

KAAVI- The Regional Mural Art of Konkan SEEKING THE LOST INTANGIBLE LAYER OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPE (Murals found In Konkan Region- Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka)

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Abstract—Building craft and Art in India has been a long tradition of master masons and artisans who created its spectacular heritage. In one such specific area of attention is the Religious Architecture in India which was traditionally shaped by visual components of Iconography. In Konkan this medium of sculpture in stone as a Building Craft was replaced by sculpture in wood craft and distinctive mural painting called KAAVI especially in the Temples of Goa, parts of coastal Maharashtra and Karnataka. As a Building Art Kaavi developed in 16th century and thrived in the region during 1500 to 1775 AD.

It is a great example of Monochrome mastery of Indian artist particularly of the Konkan region which is presently in a state of extinct due to extensive temple renovation works handled at an insensitive level. There is an urgent need for preserving these murals in the form of tracings, photographs, video documentations including its Revival.

Therefore the aim of this research paper is to seek the lost Intangible layer of cultural Landscape of Kaavi Art and Technique and to Preserve and revive this Architectural art of etching on walls. If the objectives of understanding and exploring the revival of Kaavi Art Techniques and documentation of iconography/Designs, materials, techniques and Tools are taken up, it will go a long way to help in its revival.

Awareness about Kaavi within the communities by conducting workshops with the intention to rebuilding the artisans will also play an important role to sustain and retain this identity of the Konkan Region. Although the Konkan region is an extent of 720kms, it proposed to undertake field study (survey and mapping) of Kaavi art limited to a distance of 370 kms, of temples reflecting the Kaavi art in this research as no much archival research data is available.

1. BUILDING AS CRAFT AND ART

In India there has been a long tradition of master masons and artisans who created its spectacular heritage in building crafts. These traditional and vernacular skills were specific to regions

with these groups of artisans. In many regions this knowledge has been transferred to later generations and the skills are surviving and practiced still. In many areas due to various reasons some skills have died or are in an endangered state and needs to be documented and revived.

In one such specific area of attention is the Religious Architecture in India which was traditionally shaped by visual components of Iconography depicting Mythological Epics, its heroes and important events from its narratives. These visual components were practiced in the medium of sculpture as a Building craft and Paintings as a Building Art. Earliest medium of Sculpture was practiced exclusively and extensively in stone and eventually in wood.



Figure 1: Ramayana at Cave16, Kailasa Temple, Ellora.

Figure 1 shows the wall along the Staircase of Kailasa Temple, carved in stone depicting entire storyline of Ramayana Epic in a series of rows. The first row starts with Rama at an open city gate and till the capture of Sita and the war between Rama and Ravana where Rama defeats him in the 8th row, all this dating back to 8-9th century.

The ancient Hindu Temples were decorated with doors, ceilings and various fittings carved in teak and other woods. The doors of the temple of Somnath, on the north-west coast, were famed for their magnificence and were highly valued as sacred relics. Southern Indian wood carvers are known to work often with sandalwood, with design scenes or characters from Hindu mythology. Figure 2 shows wood building craft at Mallikarjuna Temple, Canacona, Goa in the form of Foliage, fruits, flowers, iconography on the ceiling, built during middle of 16th century. Wood craft is also on pillars and Rath.



Figure 2. Ceiling Wood carving on Mallikarjuna Temple

Figure 3 shows wood carving in the ceilings in floral patterns at Laksmi Narayan Mahamaya temple, Ankola.

