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Pallavi Chamarty

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Kalamkari and Chintz: A post-colonial reassessment of entangled textile histories

Pallavi Chamarty[a]

[a]University of the Arts London, London, United Kingdom. p.chamarty@fashion.arts.ac.uk

Abstract

Traditionally researched craft and textile histories have often been criticised for being uncritical. Research in the field of Indian crafts has been preoccupied with object-led studies of craft techniques. The popular imagination buys into the mythologies depicted and the 'discourse of patronage, kings, empresses, saints and a "golden" age of craft work'. This paper reassesses a similarly uncritical history of the South Indian textile craft Kalamkari by foregrounding the artisan's perspective in this craft's narrative. Keystone texts on Kalamkari and chintz are read critically, using a postcolonial lens to reject the academic tradition of normalising colonial encroachments on traditional knowledge and underrepresenting the artisan's capacity for artistry and creativity. While artisans have been denied learning resources and systemically excluded from all forms of discursive place-making in cultural studies, such as in literature, galleries, museums and academia, findings from this critical reading are integrated with interview responses from contemporary Kalamkari artisans. This enables the exploration of their material and cultural mediations and attitudes towards community, labour, creativity and ownership. By studying the impact of coloniality on Indian craft and attempting to bridge the gap between the theory and practice of Kalamkari, this paper hopes to encourage more craft narratives that are critical of craft's place as a communal, creative practice and industry within today's global capitalist fashion system.

Keywords: Chintz, Kalamkari, Craft, Artisan, Colonialism, Coloniality, Decolonisation

Introduction

The diversity of textile crafts in India has been internationally acclaimed for centuries, and Indian artisans have 'enjoyed pre-eminence' since before the mediaeval era (Irwin & Brett, 1970). One such craft is a block printing craft known as Kalamkari, which uses complicated and layered natural dyeing techniques to decorate fabrics. It has been practised since the early mediaeval era on the southeast Indian Coromandel coast. Initially, it was made to aid religious and mythological storytelling (see Image 1) (Von Wyss-Giacosa, 2018, p. 35). Cloth made on the Coromandel coast was also exported to various Southeast Asian courts (Guy, 2013, p. 13; Guy, 2016) in the early mediaeval period. Islamic art principles later heavily influenced this craft through patronage from the Mughal courts of mediaeval India (see Image 2) (Divakala & Muthian, 2017, p. 82). By the mid-17th and early 18th centuries, painted cotton from West India and the Coromandel coast, including chintz, was being exported to Europe and its various colonies.

Chintz is a textile pattern broadly referring to colourful florals painted or printed on lightly coloured cotton or linen fabric. The hybrid floral and faunal motifs characteristic of chintz were created on the Coromandel coast to suit European sensibilities (see Image 3). Chintz's many declines and resurgences in this period have been studied in traditional textile histories to track its aesthetic evolution, implications for the cotton trade and influence on

precolonial and colonial manufacturing policies (Crill, 2008; Guy, 2013; Irwin & Brett, 1970). This has created heavy discursive associations of chintz being an 'English floral' in contemporary imagination and design practice.

On the other hand, the indigenous Indian Kalamkari has been studied by Indian scholars as an ancient craft tradition or an entirely modern craft practice, weakening any discursive connections between its history and present. These written works, heavily influenced by Eurocentric and modernist methodologies, display a preoccupation with newness in design (Metcalf, 2007, p. 14). In the case of craft literature, this informs the notion that artisans are asynchronous with modernity (DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber, 2016, p. 83). The bodily engagement and social conditions of craft-making are also under-researched in traditional craft literature.

Drawing upon postcolonial theory and contemporary craft research, this paper explores emic perspectives on how crafts and their histories can be understood, researched and preserved, which Western paradigms have not considered thus far. By doing so, this paper '... is not an *alternative* account of this already historicised world, but a deliberate attempt to pulverise the matrix of history, to disavow what was historicised by making repressed potentialities present again ...' (Azoulay, 2019, p. 207).

Image 1: Kalamkari hanging in the didactic Hindu idiom, c. late-19th to early-20th century. © The Trustees of the British Museum. (Trustees of the British Museum, n.d.).

Image 2: Kalamkari Cover, c. 1802-1803 under the Islamic idiom. (Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d., a).

