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Cultural Heritage Preservation of Traditional Indian Art through Virtual New-media

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Abstract

Traditional art and craft, practiced by various craft-guilds in the country are the evidence of Indian cultural heritage. Though the narratives depicted in the form of painted façade or scroll-paintings are the genesis of traditional Indian visual language, the scarcity of public awareness and seclusion from the mass is becoming a threat to economic sustainability of those craft-guilds as well as cultural sustainability of our heritage. Virtual heritage propagated through new-media have strong potentiality to turn people culturally aware about our absconding cultural heritage (Cameron, & Kenderdine, 2007) and eventually bring traditional Indian art and craft into the domain of public knowledge.

The paper explores contemporary research in virtual cultural heritage by arguing for an enhanced user-driven approach through new-media for diffusion of knowledge. Translating the pool of data, worthy to be preserved and diffused among larger mass, into a popular paradigm like new-media is found more accessible by new generation and can act as an educative tool (Kalay, Kvan & Affleck, 2008). The young population is most effective to carry forward the cultural heritage in the long run. In this paper new-media, like game-designs and animations are explored as a contemporary paradigm for educating the selected target-user by translating the narrative visual language of Indian vernacular art-forms. The research process involves ethnographic survey to document the socio-cultural heritage. Study is duly meant for the knowledge preservation, such as method, material and the key features of the visual art-form. Possibilities and constrains of the contemporary paradigm are analyzed and extracted visual language from the traditional art-form is translated accordingly. This paper therefore addresses the methodological user-driven design exploration to preserve and propagate the cultural heritage value of Indian traditional art-forms among new generation by documentation and responsible translation of tangible traditional visual paradigm into an easily accessible contemporary virtual paradigm.

Keywords: Virtual heritage; New-media; Traditional Indian art; Knowledge preservation; Visual analysis; Paradigm shift

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1. Introduction

Indian traditional art and craft are age old practices by different craft-guilds all over India. Though they are the manifestation of cultural heritage of this country, gradual seclusion from the larger population and the craft-guilds will affect the cultural sustainability of the country. Initially many of the traditional painters were associated with social ceremony and used to paint on façade of village houses or on scrolls as part of a traditional gesture of the ceremony (Ranjan and Ranjan, 2007).

Indian artist K. G. Subramanyan, a theoretician and educator, defines Indian art practice as an eclectic mixture of different traditional art forms (Subramanyan, 1978). He further says it is an interaction and amalgamation of different cultural forms. He explains that this vast eclectic mixture   not only is indicative of the modern multicultural situation but also can be an important tool in the renewal of Indian cultural heritage (Subramanyan, 1987; Richardson, 2007).

Though with the technological advancement and change of social behavior, cultural heritage of India is becoming secluded from day to day social activities of larger population, sensible technological intervention has the potentiality to rejuvenate our cultural heritage and connect the craft-guilds of rural India with the larger population. Genesis of the terminology virtual heritage conservation is a synthesis between technology and heritage, where new-media technology acts as a container for the content of traditional cultural heritage (Addison, Refsland &Stone 2006; Roussou, 2002). New-media technologies can help to disseminate cultural heritage between people making them uniformly available irrespective of spatial locations (Benjamin, 1970). But a meaningful application of new-media into virtual heritage conservation should retain the cultural presence to fulfill the pedagogic aim of conservation—knowledge dissemination and awareness generation (Pujol & Champion, 2011).This paper searches a meaningful designer intervention in Indian traditional art and craft practice to revitalize craft-guilds and rejuvenate cultural heritage awareness by adopting new-media as a tool.

Nomenclature		
A	Gamification:	Interface design evolved from game play for enhanced user involvement
B	Mood-board:	Collage created for design inspiration
C	Patachitra:	Traditional scroll paintings of eastern India. Some village centres are Nayagram of Bengal (a state of India), Raghurajpur of Orissa (a state of India), etc. Artist Jamini Roy reinterpreted Patachita style.
D	Kalamkari:	Southern Indian dye painted textile
F	Kaavad:	Wooden shrine of Rajasthan (a state of India) designed with multiple panels, used for storytelling
G	Tholpavakoothu:	Southern Indian shadow puppetry
F	Tolubommalata:	Southern Indian leather puppetry
G	Mughal miniature painting:	A indo-saracenic miniature painting of northern India
H	Gond:	A tribe of central India famous for their vernacular art form
I	Madhubani:	A vernacular art form of Mithila district of Bihar (a state of India)
J	Warli:	Tribal art of Maharashtra (a state of India)

2. Aim of the Research

Aim of the research work focuses on preservation of Indian traditional art and craft practices by contextualizing the practice and increasing the connection with society. To diminish the seclusion of tradition from society a method of paradigm shift from traditional art form to a contemporary popular mass media is discussed in the paper. The design process focuses on the process of adapting the visual language of traditional painting into new-media in order to reach larger target audience. The aim was to establish the potentiality of virtual new-media to digitally preserve the tangible traditional paintings after transferring into new paradigm and create an avenue to preserve the vernacular craft-guilds with their socio-cultural context—the intangible cultural heritage of India. Through the research the revival of traditional art and craft and rejuvenation of the craft-guilds are aimed.