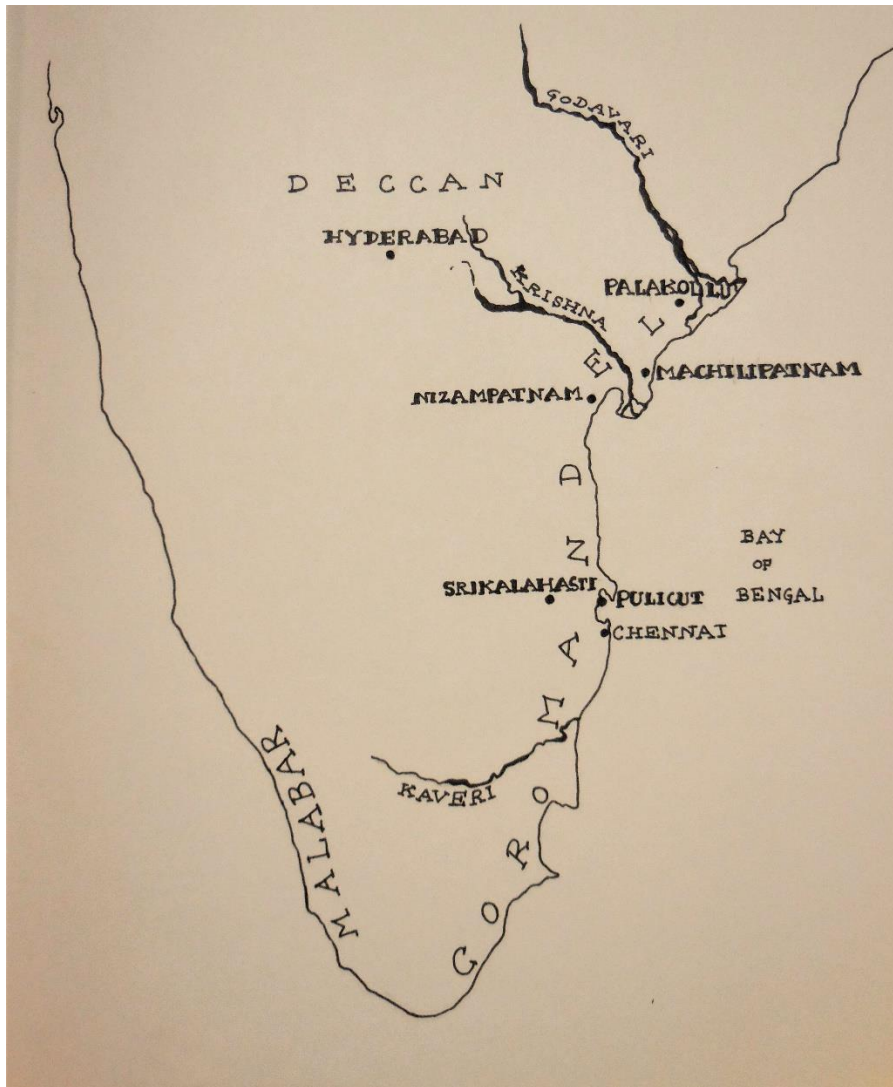


Figure 0.2: Map showing southern India, the rivers, and the centers of dyed, painted, and printed textiles. Rajarshi Sengupta, 2019.





Figure 0.3: View of the fishing port, Machilipatnam, 2012.



Figure 0.4: Fabrics being processed for printing, Pedana, 2015.





Figure 0.5: View of Polavaram, 2015.



Figure 0.6: View of a Dutch cemetery, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Pulicut.





Figure 0.7: View of Srikalahasteesvara Temple and river Svarnamukhi, Srikalahasti.



Figure 0.8: Veerabhadraswamy Temple Complex, Lepakshi.





Figure 0.9: Ceiling mural at the Veerabhadraswamy Temple showing a group of Vijayanagara courtiers, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Lepakshi.



Figure 0.10: Yali by the staircase of the Krishna Temple, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hampi.





Figure 0.11: Kondra Gangadhar at work, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 0.12: Kondra Narsaiah at work, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 0.13: Mukkantieswarudu Rao in his workshop, Polavaram, 2015.



Figure 0.14: The storehouse of wood blocks in Mukkantieswarudu Rao's workshop, Polavaram, 2015.





Figure 0.15: Nageswara Rao, Buddha, dyed and printed cotton made in the 1980s, Mukkantieswarudu Rao's workshop, Polavaram, 2015.

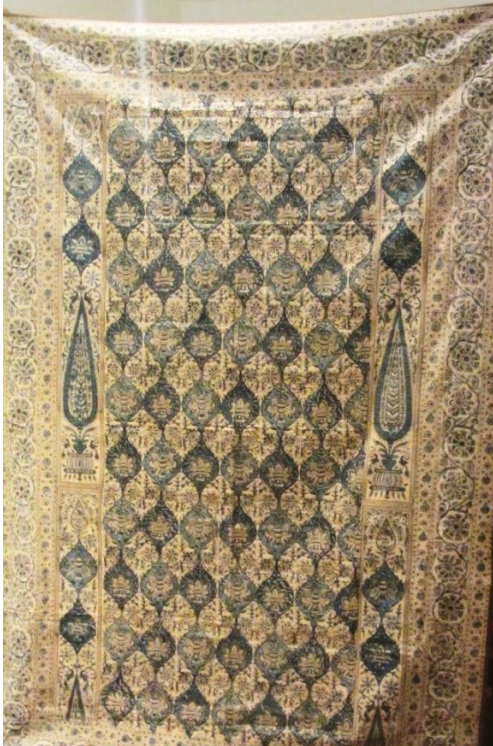


Figure 0.16: A dyed and printed bedspread produced under the supervision of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, 1990s, Polavaram, India. Photograph: Jagada Rajappa, 2018.