Image 3: Chintz Hanging, c. first quarter of the 18th century. (Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d., b).

Literature review

This research focuses on chintz, a colonial commodity with roots in the Indian Kalamkari craft tradition. Seminal texts in chintz scholarship, such as Irwin and Brett's *Origins of Chintz* (1970) and Chishti, Jain and Singh's *Tradition and Beyond: Handcrafted Indian Textiles* (2000), among others, provide valuable historical context to chintz's manufacture. However, as with other unpolitical craft histories, these texts do not thoroughly critique colonialism's impact on artisans and craft production. They fail to account for 'views "from below"' (Mignolo, 2002, as cited in Sengupta, 2019, p. 13). This research challenges these limitations of traditionally narrated craft histories and highlights the power hierarchies embedded in them by engaging with postcolonial theory.

Inspired by postcolonial theory from authors like Azoulay, Spivak and Bhabha, this paper argues against the marginalisation of the artisan's voice and knowledge in written craft histories. In considering other traditional knowledge in craft practice, Spivak's notion of subjugated knowledge and Bhabha's theory of stereotypes and mimicry highlight the positions from which these suppressed subjectivities may be articulated. Azoulay's methodology empowered me to reject existing writings' colonial and imperial rhetoric, which depended on imperial tools to capture, measure, categorise and periodise the world.

Contemporary and interdisciplinary research into chintz and Kalamkari offers more critical insights into the nature of chintz manufacture and trade before and during India's colonisation by the British. Some key works that informed this paper were Rajarshi Sengupta's (2019) research into and methodologies for uncovering artisanal agency on the ancient Coromandel coast and Tirthankar Roy's (2021) investigation into the handloom industry in colonial India. Other 21st-century enquiries into the nature of craftwork, such as works by Mike Press (2008) and Richard Sennett (2008), offer valuable perspectives on the embodied knowledge and cognitive aspects of craftwork. However, the postmodern positioning of these works and their emphasis on studying the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the craft sector are not directly relevant to this paper.

This paper thus uses interdisciplinary scholarship to challenge the reductionist tendencies of Eurocentric literature, especially regarding artisans from the global South. In doing so, I hope to explore:

a. How might the historical record of Kalamkari have changed if its makers had been considered subjects of knowledge in fashion-craft-textile literature?
b. How have these shifted subject statuses impacted the conservation and perpetuation of craft in postcolonial contexts?

Methodology

This research explored the implications of postcolonial theory for craft, textile and fashion literature and how these works treat producers and cultural 'others' in the fashion system. Since postcolonial theory emphasises specificity in knowledge production (Ashcroft et al., 1989; Reiter, 2018; Said, 1978), my positionality as a Telugu-speaking South Indian woman with experience of working with Kalamkari artisans is relevant. The postcolonial lens as a cultural researcher further contextualised my experiential knowledge as a designer. Here, 'postcolonial' is used as a 'space-clearing gesture' (Appiah, 1992, pp. 240-241), and can be used to revisit and re-present cultural exchange during colonisation.

Qualitative research tools like critical discourse analysis were used to explore the power hierarchies inscribed in seminal texts about chintz and Kalamkari. As Jörgensen and Phillips describe in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (2002), texts are produced and consumed through discursive practices. Discourse analysis as a methodology helps explore how these texts enable the 'constitution of the social world including social identities and social relations' (Jörgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 61). The impact of fashion-craft-textile literature on the space occupied by artisans and their 'subjugated knowledge' (Spivak, 1993, p. 76) in the contemporary fashion system is explored in this paper.

To emphasise artisanal subjectivity, findings from secondary research were contextualised with interviews conducted with contemporary Kalamkari artisans. Although academic contexts like colonialism and coloniality

seemed irrelevant or alien to the artisans interviewed, questions were framed in accessible ways to generate descriptive answers. These focused on 'Western' or academic logic of categorisation, archiving and ascribing intellectual ownership, as well as Eurocentric ways of researching design cognition and material sensitivity in the existing literature.