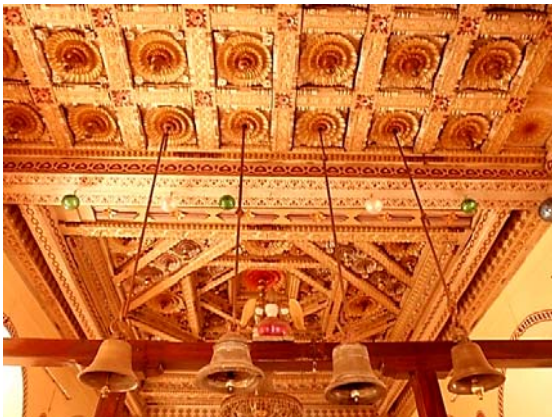


Figure 3: Wood carving on ceiling of Laksmi Narayan Mahamaya Temple, Ankola, Karnataka

In Konkan the medium of sculpture in stone as Building Craft was replaced by sculpture in wood craft and distinctive mural painting called KAAVI as a Building Art used in depicting mythological epics in religious structures. Kaavi art or Kaavi Kale is a form of a mural art exclusive to the coastal Konkan belt stretching from the coastal area of Maharashtra, Goa up to dakshin Karnataka which developed in 16th century and

thrived in the region during 1500 to 1775 AD. It is a great example of Monochrome mastery of Indian artist particularly of the Konkan region which is presently in a state of extinct due to extensive temple renovation works handled at an insensitive level. Marikamba Temple at Sirsi, built around 1688, is a temple dedicated to Goddess Durga almost 200kms from the Mallikarjun Temple in Canacona. The temple has very special paintings of murals in Kaavi art, an art form which was popular in the coastal Konkan region of Karnataka.

In this art form, now extinct, the top plastered layer of the mural was first dyed with a red pigment, which when removed revealed a lower white layer of plaster over which the murals were created.



Figure 4: Mythological Iconography Painting at Marikamba Temple, Sirsi

2. SCOPE OF STUDY

The Kaavi Art was practiced as Monochrome art, distinctive style of Mural art (painting/etching), by Indian artist in Konkan region especially in the Temples of Goa, parts of coastal Maharashtra and Karnataka which is presently in a state of decline due to lack of recognition and patronage. There is an urgent need for preserving these murals in the form of tracings, photographs, video documentations including Revival of this art technique which would help the Government or some private organization to engage in revival of this work on a war footing before it is too late. Private Structures and Temples have started destroying this art on their structures in the name of development. National and state books of Indian art do not even mention about this Kaavi art. There are no known living artists practicing this art anymore.

Therefore the aim is to study the scope of understanding and exploring the revival of Kaavi. This study can identify and document Kaavi in existing temples across Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Study is also needed about the characteristic features of materials which were used in making Kaavi paintings and the tools and technique adopted. This study can also identify skilled craftsman whose skills can be utilised to

attempt and propose a revival plan in one temple which can be a source of awareness for the communities.

3. EXPLORING KAAVI ART

Earliest reference of painter is an inscription in India in 200 BC in Ramgarh Cave mentioning a scene of dance. 'Chitrakaras'. Painter had a distinct place of honour with the Kings. Second were the trained artist who could draw pictures – 'Chitracharyas' and the third level were the 'Dindins'-inferior artist of mediocre taste employed for repairing old pictures. Paintings emerged in various stages- preparing the ground, drawing the sketch, filling of colours, 'Shadanga'-modelling and finally making the picture live-'Unmilana'. Painter's art was regarded in India as an offering to the Divine spirit. Thus most artist names were unknown. Wall paintings were favourite among painters and were known as 'bhittichitra'. Brick powder mixed with dry cow-dung finely ground added with water made into paste, rolled in stumps was used for sketching was the earliest mention in 'Silp' texts. The oldest text, 'Chitrasutra'-'Vishnudharmottara' of 6th Century mentions Icons of Gods, Chalukya dynasty of 12th Century mentions a chapter on Icons, 'Silparatna' of 16th Century mentions temporary decoration on floors, murals on walls and ceilings. 'Sarasvatisilpa' enumerates Icons or Murtis and their Iconography. The Iconography can be broadly divided as Nature, Gods and Events in the Kingdom. The popular cults owe its richness to the Sanskrit heritage and living traditions. Local deities, guardians, protectors (Grama Devatas) are at the heart of every Indian village life.