Figure 0.17: 2.8.1-3 Cotton Hanging, Block-printed and dye-painted, mehrab of Machilipatnam, 275x175 cm, produced at the workshop of Muktantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram. After *The Master Weavers: Festival of India in Britain*, Royal College of Art (Bombay: Tata Trusts Ltd., 1982), 25.





Figure 0.18: 2.11.3 Cotton Spread, Block-printed and dye-painted, Konia chakra, Kalamkari of Machilipatnam, 180x178 cm, produced at the workshop of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram. After *The Master Weavers: Festival of India in Britain*, Royal College of Art, 35.



Figure 0.19: Muhammad Salim Pasha (right) in conversation with Sharada Devi, Jagada Rajappa, and Anjamma, Workshop of Md. Salim Pasha, Hyderabad 2017.



Figure 0.20: Jyotamma and Govindamma dyeing yarns in indigo, Workshop of Md. Salim Pasha, Hyderabad, 2017.





Figure 0.21: V. Bhikshamayya Chary in his workshop, Hyderabad, 2017.





Figure 0.22: Golconda Coverlet, 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed and painted cotton, 89x74 cm, National Museum, New Delhi, A/c: 48.7-103. Image Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.



Figure 1.1: A wood block being prepared at the workshop of Kondra Gangadhar and Kondra Narsaiah, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 1.2: Gangadhar garu measuring a wood block in his workshop, Pedana, 2015.





Figure 1.3: A cotton fabric is being printed with repetitive patterns, Workshop of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram 2017.



Figure 1.4: A mordant printed cotton fabric (centre), Workshop of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram 2017.





Figure 1.5: Qanat or Tent (Detail I) showing a double-headed bird, Deccan, 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed and painted cotton, 451x223 cm, National Museum, New Delhi, A/c: 48.7/29. Image courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.



Figure 1.6: Two-headed bird on a gravestone, Dutch cemetery, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Walandapalem, Machilipatnam, 2015.





Figure 1.7: Golconda floor spread (Detail I) showing a soldier in conversation with a couple, 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 216x 449 cm, Petaboli, Calico Museum of Textiles, A/c: 403. Image courtesy: Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.



Figure 1.8: Golconda hanging (Detail I) showing a couple in conversation, 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, Calico Museum of Textiles, A/c: 647. Image courtesy: Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.





Figure 1.9: Golconda hanging (Detail II) showing three Deccani courtiers in a conversation, 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, Calico Museum of Textiles, A/c: 647. Image courtesy: Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.



Figure 1.10: Nageswara Rao (left) showing the printing workshop of his father Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram 2015.





Figure 2.1: Golconda Hanging (Detail III) showing royal figures against a brilliant red background, 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c no. 647. Image courtesy: Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.



Figure 2.2: William Roxburgh, *Butea frondosa*, hand tinted etching, After William Roxburgh, *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel: Selected from Drawings and Descriptions* (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1795). Image courtesy: National Library, Kolkata.