Three artisans were interviewed - a block printer, a hand painter and one block maker - each with decades of experience in Kalamkari. They are each referred to by their first name, followed by the Telugu honorific *Gaaru*, which precedes emic craft literature (Divakala & Muthian, 2017; Sengupta, 2019). I contacted one block printer through a professional and personal connection, and he referred my other participants. The interviews were conducted in Telugu. I translated and transcribed exact quotes and noted down general discussions and emergent themes during the interview. These responses were encoded and thematically analysed within the methodological framework and postcolonial theories underpinning this paper. The difference in class and social positions between the researcher and artisans was mediated by familiarity with one of the artisans, the craft clusters and knowing the Telugu language and culture to produce valid and reliable knowledge.

Reviewing Kalamkari with artisanal subjectivity

Discourses about crafts and artisans have frequently upheld colonial epistemic frameworks that appropriated the artisan's body, labour, knowledge and creative production. The historiography of these texts has also enforced a form of 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1993, p. 82) on craft communities of previously colonised countries. The violence of these texts lies in the fact that they create a perspective of artisans being 'unmodern' (DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber, 2016, p. 83) and 'simple, weak, traditional and rural' (Roy, 2021, p. 157), subjugating their knowledge systems and ruling entire communities' ways as unfit in the modern world. On the other hand, artisans do not speak of craft and tradition self-consciously (DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber, 2016, p. 90). Sengupta identifies through reading Irwin and Brett (1970) that 'there are 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.' (2019, p. 4). Quoting archaeologist Uzma Rizvi, Sengupta explains that the artisan's subjectivity is inscribed in their psycho-somatic engagement with their craft (Rizvi, 2015, cited in Sengupta, 2019, p. 36).

This section textualises the artisan's material and cultural engagements while practising Kalamkari and re-visions the history of Kalamkari by attempting to bridge the gap between theory and practice. As Azoulay says, quoting Arendt, these engagements or activities can be considered 'an archive of the *vita activa*' (Arendt, 1958, cited in Azoulay, 2019, p. 218). By foregrounding these engagements, this section revises part of the history of this craft by looking beyond the imperial logic of its historiography.

Material mediation in Kalamkari and chintz

In existing written histories, the distinction between painted and printed cotton is seen as 'an essential and radical one - mainly to design students' (Irwin & Brett, 1970, p.7). Block-printed chintzes were considered less artistic or of lower quality in these works. However, the co-production of both on the Coromandel coast, both historically and today, suggests that there was no fundamental ideological or geographical segregation of craft communities who hand painted and hand block printed their textiles. While contemporary artisans interviewed for this paper saw that hand-painting allows for more creativity, employs more artisans per piece and is a more intentional, effective process, block printing allows for more repeatability of designs, which is helpful for bulk production.

However, they emphasised the use of natural dyes over aniline and chemical dyes as central to the Kalamkari process and identity. Hence, if an ideological split in Kalamkari textile-making were dictated from an artisanal subject position, it would more likely be between natural and chemical dyes.

Material sensitivity during the block printing process is another under-textualised aspect in written works. They all commend the skilled craftsmanship required to execute fine line work in even block-printed chintzes popular in the 1800s. However, these written works do not cover how this fineness is achieved or discuss artisanal sensitivity to material and embodied knowledge. To explain how outline, filling and background blocks are printed, Nagendra Gaaru elucidated the block printer's technique of using multiple layers of cloth in the dye tray to control how much dye the block takes up. Lesser amounts of dye are needed to print minute details, meaning more layers of cloth are used in the dye tray to intercept excess dye and vice versa. While the act of block printing can seem hypnotically repetitive, the printer, in fact, constantly displays *kramasiksha* or discipline while printing. This discipline is needed to engage with and mediate materials in the craft process. While the results of this labour, block print designs, have been widely imitated since the Great Exhibition of 1886 (Dewan, 2019), this strenuous and disciplined bodily engagement in crafts was not profoundly studied in craft scholarship until recently. Sennet, in his book *The Craftsman* (2008), makes a compelling case for the deep and complicated relationship between physical movements of the body and the hand and the cognitive processes that drive and control it, as well as the reciprocity between body and mind, which creates successful artisanal decisions (Sennett, 2008, p. 152).