The Iconography, the art of making mural paintings, the local availability of laterite red mud all these put together worked out a perfect plan for Kaavi art especially in the Temples of Goa, parts of coastal Maharashtra and Karnataka to flourish in the Konkani coastal belt during the 16th-18th century. It is a great example of Monochrome mastery of Indian artist in the form of murals found in Konkani region also seen in the old houses (Hindu Palatial houses) in Goa, small shrines and rarely on the walls of Roman Catholic churches

4. HISTORY AND TECHNIQUES OF KAAVI

The murals which were found in south India and the Jesso works of Mysore were not found towards the west coast as the west coast receives highest rainfall prolonging for 4 months, with a hot and humid climate unsuitable for making mural paintings with colour pigments. The multi colored murals could not withstand this high content of moisture for long period of time and it would peel off within a few years. As a result of which the Konkani artist explored the art of making murals known as Kaavi, Kaavye, Kavikale or Kavikala using the alluvial soil which was region specific thus evolved the region specific art.

The term Kaav in Konkani refers to Indian red pigment which is obtained from red laterite soil rich in iron oxide, the only

colour used in this type of mural paintings. The colour red in Konkani Maharashtra is known as Kaav, in Konkani Goa it is known as Kaavi and in the Konkani Karnataka it is known as Kaavye or Uramunji. The designs of the murals were drawn and executed as reddish brown murals against the white wall surface of the lime plastered walls. The white lime was obtained by burning sea shells, washed sand from river beds with black jaggery (Kakvi) and allowed to ferment for two weeks which was the traditional plastering technique followed in Konkani region. The lime plastered wall when it is moist or wet the Kaavi pictures were etched or drawn, a buttery smooth mixture of lime and Kaav was smeared with a steel trowel, spreading it with the help of a wooden float for spreading. After an hour engraving work would commence. A trained Kaavi artist then would his artistic skills over it which would include etching simple geometrical designs like in Figure 5 with the help of compass and rulers.



Figure 5: Simple border designs adopted in Kaavi

For the main Iconography, the motifs were first drawn on paper perforated with pin holes and then traced on the walls dusted with dry lime. Kanthas also called Steel bodkins of different sizes and dimensions was the tool used for etching. During this process any fault in the design of the mural was corrected. One day was considered as drying duration after which the water was sprayed on the murals at four hour interval of a week. After each spray the murals were polished with smooth pebbles from river beds using the traditional oil as a protective film over it. This treatment would prevent the cracks and ensure long life of mural paintings along with the structure. These design and Iconography drawn and well executed reddish brown mural against the white sand blasted background would give an attractive monochrome painting contributing to this region specific art of Konkani.

There were no rules adopted for locating Kaavi pictures in particular as they were located on any part of the walls, pillars, barrel vaulted ceilings. Kaavi was seen on the internal as well as external facades, more prominently in the temple premises and also in the Goan churches but on a lesser scale. Rows of spirals, spades, semi-circles, curves and bands were used to decorate the large spaces and the in between space was covered with circular and geometrical designs and nature motifs. Simple geometrical shapes like circles, semi-circles, triangles, squares, hexagons and octagons were used in mosaic combination. No two designs were identical as seen in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Kaavi geometrical designs on the columns

All architectural components like plinth, wall facades, openings (doors, windows, ventilators), roofs (barrel vaulted ceilings) become a part of the murals. A broad border was made to run all along the murals which maybe either square or rectangular. The temple Vimana top was usually semi-circular in shape with a decorative crown on it. Two third of the wall was covered with the motifs which includes images of Gods and Goddesses and human figures. Screens, curtains, pendant lamps and globes occupy the remaining area. Plants, stems, leaves depicting the nature worship also forms part of the motifs. Motifs convey symbolic meaning than realistic for e.g. a group of oval petals represent a flower. If a stem is added to this it becomes a tree. At times leaves and fruits are also added. Animals, birds, human figures also add to the beauty of the murals. Some mostly seen motifs included parrots, dancing peacocks and flying pigeons whereas in the churches there are eagles. Animal motifs of two monkeys such that they look like

four, bull elephant heads are also some designs. Most themes were chosen depending on the main deity and the cult followed in the Temple like Vaishnavism (for e.g. narrations of Ramayana).