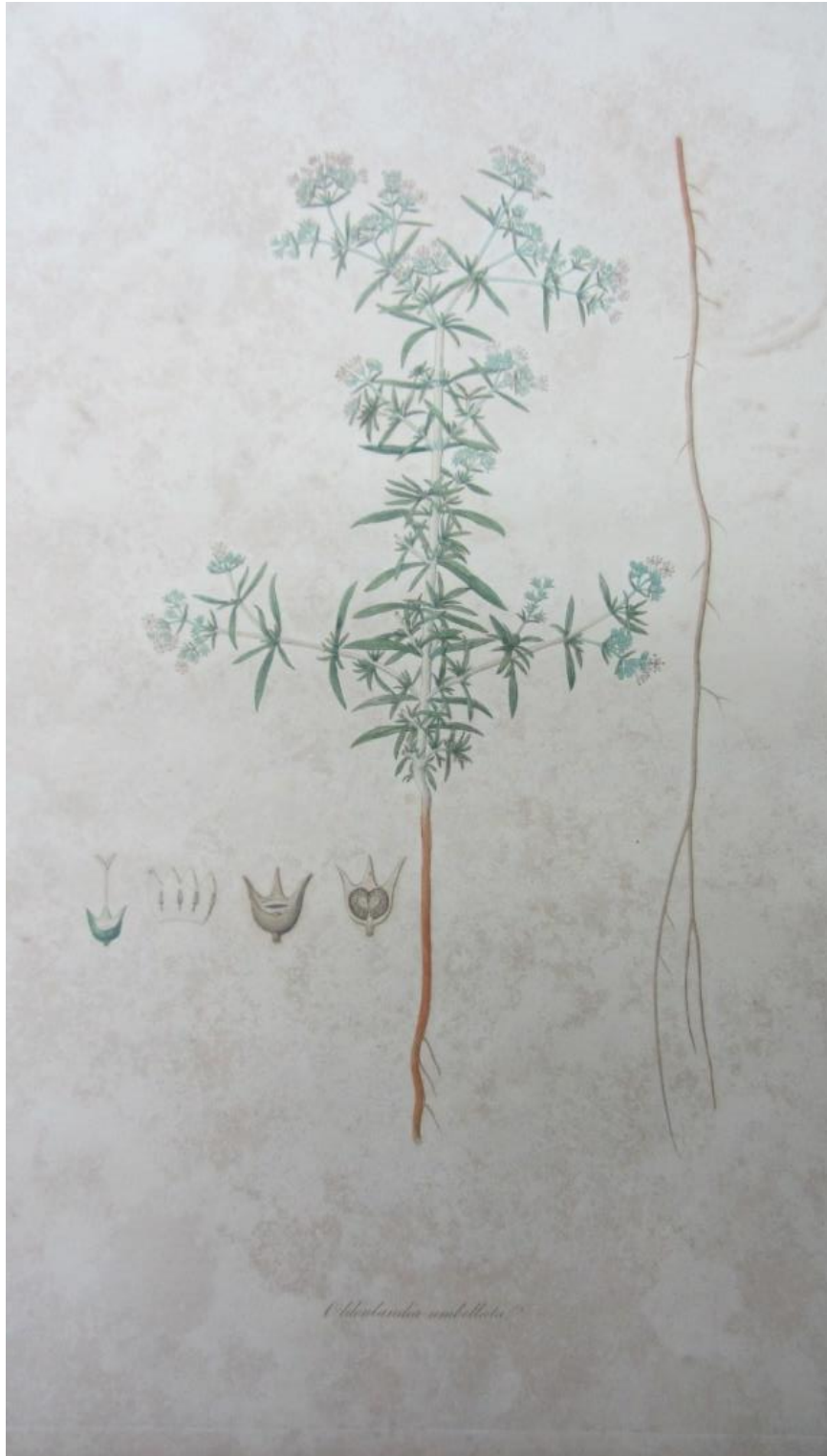


Figure 2.3: William Roxburgh, Chaya Roots or Oldenlandia umbellata, hand tinted etching, After William Roxburgh, Plants of the Coast of Coromandel: Selected from Drawings and Descriptions (London: W. Bulmer and Co, 1795). Image courtesy: National Library, Kolkata.



Figure 2.4: J. Forbes. Watson, Printed textile sample from Machilipatnam, from A collection of Specimens of the Textile Manufactures of India (second series), 1874. Image courtesy: Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad.



Figure 2.5: View of the Dutch Fort, Machilipatnam, 2015.



Figure 2.6: View of Polavaram, 2015.



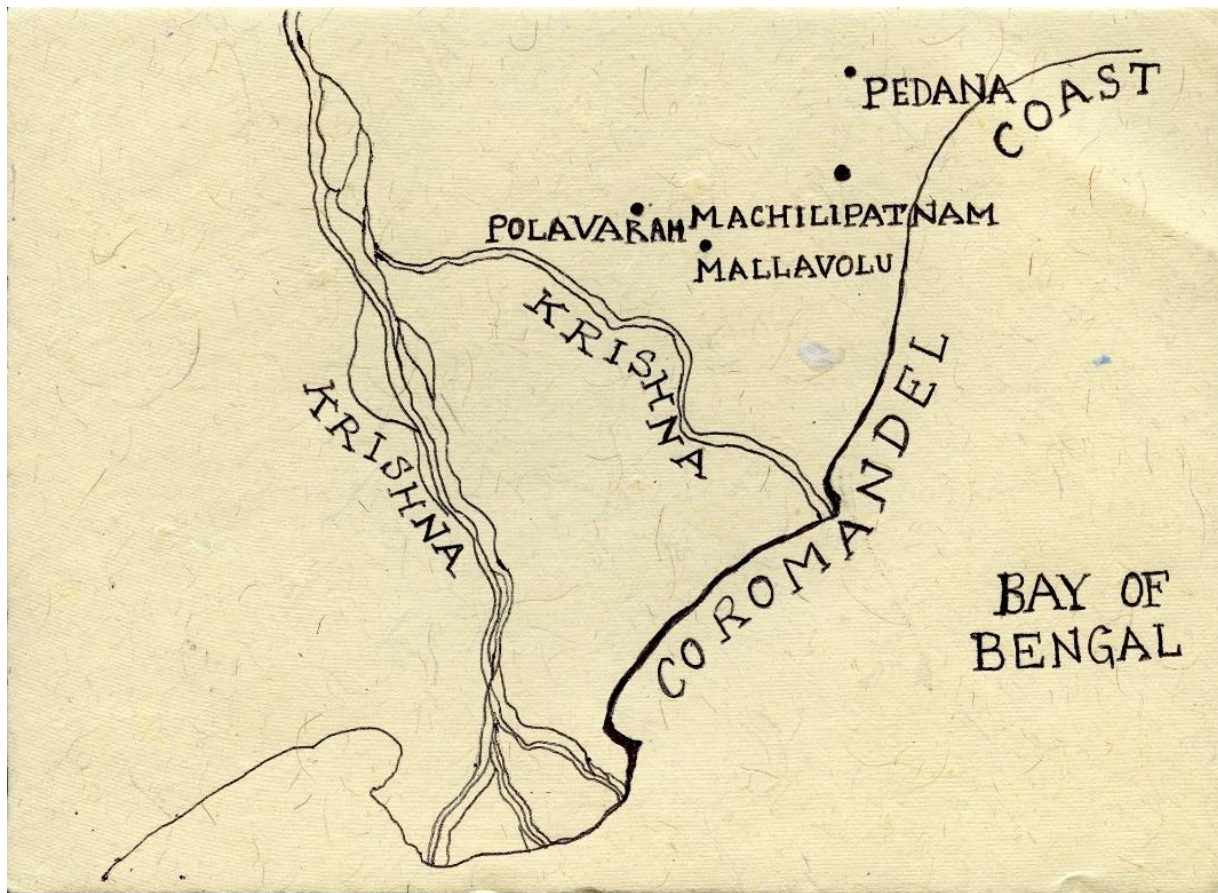


Figure 2.7: Map showing Polavaram, Machilipatnam, and Krishna river on the Coromandel Coast. Rajarshi Sengupta, 2018.