Cultural mediations and artisanal decision-making

In the lead-up to the popularity of chintz, artisans were producing textiles in religious contexts for Hindus and Muslims, as well as for trade with non-European markets. Despite this demonstrable willingness to accept newness in Kalamkari practice, leading to the popularisation of the anglicised chintz, traditional scholarship persists in believing that crafts are reluctant to change. This may be explained through Bhabha's theorisation of a 'stereotype'. In Bhabha's postcolonial theory, stereotypes are a 'discursive strategy' (2004, p. 94) that seek to manage the image of the cultural other. To do so, they 'exaggerate difference of the other, while nevertheless attempting to produce them as a stable, fully knowable object' (Hook, 2005, p. 1). Bhabha informs us of the anxious repetition of the stereotype to achieve stability or 'fixity' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 94). In the fashion industry and scholarship, artisans are considered cultural 'others', and this ideological position given to them is maintained through the anxious repetition of the rhetoric of the '"unmodern" maker' always in need of protection, patronage and charity (DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber, 2016, pp. 82-84). The interdependent relationship between them and designers 'has to be continually dismissed as insignificant and pushed into invisibility' to ensure 'value creation, but also for reproduction of firm hierarchy' (Kuldova, 2016, p. 76).

By activating stereotypical narrative tropes in speaking of artisans, historical and contemporary artisans' ability to mimic European taste successfully enough to create the globally popular chintz is erased and buried in existing written literature (Irwin & Brett, 1970). 'Mimic' here is used in Bhabha's sense of the word as a 'sign of double articulation' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 122), wherein painting techniques and line qualities were informed by South Indian and Mughal artistic traditions to create motifs for a European market. Following Sengupta's (2019) methodology, contemporary attitudes towards cultural newness can be understood and projected onto the past. Therefore, the artisans were asked how they approach 'new' designs that Kalamkari has not yet adopted. Gangadhar Gaaru, an eminent Kalamkari block maker, echoed all the artisans' sentiments on experimentation and called it his *dharmam* to attempt an adaptation, no matter how unfamiliar the source material may be.

Dharmam translates to a religious or moral duty. Mediating unfamiliar visual cultures by adapting new motifs is not as simple as drawing and making new blocks. It involves a series of conversations between the artisans, reference drawings, wood blocks, tools and clients. Artisans must also consider the scale and proportions of the motif, as well as the colours to be used. These attitudes and strategies to mediate unfamiliarity were essential in negotiating between cultures, media and multifaceted material processes to produce chintz, the first global textile trend (Guy, 2013, p. 27). Though chintz is considered an English textile, Kalamkari artisan Bhaskar Gaaru commented, "The British did not create anything. We already knew about natural dyes and got our ideas for designs from our temples. If anyone ever taught us anything, the Mughals started block printing in Machilipatnam. The British only came and said, 'These designs are nice; can you print them on our cloth?'"

Artisanship and enterprise

The discursive erasure of innovation and skill in the crafts and of enterprising, problem-solving artisans creates an oversimplified position for crafts in the fight against industrialisation and capitalism (DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber, 2016; Press, 2008). As Metcalf (2007) observes, 'Most writing in the field [of craft] borrows ideas uncritically from painting and sculpture, without questioning how appropriate they are to a craft object' (p. 7). This 'paucity of thinking and writing on craft has led to a vacuum of both debate and standards' (Metcalf, 2007, p. 7). Furthermore, the nascent craft industry of post-independence India was governed by a protectionist ideology which originated in the nationalist fight against the supposed decline of crafts due to colonialism and foreign trade (Roy, 2021; Tarlo, 1996). In contemporary India, this has massively impaired historical and contemporary artisans' image and ability to be a community-based and enterprising capitalist.

Roy introduces the concept of an 'artisan-capitalist' (Roy, 2021) who is defined by their '... rootedness in textiles, preference for the non-corporate organisation, reliance on informal finance, and reliance on the community in making contracts and arranging collaborations' (p. 17). The artisan possesses tacit knowledge, which 'holds the key to success' (Press, 2008, p. 263) in craft practice in pre- and post-industrial contexts. For instance, the commercial success of chintz was only brought on by artisans responding to countless 'pattern books, designs, musters and sample cloths' (Guy, 2013, p. 23). As such, alternative reasons for the 'sameness' of chintzes across centuries, due to which authors like Irwin and Brett (1970) perceived artisans as lacking innovation, have not been adequately explored. From the perspective of an artisan entrepreneur, this may have been a function of the enormous order quantities and extended lead times of the global chintz trade rather than a shortcoming of the maker's creative faculties. Considering that these chintzes travelled long distances over months, and imagery was not commonly created or widely circulated, it is possible that artisans had to curb creative spontaneity and create chintz patterns that were predictable, with only minute innovations, to ensure that their clients were satisfied with the type and quality of fabrics they received from India.