5. DOCUMENTING KAAVI IN KONKAN

For mapping the sites across the Konkana region a list of 15 temples were visited and the comparative study of the façade treatment done in the past and present was analysed, out of which 3 temples, one each respectively of each region, i.e. Konkana Maharashtra, Konkana Goa and Konkana Karnataka are discussed in this research limited to a stretch of 370 kms distance, from Sindhudurg in Maharashtra till Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka. The Konkana region otherwise is a stretch of 720 kms as mentioned earlier. Temples discussed are;

1. Shri, Mauli Devasthan, Asaniye, Dodamarg, Sawantwadi, Maharashtra
2. Vijayadurga Temple, Keri, Ponda Taluka, Goa
3. Marikamba Temple, Sirsi, Uttara Kannada, Karnataka.



Figure 7. Shri. Mauli Devasthan, Asaniye

Table 2 FACADE TREATMENT		SHRI. MAULI DEVASTHAN, ASANIYE, DODAMARG, SAWANTWADI, MAHARASHTRA.	
<p>1. FACADE:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>	<p>2. WALL:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>	<p>3. CEILING:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>	<p>4. SCREENS:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>
<p>5. LEAVES:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>	<p>6. FLOWERS:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>	<p>7. ANIMALS:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>	<p>8. HUMAN FIGURES:</p> <p>A/E/N has applied 2018, 2019, 2020</p>

Figure 8. Comparative analysis of Facade, Asaniye Shri, Mauli Devasthan temple as in Figure 7 and 8, at Asaniye, is about

200- 300 years old dedicated to Goddess Maishasura Mardini incarnation of Durga, worshipped as Mauli Devi. The temple belongs to the tribal community. The spatial arrangement of temple spaces, reflect a typical vernacular Konkani typology having enclosed Garbhagriha and outdoor Sabhamandapa space for community get together, with exclusive sloping pitch roof canopies. Garbhagriha space has exclusive Kaavi paintings, on internal as well as external wall façade, reflecting indigenous Kaavi art of Konkani Maharashtra.



Figure 9. Vijayadurga Temple, Keri, Ponda



Figure 10. Comparative analysis of Facade, Keri

Vijayadurga Temple, Keri, Ponda, is dedicated to Goddess Maishasura Mardini incarnation of Durga, worshipped as Sri Vijayadurga. It's the family deity of most of Brahmin community. All the temples in the Portuguese old Conquest were destroyed between 1560 to 1570, during the same time in the year 1567 the temple got shifted to Ponda Taluka (then known as Antruz Mahal) at village Keri from its original location at Mormugao taluka in village Sancoale (then known as Shankhvali) The spatial arrangement reflect a typical vernacular Konkani Goan typology very rich and spacious with enclosed Garbhagriha, Sabhamandapa on either sides of Upmandapa, along with semi open Mukhamandapa that transitions the main temple with the Rangamandapa,

crafted for community get together with exclusive sloping pitched roof canopies with Vimana highlighting the dome.

This is the only grand scale surviving temple of Ponda where the indigenous Kaavi art of Konkani Goa is retained and preserved as seen in Figure 9 and 10.



Figure 11. Marikamba Temple, Sirsi



Figure 12. Comparative analysis of Facade, Sirsi

At a distance of 83 kilometres towards the east of Gokarna this 16th century built Sri. Marikamba Temple is located at a tranquil town Sirsi, a small hill station in Karnataka dedicated to Goddess Maishasura Mardini incarnation of Durga, multi-armed (eight shoulders), riding a tiger and killing a demon, worshipped as Sri Marikamba. Temple enshrines a wooden deity, 7-foot-tall (2.1 m) image. It is believed that it was retrieved from a pond on the road to Hanagal, Sirsi and was also known as Kalyanapattana during the Sonda Dynasty. It is also known as Doddamma Temple, with "Doddamma" denoting the "elder sister" of all Mariammas in Karnataka. It is an eight-armed image of Durga, also known by the names Renuka and Yellamma with analysis as in Figure 11 & 12.