Figure 2.8: View of fields from Mukkanteswarudu Rao's washing unit, Polavaram, 2015.



Figure 2.9: A break during boiling, Mukkantieswarudu Rao's washing unit, Polavaram, 2015.

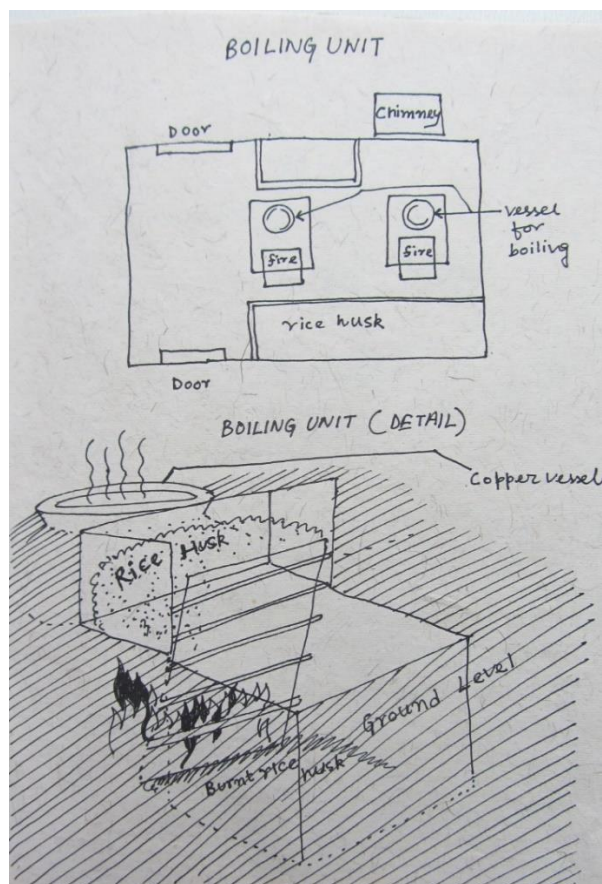


Figure 2.10: Plan of the boiling unit (above) with detail (below), Washing unit, Mukkantieswarudu Rao's workshop, Polavaram. Rajarshi Sengupta, 2015.





Figure 2.11: Cloth, along with water and jaji leaves, are being boiled at the washing unit, Polavaram, 2015.



Figure 2.12: Difference of color, before (right) and after (left) of the dyeing, Polavaram, 2015.





Figure 2.13: Fabrics dyed and printed with red, black, and yellow in Rao's workshop, Polavaram, 2015.



Figure 2.14: View of Muktantieswarudu Rao's printing workshop in a lazy afternoon, Polavaram, 2015.





Figure 2.15: Printing at Mukkantieswarudu Rao's workshop, Polavaram, 2017.



Figure 2.16: The well with salt and sweet water is seen across the wall, in the front yard of a residential house, Polavaram, 2015.





Figure 2.17: Prayer Mat (Detail I) showing the deteriorated areas containing black dye, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, resist, and printing on cotton, 11x 84.5 cm, Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, A/c no. XXXI-54. Image Courtesy: Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad.



Figure 2.18: Golconda Hanging, 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c: 647. Image Courtesy: The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.





Figure 2.19: Golconda floor spread (Detail II), 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 216x 449 cm, Petaboli, Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c: 403. Image courtesy: Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.





Figure 2.20: Nageswara Rao, Buddha (Detail I), dyed and printed cotton, 1980s, Mukkantieswarudu Rao's workshop, Polavaram.



Figure 2.21: Nageswara Rao, Buddha (Detail II), dyed and printed cotton, 1980s, Mukkantieswarudu Rao's workshop, Polavaram.





Figure 3.1: K. Narsaiah tracing an image, Workshop of the K. Gangadhar and K. Narsaiah, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 3.2: K. Narsaiah tracing an image (Detail), Workshop of the K. Gangadhar and K. Narsaiah, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 3.3: Golconda Hanging (Detail IV), 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c no. 647. Image Courtesy: The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.

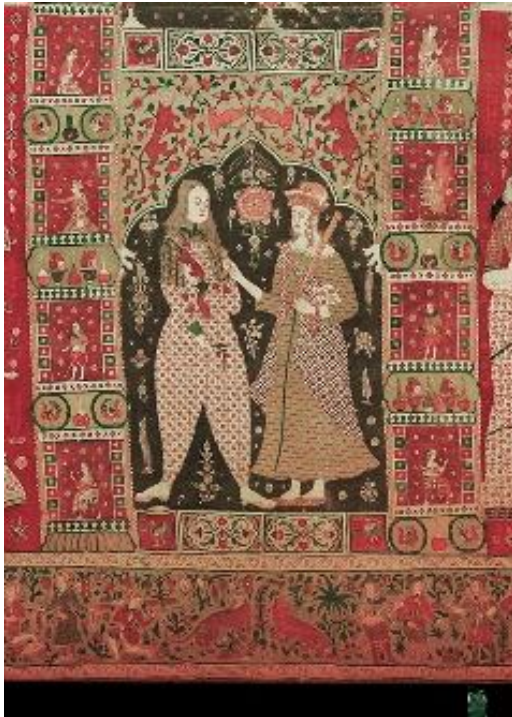


Figure 3.4: Golconda Hanging (Detail V), 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c no. 647. Image Courtesy: The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.