Rather than approaching artisanship through rigid and politicised ideologies, emphasising their problem-solving and entrepreneurial tendencies can prompt a deeper study into the areas of progression available to artisans. Avenues to empower self-employment, create democratic access to contemporary resources and technology and engage in a fulfilling manner with their crafts and communities can also be developed through such study.

Ownership and craft communities

Attitudes towards creative ownership also differ between Western theory and praxis and Kalamkari practice in South India. The ability and practice of signing an artwork to credit the piece back to the artist is a given in the Eurocentric artistic sphere, but community-based artisans seldom sign their work. In the context of extant

chintzes, there are scholarly preoccupations with certain marks left on chintzes, including stamps, seals and other inscriptions (Irwin & Brett, 1970, p. 11-12), which might signify the maker's identity. However, there is no definitive evidence regarding who left these marks, why or if these were even meant to signify individual artistic ownership (Irwin & Brett, 1970).

However, interviews with contemporary artisans signify that these practitioners do not share this preoccupation. Artisans interviewed for this paper did not see a need to sign their works. When asked about creative ownership, owning their artworks readably seemed too alien a worldview even to be a comprehensible question. Considering the collaborative nature of the work, involving designers, block-makers, dyers and printers, they acknowledged that there would be no fair way to credit everyone and did not feel any resentment or other negative feelings towards their artworks not being traceable directly back to them. They believed credit and further opportunities would accrue if the broader market liked their work.

Additionally, artisans who supply Kalamkari to other businesses that make it into apparel or home furnishings are more restricted from leaving any ownership trace. Signing the product itself would damage it in the eyes of buyers, who want pristine fabrics that they may put their own brand's labels on. The lack of naming enables commodification and circulation of crafts as goods, unlike singular artworks defined by the artist's name.

This section has highlighted edits, omissions and revisions that could be made to the written histories of Kalamkari, which centre on artisans as subjects in craft research instead of perpetually appropriating their productions. Discussing alternative or subjugated forms of material, cultural and entrepreneurial engagements also textualises their 'nonacademic' and 'nonprofessional' (Azoulay, 2019, p. 231) experiences as viable sources of knowledge in postcolonial craft literature.

Re-entering the preservation of craft history

This section explores how broader craft histories can be more authentically preserved in a postcolonial context, furthering the previous section's discussion of artisanal subjectivity in craft research. This involves considering more suitable ways of preserving craft history and recommending highlighting artisanal subjectivity in the preservation and communication of craft histories.

Empowering learning

Somatic and material involvement in craft suggests that in addition to the textualisation and archiving that craft scholars have relied on so far, the perpetual practice of craft or embodied preservation may be a pivotal way to preserve and propagate traditional knowledge (Sengupta, 2019, p. 6). As intangible cultural assets, the craft can be 'discovered and kept alive … not by academic study, but by being 'lived' and moulded through use' (Patankar, 1984, as cited in Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 119). Considering the multitudes of aesthetically and functionally similar crafts that have been localised and practised in various regions in India, educator Maulshree Sinha proposed 'artisan forums' as a tool for inter-communal knowledge exchange. Based on her observation of the technical improvements resulting from interactions between potters from distinct craft cultures in Kutch (Gujarat) and Delhi, Sinha further ideated these forums by drawing upon Etienne Wenger's *Communities of Practice* (1999). Citing Wenger, Sinha posits that inter-communal interactions could enable artisans with comparable histories and techniques to come together and create solutions for each other's needs (Sinha, 2019, p. 1).

My research shows that knowledge has already been lost from individual artisans and communities, which may be regained through interactive knowledge exchange between craft communities. For instance, Irwin and Brett (1970, p. 11) mention the gilding of chintz as a value-adding technique in the late 18th and 19th centuries. While this technique has since disappeared from chintz and Kalamkari practice, one of my interviewees mentioned an interaction with an artisan from Jaipur, from whom he learned that West Indian artisans could print with gold by using a special gum on fabric. In today's craft practice, this process could refer to gold-leaf printing or *khari* printing, which is still prevalent in West India. A more sustained and purposeful interaction between West and South Indian artisans who practise these distinct crafts could help both communities recreate a technique and visual aesthetic that is considered lost.

