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## ART AND CULTURE OF TELANGANA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The Art, Culture and Traditions of Telangana is a fusion of the Telugu and Persian culture dating back to the Nizams and Mughals. Hence, there is an influence of Hinduism and Islam. Since Buddhism was the dominant religion up to the 6<sup>th</sup> century it was also the home of Mahayana Buddhism. This can be observed in the monuments of Nagarjunakonda and the World University at the Sri Parvata presided over by Acharya Nagarjuna. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Kakatiyas and the Chalukyas revived Hinduism and Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagar Empire restructured old temples and built new ones. This research article to be discussed about the glorious Telangana traditions, Arts and Culture in the geo historical aspects.

**Keywords:** Telangana Arts, Parsian Culture, Nirmal Paintings, Cultural Era. Humanitarian Arts. Historical Outputs.

### Introduction

#### Statement of the Problem

*“Art is a necessity- an essential part of our enlightenment process. We cannot as a civilized society, regard ourselves as being enlightened without the art forms.”*

**Prof. Ken Dauby, Artist**

Telangana the name ‘Telangana’ is derived from the word ‘Trilinga’ meaning the place of three lingas as according to legends Lord Shiva’s lingams are found on three mountains Srisailem, Kaleshwaram and Draksharama which form the boundaries of Telangana. It is mentioned in the Mahabharata as Telingadesha and it is said that the people of this land sided with the Pandavas in their battle against the Kauravas in the Kurukshetra War. It is also mentioned in the Aitreyabrahmana, Ramayana and Puranas. Amidst the hills and forests of Adilabad one of the districts of Telangana is the small town of Nirmal. It has been considered the land of art and crafts. The big community of craftsmen in Nirmal are referred to as ‘Nakkash’. This town is famous for its paintings known as Nirmal paintings. These paintings were greatly admired and patronised by the Mughal rulers in the medieval period and it is said that Lady Hydri later on brought the craftsmen to Hyderabad to promote their growth and development. In this, traditional art scenes are painted from the Hindu epics- Ramayana and Mahabharata. The paintings have been influenced by the Indian Schools of Art like Ajanta, Kangra and from Mughal miniatures. The colours used in these paintings especially the familiar gold colour are produced indigenously from extracts of herbs, gum, vegetable dye and minerals. The paintings, whether depicting the grace of a dancer or the rhythm of a musician, enrapture the viewer. It is said that in the past the Nizam of Hyderabad on visiting Nirmal was given a grand welcome with the artisans decorating the venue and seat of the Nizam in such a way that an intricately designed banana bud suspended over the Nizam’s seat unfurled and a cascade of golden petals were showered on the Nizam. This so overwhelmed him that he began to patronise the artisans. Deccani paintings are a style of miniature paintings which flourished among the Deccani Sultanates in peninsular India in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was a combination of Vijayanagar wall paintings and Persian influence with elongated figures and landscapes with floral backgrounds. The colours used were rich and luminous predominantly in gold and white.

### Art and Culture of Telangana

Telangana is a storehouse of creativity which is prevalent in its collection of art and craft. Developed in the 16th century, the Golconda style is an old method of blending foreign techniques. A dash of bright gold and white colour is used in the Golconda style. The Hyderabad style emerged in the 17th century under the influence of Nizams. Dhokra or Dokra is a famous craft which is also known as Bell Metalcraft. Here artisans produce figurines, peacocks, elephants, horses, tribal gods and other variety of birds and animals which are made of brass. It originated in West Bengal, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand. Bidri craft is said to have brought in by migrants. It is an art where silver is engraved on metal. The name is derived from a town called Bidar (now in Karnataka). Beautiful jewellery boxes, hukka, buttons and other things are made using this art.

Telangana is home to diverse culture and religions. Till 6th century, the region was predominantly ruled by the Buddhist and is the home of Mahayana Buddhism. From the 14th century onwards, Islam began to spread. Urdu is the second widely spoken language in the state. Christianity began to spread from 1701 and later, East India Company and British Raaj



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encouraged more of Christian culture. Hinduism was rekindled in the 12th century. Emperors like Krishnadeva Ray, in particular, built temples and embellished the old ones.