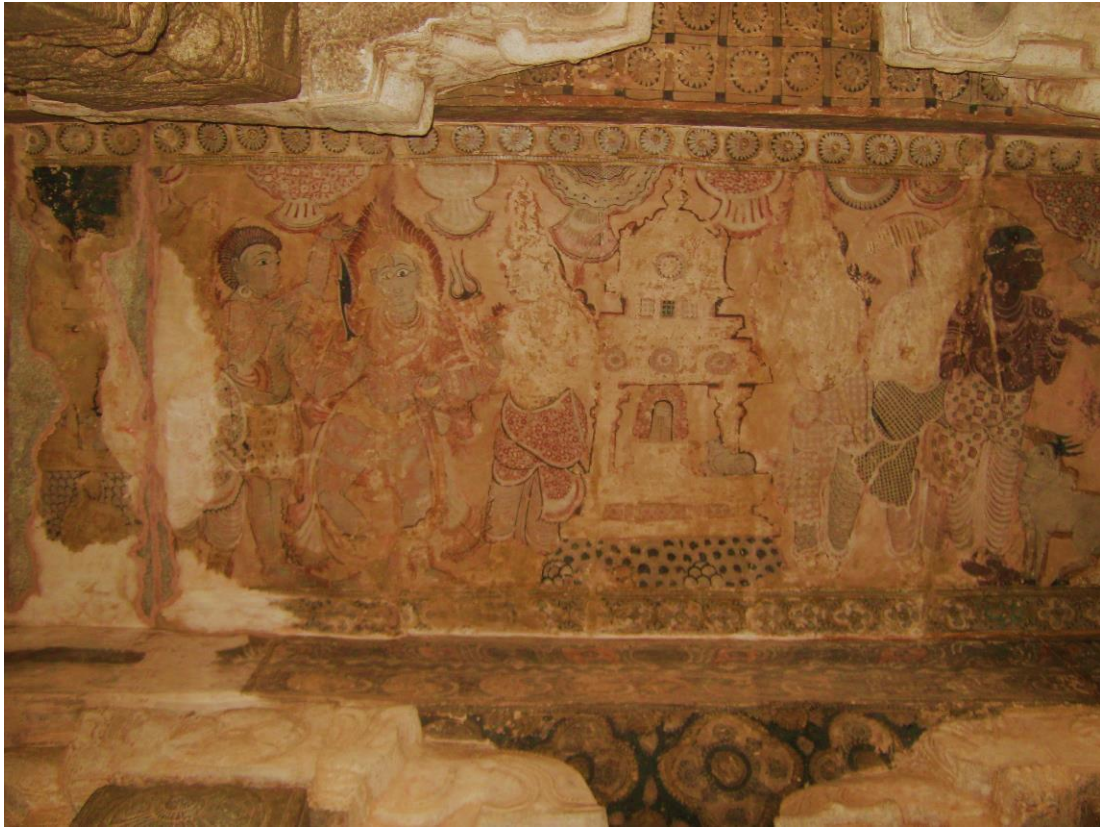


Figure 3.5: Panel of Veerabhadra, 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Natya Mandapa, Veerabhadraswamy Temple Complex, Lepakshi.



Figure 3.6: Veerabhadraswamy Temple, 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Lepakshi.



Figure 3.7: Mihrab at the Jama Masjid, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Bijapur.





Figure 3.8: Prayer Mat, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, resist, and printing on cotton, 11x 84.5 cm, Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, A/c: XXXI-54. Image Courtesy: Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad.

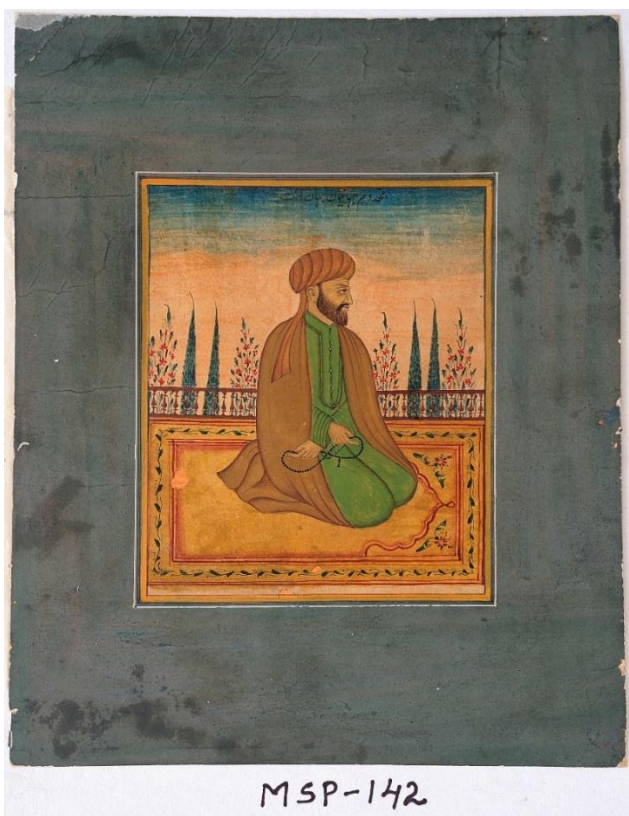


Figure 3.9: Sufi-Makhdum Jahnian, 18<sup>th</sup> century, pigment based opaque paint on paper, Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, A/c: MSP-142. Image Courtesy: Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad.