So far in contemporary history, these interactions have been brokered by administrative or institutional actors like state governments, ministries and design institutions. Sinha (2019) urges the creation of collaborative platforms where artisans may interact with each other without the 'interpretive and selective lens of organisations' (p. 10). Sinha also hypothesises that digital technology can be leveraged to enable these cross-cultural exchanges without intermediaries. Digital technology also presents opportunities to preserve and build upon traditional techniques, provided it is applied thoughtfully. In his interview, Bhaskar Gaaru also concurred that technology may connect artisans and partially retrieve lost Kalamkari-making processes. He said, "I cannot learn what was taught hundreds of years ago, but maybe I can copy it with technology. If I could still use natural dyes in that process, I would still feel like this is Kalamkari, even if I made it with the help of technology."

Craft knowledge can be preserved through research and literature, but it must also be perpetuated through embodied practice by artisans with democratic access to contemporary resources. This preservation mode also maintains artisanal subjectivity by putting artisans at the forefront of instituting artisanal knowledge exchange.

Textile archives and Sampada

In addition to emphasising the role of the artisan in the preservation and perpetuation of artisanal knowledge, it is also vital to reconsider how traditional approaches to the preservation and communication of history, such as by archives and museums, value, capture and communicate craft histories. Proposing a universal systemic overhaul of the archival practices and processes goes against my postcolonial position by being prescriptive. However, in this section, I would like to expand on how artisans archive their histories. In doing so, I will also highlight some critical distinctions in how traditional academic archives, galleries and museums are conceived and realised by institutions, as opposed to the creation and use of a practitioner's or artisan's archive.

The archiving and exhibition of Indian handicrafts have received scholarly attention since at least the mid-20th century (Sengupta, 2019). As Sengupta (2019, p. 25) highlights, landmark exhibitions like the *Textiles and Ornamental Art from India* exhibition in New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the establishment of museums like the Calico Museum of Textiles in textile hubs like Ahmedabad have made information about Indian crafts available to researchers and the public. The wealthiest and most prestigious archives based in the West are often alienated from artisans and practitioners of the global South and do not consider artisanal subjectivity in their archiving or exhibiting procedures.

In stark contrast is the archive that Kalamkari makers maintain for themselves. For the block print Kalamkari artisans I interviewed, the physical archival space is no more than scores of blocks stored along the walls in their work shed, each a composite of a larger design. This archival space's history of the craft's aesthetics is preserved

as decades-old blocks. However, only one or two artisans in the workshop know the specific layout of block storage, where allover trellis-like patterns, borders or standalone *butti* motifs are present. Artisans refresh their memory of this crowded, confusing space by constantly engaging with the block store to retrieve blocks for use or cleaning them to prevent termite infestations. In other words, the knowledge from this space can only be accessed when the archive is activated through an artisan's mind and body. However, the primary use of these blocks is textile printing, not meaning construction, and thus, none of the artisans interviewed considered exerting a 'logic' on this space to make it more commonly 'readable'.

One of the most interesting materialised artisan archives is what Gangadhar Gaaru calls his *sampada* in his interviews for Sengupta's (2019, p. 118) doctoral research and my study in this paper. *Sampada* is a Telugu word for material wealth. In this context, *sampada* is the name Gangadhar Gaaru gave to a book of collected prints he and his brother created over the last 40 years. As opposed to a material archive in an academic sense, this *sampada* serves the practical purpose of allowing printers in Gangadhar Gaaru's workshop to access designs from the past, depending on the needs of a contemporary project. It also immortalises historical patterns, even after wooden blocks decay. Beyond this, Gangadhar Gaaru sees his *sampada* as fulfilling a more significant purpose like academic archives - 'I work with the belief and conviction that handcrafts need to survive. We store a *sampada* because we believe these are good works, and we preserve these designs and details for future generations. If anyone wants to access it, they may.'