6. ATTEMPT OF REVIVAL

Charter of the Built Vernacular Heritage (1999), ratified by the ICOMOS 12th General Assembly, in Mexico, October 1999 states the guidelines in practice on Traditional building systems as follows:

The continuity of traditional building systems and craft skills associated with the vernacular is fundamental for vernacular expression and essential for the repair and restoration of these structures. Such skills should be retained, recorded and passed on to new generations of craftsmen and builders in education and training. For any art or craft to survive, it should be in practice, otherwise it leads to its own death. In the case of Kaavi, the migrant artists from Goa, who got settled in coastal Karnataka, were living but nobody utilized their services till 1997. At present there are no known living artists practicing this art anymore. Therefore the strategy is to map Kaavi region wise as listed earlier, then identify and map the artist communities of similar nature and lastly establish the Building Materials and Construction Techniques. The places identified and visited for mapping artist communities of similar nature are Sawantwadi, Orissa- Interview of a Pattachitra artist at the Lokutsav festival in Goa and the Goan local Chittari artist community.

Sawantwadi is well known for its lacquer ware, an art form that was brought to the attention of the public by Queen Bhonsle Satwasheela Rani Devi. Local artisans employed in the palace have proved instrumental in the production of lacquer ware furniture, chess sets, board games, candlesticks, fruits, vegetables and dolls. Ganjifa art is believed to have been passed on by some Telugu Brahmins to the Chittari, who were a class of artist in Sawantwadi alongwith introducing Dashavatara Ganjifa cards which had intricate designs of 10 incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Ganjifa art had almost vanished but in 1971 the Bhonsle Royal family revived it with the help of 80 years Pundalik Chitari the only artist who is said to have known Dashavatara Ganjifa art at that time. These cards come in variety of size ranging from 3 cms to 10 cms diameter or shapes which are painted on cartilage paper. Presently after the death of the Sawantwadi Queen recently only five Ganjifa artist are surviving in Sawantwadi. Dashavatara painting of Ganjifa art has similarity with Dashavatara mural paintings of Kaavi iconography in the Konkan region although the material medium is different. Pattachitra art form is known for its intricate details as well as mythological narratives and folktales inscribed in it. Pattachitra is one of the ancient artworks of Odisha. The Goan Chittari are the artisan families migrated from Kumta and Sirsi and settled in a village by name Cuncolim in Goa which are having the expertise of making the Lacquer paintings on traditional wooden furniture (called 'Patt' in Konkani) which was used for sitting purpose. This furniture is still used during the festival time of Chaturthi and marriage ceremonies of Hindus.

Kaavi is basically the visual graphics which was done on the white lime plastered wall as an indigenous protecting coat done on the wall surface. Materials identified for its preparation are Lime, Sand, Pozzolons, (Jaggery, Rice water, Vegetable mix, Bel fruits), Natural pigments (red colour came from soil rich in oxide) alluvial laterite soil, available in Konkan belt and water. All the resources required for the revival of Kaavi including mapping, drawings (Tracings), tools (Kanthas), techniques and craftsmanship as shown in Figure 13, are studied in detail in my Research study and only its revival is yet to be explored and executed.



Figure 13. Ganjifa, Pattachitra, Kanthas, Tracing documentation

7. REGION WISE FINDINGS

Region wise findings characterise a few points which needs to be noted before general conclusions are drawn. In Konkan Maharashtra, the temples which have retained and those which are surviving are of a smaller scale compared to that of Goa and Karnataka. The main reason could be that the Jirmodhara or Restoration/ Reconstruction have not yet happened. Hence the indigenous art form is still intact although the Iconography which reflects Vaishnavite cult is crude in nature with more emphasis given on the pictorial part rather than the sharp artistic images. While the other regions of Goa and Karnataka had it in more refined form. Present generation is not sensitive to the indigenous material usage and the craftsmanship followed in the past. The temple facades at present are painted in new medium, although the visual sense of colors/ Iconography in Kaavi is retained.