### Festivals and Traditions in Telangana

With so many religions it is expected to host some festivals as well. To start with, Bathukamma is a part of Dasara festivities which is unique to Telangana. Celebrated by Hindu women, this festival falls in September/October and as per the lunar calendar. In Telugu, 'Bathukamma' meaning 'Mother Goddess Come Alive', is worshipped in the form of Bathukamma, the goddess of womanhood - Maha Gauri Devi. Bonalu is another Hindu Festival, celebrated during June/ July where Goddess Maa Kali is worshipped. The festival is considered a thanksgiving to the Goddess for fulfilling the desires of devotees. A great family feast follows after the massive offering. The meal is the meat of a goat or a chicken which is offered ceremonially to the goddess, and it is considered sacred. The offering of alcohol is also seen as a must. Ramzan is the main festival of Muslims and Moharram too is celebrated on a large scale in Telangana. It is known as 'primarily panduga' where Pir means Master. Many Hindus also actively take part in the festival.

Telangana is famous for its weaving and dying techniques because its cotton producing units are world famous. The most common apparel worn by women is saree along with langavoni, salwar kameez and churidar. The famous sarees made in Telangana include Pochampally Saree and Gadwal saree. Bhoodan Pochampally, a Mandal in Nalgonda District, is known for its Ikat style of sarees and material. Pochampally weave is commonly called ikkat or tie and dye weave. Male clothing includes the traditional Dhoti which is also known as Pancha. The Hyderabad Sherwani used to be the dress of choice of the Nizam of Hyderabad and Hyderabad nobles. Sherwani is usually worn by the groom during the wedding ceremonies.

### Various Art Forms

Perini Thandavam is an ancient dance form performed by males. Legends say that warriors used to carry out this dance before the idol of Lord Siva before going to the battlefield during the reign of Kakatiyas. This classical dance uses 'Prerana' which means inspiration and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The other widely famous dances in Telangana are Gusadi Dance, Kuchipudi, Tribal Dhimsa Dance, Lambadi Dance, etc. Burra Katha is a form of dance which has evolved from a dance called Tandana Katha. It is mainly performed by a group of three main artists in the centre. Bhamakalpam and Gollakalapam are famous traditional dances which emphasise on the moral values initiated by Sidhenra Yogi. Dandaria is a dance performed by the Gonds of Northern Hyderabad. The Gonds believe that they are the descendants of Pandavas. The male dancers dance with their Dandas and go from village to village to host functions. Bonalu is the folk festival of Telangana where we see the colourfully dressed female dancers balancing pots (Bonalu), to the beats and tunes in praise of Mahankali. Male dancers called Potharajus precede the female dancers to the temple adding colour to the festivity. Telangana, a word to some but to its inhabitants, the name is a celebration. The state was born after a huge struggle where everyone maintained their unity with an unprecedented belief in victory. The state's culture, tradition and its uniqueness still linger in one's memory after their visit. Truly, a place worth exploring!

These paintings originated from the word 'kalam' meaning pen and 'kari' meaning work. Colourful designs are applied on cloth using vegetable dyes. Scenes from Hindu mythology are depicted though Persian designs and motifs are included due to the influence of Muslim rulers. Hand carved blocks are used to do the outlines and main features and the pen is used for finer details.

### Paintings

These paintings are stylised versions of Nakashi art which is an art form practised in Cherial district of Warangal in the Telangana region. They are used for storytelling and their themes are drawn from folklore and mythology like the Puranas and Epics. The format of these paintings is narrative like a film role or a comic strip. They were traditionally used by the balladeer or story telling community known as 'Kaki Padagollu'. They went from village to village singing and narrating their ballads with music and dance displaying these scrolls in a series of horizontal or vertical panels on a stage erected on four poles with a horizontal bar. The length of the scroll depended on the length of the story and each scroll could have about 50 panels. The panel depicting that particular part of the story would be displayed as the bard would narrate the story. In modern times instead of a continuous scroll single pictures are painted as wall decorations. The making of the canvas is an elaborate procedure with Khadi cotton, rice starch, white mud, boiled tamarind seeds and gum water. The artists then sketch the outline on the canvas with a brush made of a stick with squirrel's hair. They are painted in vivid hues with the red colour predominantly in the background.