Figure 3.10: The mihrab and portion of a prayer mat in a mosque adjacent to the tomb of Hayat Baksh Begum, Qutb Shahi Tomb complex, Hyderabad, 2015.





Figure 3.11: K. Gangadhar in his workshop, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 3.12: K. Gangadhar measuring a design and a wooden block, Pedana, 2015.





Figure 3.13: Nilambar at work, while a silent visitor peeps in, Kondra brothers' workshop, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 3.14: A block in making, Kondra brothers' workshop, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 3.15: Beveling and trimming of blocks, Kondra brothers workshop, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 3.16: Taking a rubbing print of a newly prepared block, Kondra brothers' workshop, Pedana, 2015.



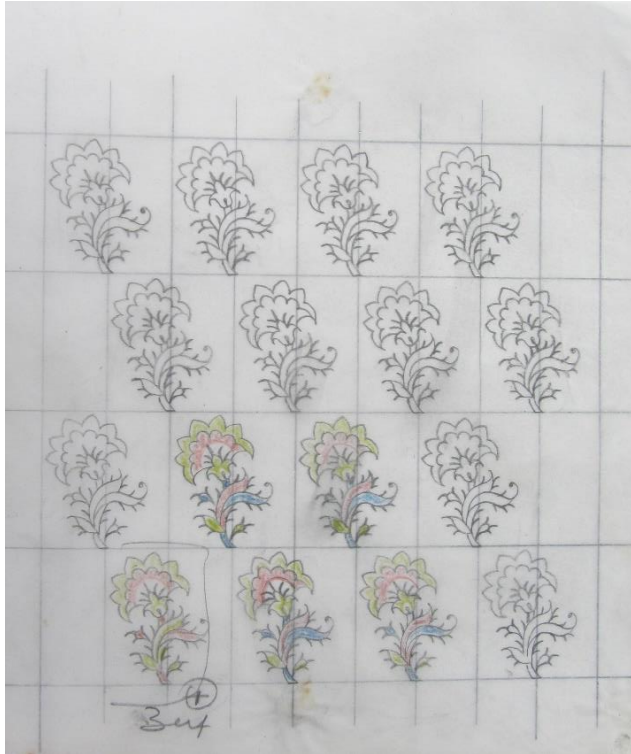


Figure 3.17: K. Gangadhar and K. Narsaiah, Initial drawing for a block, pencil on paper, Kondra brothers' workshop, Pedana, 2017.



Figure 3.18: A block and its rubbing impression, Kondra brothers' workshop, Pedana, 2015.





Figure 3.19: Golconda floor spread (Detail III), 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 216x 449 cm, Petaboli, Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c: 403. Image courtesy: Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.





Figure 3.20: Golconda Hanging (Detail VI), 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c: 647. Image Courtesy: The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.



Figure 3.21: Panel showing Courtiers, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Natya Mandapa, Veerabhadraswamy Temple Complex, Lepakshi.





Figure 3.22: Golconda Hanging (Detail VII), 17<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, painted, resist, and stencil printed cotton, 315x 231 cm, Pulicut, The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad, A/c: 647. Image Courtesy: The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmedabad.



Figure 3.23: A Qutb Shahi gateway facing the Golconda fort complex, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hyderabad.



Figure 3.24: The north doorway to Hayat Baksh's tomb, 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Qutb Shahi Tomb complex, Hyderabad.





Figure 3.25: The north doorway to Hayat Baksh's tomb (Detail), 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Qutb Shahi Tomb complex, Hyderabad.



Figure 3.26: K. Gangadhar and K. Narsaiah, Initial drawing for a block, pencil on paper, Kondra brothers' workshop, Pedana, 2017.



Figure 4.1: Fermentation process at the workshop of Md. Salim Pasha, Hyderabad, 2017.



Figure 4.2: Dyeing yarns in indigo, Workshop of Md. Salim Pasha, Hyderabad, 2017.





Figure 4.3: Pile of rice husk in the boiling unit of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram, 2017.



Figure 4.4: Textile fragment, 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, dyed, resisted, and painted cotton, 34x 44.5cm, Machilipatnam, Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, A/C no. 89-54. Image Courtesy: Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad.





Figure 4.5: Anindita Chakrabarty at the printing unit of the Weavers' Service Centre, Hyderabad, 2017.



Figure 4.6: Printing tables at the workshop of Mukkanteswarudu Rao, Polavaram 2017.



Figure 4.7: V. Ventakesh printing a bedspread, Workshop of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram 2017.