In Konkan Goa, the temples of Goa represent a very grand vernacular scale compared to Maharashtra. Goa was the origin of Kaavi Iconography, which influenced Konkan Karnataka as fallout. It has more intricate geometrical, nature motifs and mythological narrations on the wall and on the barrel vaulted roof ceilings. Presently no trace of it is available as the main Iconography depicting mythological narrations has totally vanished except some very few temples where sensitive preservation and restoration is worked out. Renovation and Reconstruction of Temples has been a major factor for this decline and in Goa almost all the temples have already gone

under renovation leaving no trace and scope except one or two surviving in the indigenous form. Whatever is restored has been done in a new medium of acrylic and synthetic paints. A few which are remaining and have not yet gone for major Renovation/ Reconstruction and need sensitive and careful restoration hence the awareness programs should be conducted, which would help to restore, the traditional indigenous art, in order to safeguard the unique identity, and architecture built character of the place. In one of the church campuses at Old Goa, one chapel has intricate Kaavi which reflect the western influence of Indo-Portuguese culture depicting western designs and patterns which is now the only evidence remaining, hence the documentation has to be done of the same to save the drawing records for Kaavi of Indo-Portuguese Iconography.

In Konkan Karnataka, the temples of Karnataka in the town of Ankola, Uttara Kannada district are the migrated temples from Goa during the 15th – 16th century which makes it evident that the art travelled from Goa to Karnataka along with the artisans and craftsmanship during the Portuguese regime in Goa then. The Kaavi Iconography especially the narrations of mythological stories are more elaborate and intricate compared to Goa and Maharashtra although they are restored in the new medium. Hence for the revival attempts of Kaavi Iconography especially the intricate paintings related to mythological narrations needs to be documented. The temple at Sirsi is a vantage point where the exclusive Kaavi art can be witnessed of past intangible heritage.

8. CONCLUSION

Although the Kaavi was the Monochrome mastery to Indian Murals specific to Konkan region, it did not survive due to many reasons. Foremost discontinuity in traditional building practices which was the amalgamation of eco-friendly and sustainable materials used. These practices created vernacular artist and involved community participation which was the essence of cultural intangible heritage making it an integral part of people's life style. The processes adopted were time consuming but it lasted for more than 300 years unlike the new mediums of paintings, but the ease of availability of new mediums took over as a major threat. As the application was water resistant it was effectively used as a protective coat in treating the internal as well as the external facades during the past, but this involved time, skilled workers and cost.

Eventually as time passed due to the discontinuity of practices, the generation which had this knowledge system passed away leaving no trace of revival attempts. The temples that went under renovations and restorations could not restore as there are no known living artist practicing this art anymore which was the major factor for its decline.

Findings on the basis of history establishes that all temples and churches which are surviving or which have gone under renovation and restoration were all built within the time frame

of 16th century till 19th century which makes it evident that this art flourished in that period. Due to lack of recognition and patronage Kaavi art is on the verge of becoming extinct. Hence Revival of the Kaavi art is the only way out and its implementation has to be done or retained in indigenous medium only.

Some ways of achieving this Kaavi art revival are listed here. Conducting awareness programs, as almost all the temples of Konkan Region comes under the temple private ownership (Temple Trust), hence the awareness programs should be conducted, which would revive the traditional indigenous practices which in turn will help to retain the built character and identity of the place. Training new craftsmen with the help of the existing craftsmen surviving in the similar medium of paintings as mentioned in earlier topic like Ganjifa artist, Lacquer artist, Pattachitra artist who can be utilised in working on the Iconography in Kaavi. The tools and techniques are to be revived. The designs have to be data based and digitised for future references. Streamline the Vernacular Heritage By-laws at the district level for the protection of this type of intangible cultural resources.

Otherwise it will be loss forever to regional heritage.

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- [12] This study is presented as research study for the Final year Masters in Architectural Conservation program at the Sinhgad college, Pune, SCOA with the encouragement of Dr. Vaishali Latkar, HOD, Dept of M.Arch(Cons)