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## Sculptures

Sculptures made of stone, marble or wood are made in the Telangana region into various animal and bird forms. Sculptures of deities in various forms in intricate and aesthetic styles are crafted by the artisans. Examples of fine sculptures can be seen in the Ramappa temple in Warangal, the thousand pillar temple built by the Kakatiyas in the town of Hanamakonda in Telangana and the Alampur temples in Mahabubnagar. Telangana has many museums which have prized collections of different civilisations depicting the culture of the various kingdoms of the state. They are-

Salar Jung Museum is one of the three National museums of India and is located in the city of Hyderabad in Telangana. The art objects were collected by three generations of the Salar Jung family with the major portion of the collection acquired by Salar Jung III (Nawab Mir Yousuf Ali Khan) who devoted his entire life to collecting rare and precious art objects. It was originally stored in his ancestral palace 'Dewan Deodi'. Thereafter his heirs decided to form a museum to store the various artefacts, books and manuscripts in 1968. The collection comprises antiques and art objects not only from India but also from Western, Middle East and Far East countries. It is a treasure house of art from different cultures like Roman, Greek, Hindu, Jain Buddhist, Islamic and Christian culture and a cultural centre for research projects, exhibits as well as an educational centre. These include paintings, sculptures, metal ware, carvings, ceramics, ivory, lacquer ware, porcelain, metal ware, glass etc and a huge library of books, journals and manuscripts.

## Crafts

Biridi Craft form is said to have originated in Iran centuries ago and brought down by migrants. It has been nourished and maintained by future generations of practitioners and is said to have derived its name from the town Bidar of the erstwhile princely Hyderabad state now currently part of Karnataka. It is the unique art of silver engraved on metal. It involves four stages of manufacturing namely casting, engraving, inlaying and oxidising. Black colours for surface ornamentation are used for Bidri art which does not fade easily and is accompanied by silver and gold coatings. An alloy of zinc and copper called gunmetal is used for this art. Flower vases, jewelleryboxes key chains and other artefacts are made which is very popular all over the world.

This metal craft could be seen centuries earlier in the artefacts of Mohenjo Daro. It is a bell metal craft which combines skills of metallurgy with wax technique and though it originated in West Bengal, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand it travelled to Orissa and Andhra Pradesh mainly in the district of Adilabad. Dokra is an ancient technique of casting wherein wax threads are wrapped around an inner core of clay model. Molten brass or bronze is poured into an opening which has been covered with another layer of clay. It is a very labour-intensive work and each piece crafted is different from the other. Simple art forms and traditional designs are made like tribal Gods, figurines, caskets, bowls etc and its aesthetic beauty is in great demand in India and abroad.

Initially the Nirmal artisans restricted themselves to art form. But later local talent was exploited and decorative and utility articles began to be manufactured. Nirmal toys are carved out of Puniki wood or 'PunikiChekka' which is flexible and light and can be cut into various shapes and sizes. The various parts of the toys are then coated with 'Chinta Leppam' which is a specially prepared glue prepared from boiled tamarind seeds and sawdust and coated with white clay which smoothens any depressions or ridges present in the toys. The artefacts and wall plaques are made of teak wood which is well finished on lathe before painting the preconceived design. Then Duco paint in the desired background colour is sprayed on the plaque and finally the artisan paints the design. The quality and beauty of the finished products is breath taking. In modern times experimentation with various hues and shades without moving away from tradition has been evolved. A variety of aesthetic household and office furniture and decorative furnishings too are made by the craftsmen.

Banjara Needle Craft is practised by the Banjaras or tribals of Telangana. It is made up of needlework with geometric patterns of squares, diamonds and triangles. Colourful and different types of stitches with mirror work, beads and shells are made on rich and brightly coloured clothes. These are different from the embroidery and design work of the tribals of Gujarat and Kutch region. These beautiful designs and intricate patterns are used in clothes, bags, bedspreads and bring an exotic look to the decor of a place.

The bronze castings of Telangana are world famous and detailed information can be obtained from the Shilpa Shastras which is a text from the Gupta period on the methodology of casting images in metal. The Vishnusamhita an appendix to the Vishnu Purana refers to wax modelling for making metal objects. The ancient Sanskrit text Manasara Shilpa has a chapter entitled Lost wax Method or Maduchhistha Vidhanam giving details of casting idols in wax. The Abhilasitartha Chintamani or Manasollasa written by King Bhulokamalla Someshvara of the Chalukya dynasty gives detailed description of lost wax and casting methods. Srikumara's Silparatna contains instructions on the hollow casting procedure. Studying all these detailed procedures the craftsmen make the idols



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with accurate measurements and descriptions of the deity in proper proportion bringing out the salient features and characteristics. Several coatings of clay on a finished wax model are used to create the mould which then imparts intricate curves to the cast image.