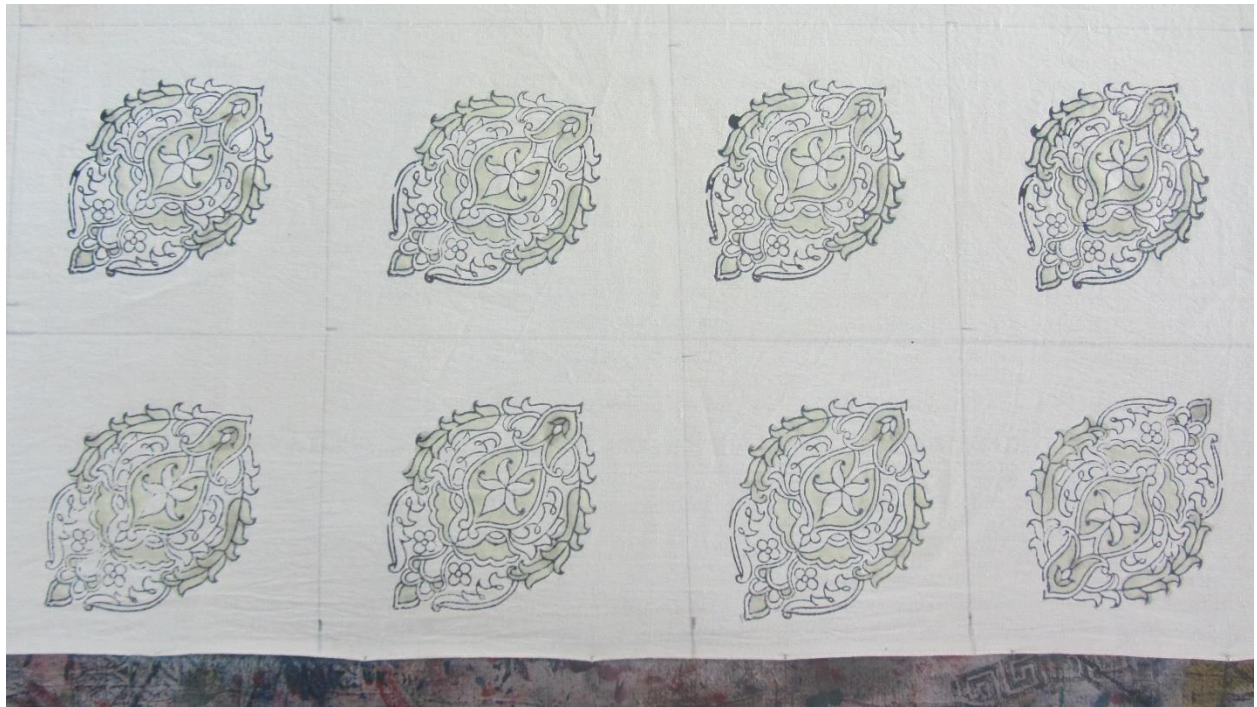


Figure 4.8: Block printing at the Weavers' Service Centre, Hyderabad 2017.





Plate 8. Wax processing.



Plate 9. Wax processing.

Figure 4.9: Women wax-resist artisans, Machilipatnam. Published in- A. Chandrasekhar, *Census of India, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-A (1), Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1964). Image courtesy: The Crafts Museum, New Delhi, 2015.

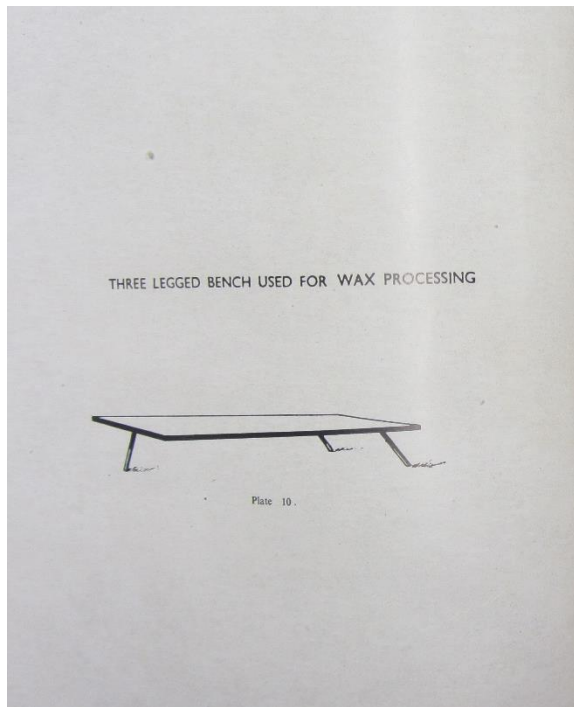


Figure 4.10: Three-legged bench used for wax resist drawing, Published in- A. Chandrasekhar, *Census of India, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-A (1), Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1964). Image courtesy: The Crafts Museum, New Delhi, 2015.