However, a critical difference between academic and artisanal archives, besides retrieving meaning from artefacts, is the question of ownership or whose voice controls the telling of this craft's history. Gangadhar Gaaru explained that he once turned down an offer from an (undisclosed) museum in Hyderabad that asked for his pattern archive to be displayed within their museum. Contrary to established research which talks about the clannishness of craft communities, his refusal did not stem from wanting to protect or gatekeep the craft from outsiders - indeed, as he said, 'How would people learn about our craft and work if we just keep our pieces with ourselves?' Instead, it was the fact that his archive would be stored behind the museum's closed doors, and his name would be associated with it only as a footnote in a more extensive exhibition. His *sampada* would be perceived as the museum's property without benefitting him or his community. From the artisan's perspective, the purpose of museums may not be primary education but the accumulation and gatekeeping of cultural wealth. Expanding upon which circumstances he *would* consider for collaborating with a museum, Gangadhar Gaaru mentioned that he would welcome the opportunity to travel with his *sampada* to this museum and conduct participative learning sessions himself. His apprehension with the extractive tendencies of museums and institutional amnesia in supporting living craft cultures is not unfounded or isolated. It may be mitigated by treating artisans as 'an archive of the *vita activa*' (Azoulay, 2019, p. 218) and creating academic, archival and curatorial cultures that amplify maker communities' perspectives. By amplifying these subjugated and previously excluded voices, these cultural practices and institutions can exit the coloniality of their contexts and change the discursive conditions of lesser-known crafts like Kalamkari.

Conclusion

This paper has argued for a re-visioning of the history of Kalamkari, which foregrounds the agency and knowledge of Kalamkari artisans. By studying how contemporary artisans practise their craft and their stances on colonialism, creativity, ownership and preservation of crafts, it aims to create space and amplify the voices of artisans in the evolving historical record of Kalamkari and craft. A critical analysis of seminal texts (Irwin & Brett, 1970) informed

by postcolonial theory has exposed the limitations of traditional scholarship on chintz and Kalamkari, which often uncritically propagate Eurocentric methodologies and orientalist assumptions.

Contemporary secondary research (DeNicola and Wilkinson-Weber, 2016; Divakala & Muthian, 2017; Roy, 2021; Sengupta, 2019) and interviews with artisans highlight the need for fashion-craft-textile literature to move beyond the discursive erasure of the creativity and enterprising nature of artisans in written histories. Artisans' decisions to mediate between materials and cultures and the artisan's role in the success of a design process can represent the place artisans correctly hold in the global fashion, craft and textile industries. Understanding the history and evolution of a craft from its maker's perspective also helps scholars see artisans as problem-solving, creative entrepreneurs instead of perpetual victims in a capitalist market. This shift in the perception of artisans in popular discourse may also catalyse how the fashion and textile industries think of, use and value their cultures, people, vendors, supply chains and products. Ideas of collaborative ownership from community-based artisans can also help the more significant fashion and textile industries rethink the unstable boundaries between copying, mimicking, learning and inspiration in the contemporary design industry. A more robust theorisation of collaborative production and ownership is also needed to create policies to safeguard community-based artisans' cultural, social, and economic interests from appropriation by an industry where intellectual property is otherwise gatekept religiously.

By considering how traditional cultural studies captured, recorded and preserved information about chintz and Kalamkari and their makers, this paper also highlights the oriental, colonial positions we must 'exit' (Azoulay, 2019, p. 211) to ensure the authentic representation and preservation of intangible heritage through craft. I have attempted this by highlighting how the writers of culture maintain differential archives – curators, researchers and academics – and the sources of that culture – the artisans themselves. This is intended to highlight the areas in cultural studies and praxis where artisanal voices can be amplified.

To maintain the position of postcolonial research, this paper has focused on only a portion of *one* craft's history, precisely its encounter with colonialism and coloniality. In doing so, I explored a few context-heavy ways in which cultural studies can effectively and ethically 're-enter' (Azoulay, 2019, p. 211) their relationships with maker communities in a postcolonial context. Though the recommendations in my research are partial, the encroachments of colonialism and coloniality on traditional knowledge are, in my view, pervasive. More diverse case studies relating to coloniality and craft that reflect different global contexts could add depth to the arguments and suggestions laid out in this paper. This would retrieve new ways of material engagement, cultural mediation and artistic creation and reframe how we, as academics, practitioners and policymakers, think of labour, creativity and belonging in the design industries.

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