### **Bathukamma**

This festival commences nine days prior to Bathukamma festival and concludes on Mahalaya Amavasya. It is a festival for unmarried girls. The courtyard is cleaned and decorated with turmeric, flowers and Rangoli. An image of Boddemma is prepared in seven layers with earth in the shape of a Gopura. In the EVENING all unmarried girls sing and dance around it praying to the Goddess for an early and successful marriage. This festival is celebrated by the women of Telangana during Mahalaya Amavasya or Bhadrpada Amavasya in the month of September – October during Navratri for a period of nine days and is now declared the State Festival of Telangana. The first day is on Mahalaya Amavasya and the last day culminates on Ashwayuja Ashtami or Durgashtami two days before Dussehra. This day is called Pedda Bathukamma or Saddula Bathukamma. 'Bathukamma' or 'Divine Mother Gauri–Life Giver' is said to be the patron Goddess for women. Women DRESS up in traditional finery, clean their courtyard, use cow dung as base and decorate it with various designs of Rangoli using rice flour. For the first five days five small cone shaped lumps with cow dung are arranged in the courtyard. Men help in gathering various kinds of flowers including rare and wild flowers found in the various plains of the region. These flowers are decorated and scented and stacked in a conical mound with a lotus or pumpkin flower on the top along with a symbolic mound of turmeric depicting Goddess Gauri. In the evening women form a circle around it clapping and singing folk songs slowly revolving around in small steps. The songs invoke the blessings of the various Goddesses for the happiness, good health and prosperity of their families.

Bonalufestival is celebrated to pray to Goddess Mahakali and began during the period of the Nizams. It is said that during the outbreak of plague in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Hyderabad, people prayed that they would instal an idol of Mahakali if the disease was destroyed and hence this festival is celebrated. Another version states that the Goddess returns to her parental home in the month of Ashadi and the occasion is welcomed and celebrated as Bonalu. Women and unmarried girls dress up in traditional finery dancing with Bonam (balancing pots) to the rhythmic beats of drums. Devotees offer a Thottelu or a small colourful paper structure supported by sticks as a mark of respect. The brother of the Goddess represented by Pothuraju is a man anointed with turmeric and vermilion draped in a red dhoti with bells in his ankles who dances to resounding drums and leads the female dancers to the temple. Streets are decorated with neem leaves and the Goddess is offered cooked rice with milk and sugar in brass or earthen pots decorated with neem leaves, turmeric and vermilion.

### **SadarFestival**

**Sadar** festival people belonging to the Golla caste or the Yadav community celebrate this festival on the second day after Diwali and it is also known as the Dunnapothula Panduga or the Buffalo festival. Buffaloes are decorated in festive colours, turmeric with bells around their necks and are taken around the streets. Competitions are held and awards are presented to the owners of the buffaloes.

Sammakka Saralamma festival is held once every two years in the month of February and is celebrated for four days attracting a large number of pilgrims to Warangal. Sa,makka and Saralamma are the mother and daughter duo revered as tribal Goddesses. According to legends they fought against the unjust and unfair rulers of the kingdom and are worshipped and revered to this day. All the tribal population gather together and offer prayers and Thulabaram (offering objects equal to body weight) generally of jaggery to the Goddesses. They then take a dip in the Jampanna Vagu where Jampanna was said to be the son of Samakka and he died sacrificing his life for the sake of the tribal people in his battle against the Kakatiya rulers.

### **Summing up**

Telangana has a rich culture and tradition and the artefacts and crafts made by the artisans are in great demand throughout the world. Their historical designs on cloth and their folk and traditional arts are well known and have been passed down to generations of artisans and weavers. Historically it has been proved that if any society has experienced the everlasting development in terms of its literature, culture and heritage, it happened only when the rulers were committed enough to encourage, promote and support such growth. However, it has been proved in more than several occasions that Andhra rulers are determined to disrespect, degrade and destroy the cultural identity of Telangana. After formation of Telangana State on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014 for the all aspirations of the Telangana People the new state has been formed. Thereafter Telangana Culture, Art forms, Writings are recognized by the scholars and intellectuals. New historical research culture came into the force. So many historical writings are coming. The Telangana Government has to be encouraged innovative historical research activities has to be encouraged. The universities has to be taken interest to find out the historical research aspects to inculcate Telangana culture, historical output.



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