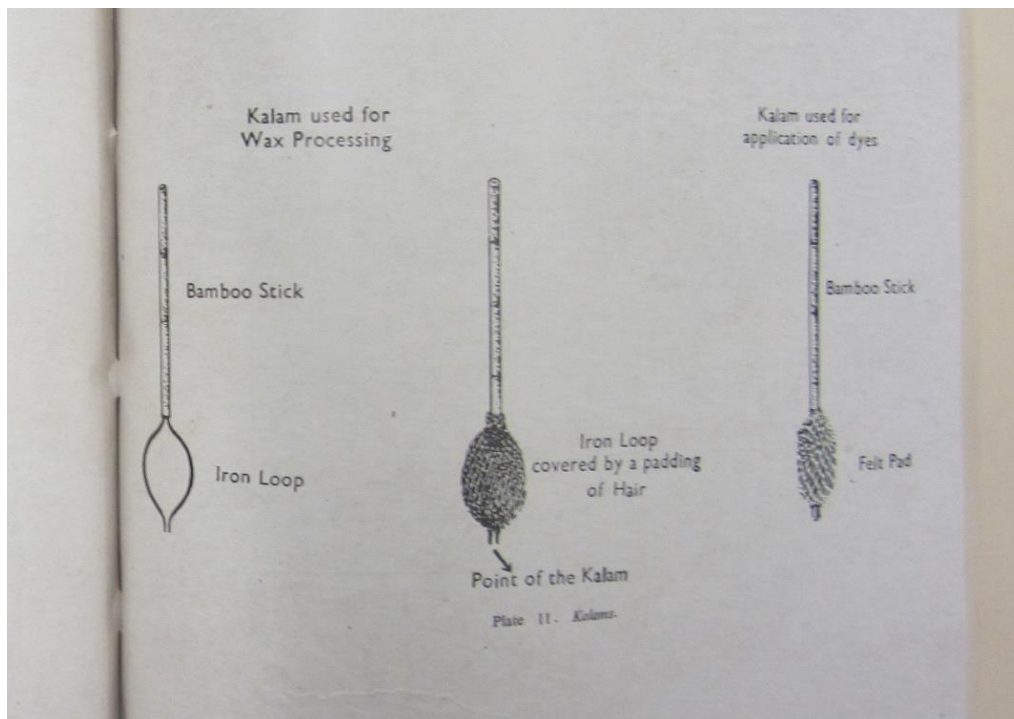


Figure 4.11: Kalam Used for Wax Processing, Published in- A. Chandrasekhar, *Census of India, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-A (1), Selected Crafts of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Govt. of India, 1964). Image courtesy: The Crafts Museum, New Delhi, 2015.





Figure 4.12: View of Srikalahasti.



Figure 4.13: A kalam for drawing, Workshop of Dasaratha Chary, Srikalahasti, 2012.





Figure 4.14: Printing with indigo, Workshop of Mukkanteswarudu Rao, Polavaram, 2017.



Figure 4.15: Bhishamayya Chary holding the wax drawing tool of this own making, Hyderabad 2017.



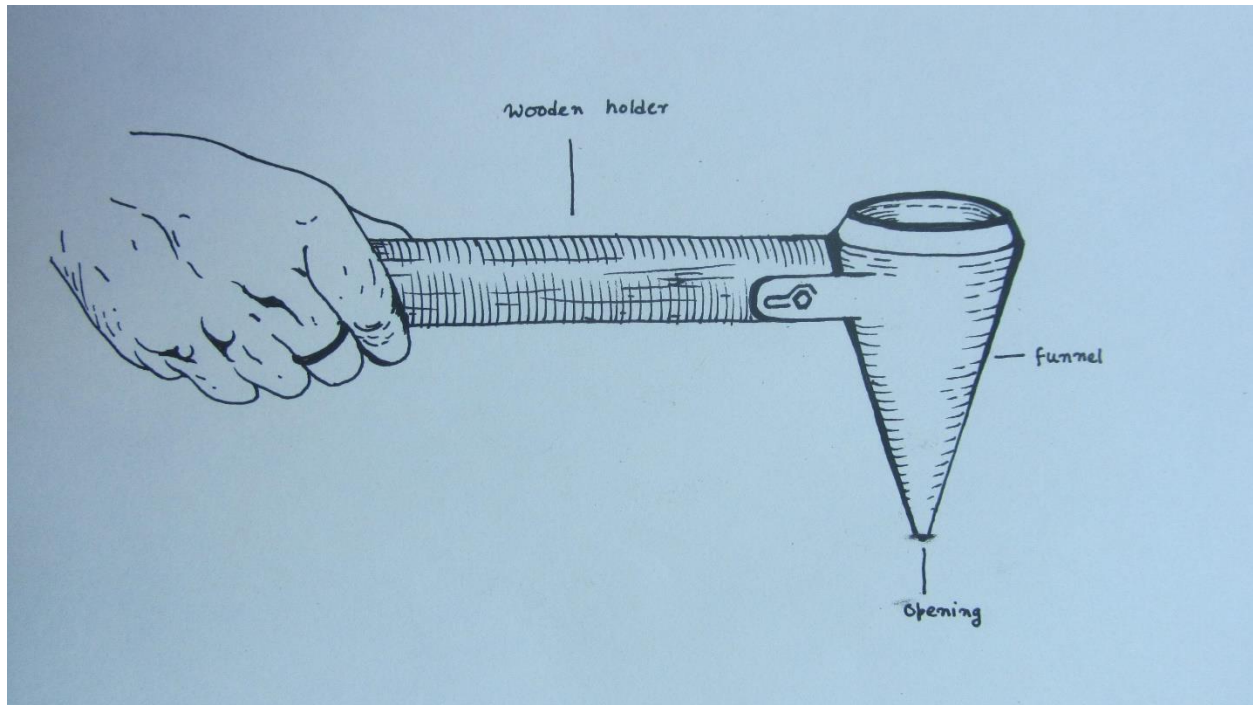


Figure 4.16: Drawing of the wax-resist tool made by Bhikshamayya Chary, Hyderabad. Rajarshi Sengupta, 2017.



Figure 4.17: Kalam for wax resist drawing, Weavers' Service Centre, Hyderabad 2017.



Figure 4.18: Mehrab pieces being dried at the workshop of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram. 2015.





Figure 4.19: 2.8.2 Cotton Hanging, Block-printed and dye-painted, mehrab of Machilipatnam, 275x175 cm, produced at the workshop of Mukkantieswarudu Rao, Polavaram. After *The Master Weavers: Festival of India in Britain*, Royal College of Art, (Bombay: Tata Trusts Ltd., 1982), 24.





Figure 5.1: A silk screen printing unit, Pedana, 2015.



Figure 5.2: Screen printed cotton being dried, Pedana, 2015.





Figure 5.3: Woman's jacket, Designed by Rajesh Pratap Singh, Delhi, Autumn/Winter 2010-11, Linen, digital print, L: 71.5cm, V&A, A/C no: IS.27-2012. After *The Fabric of India* (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), 219.

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