Thematic Analysis of Ramayana Narrative Scroll Paintings: A Need for Knowledge Preservation

Authors : Shatarupa Thakurta Roy

Abstract : Along the limelight of mainstream academic practices in Indian art, exist a significant lot of habitual art practices that are mutually susceptible in their contemporary forms. Narrative folk paintings of regional India has successfully dispersed to its audience social messages through pulsating pictures and orations. The paper consists of images from narrative scroll paintings on 'Ramayana' theme from various neighboring states as well as districts in India, describing their subtle differences in style of execution, method, and use of material. Despite sharing commonness in the choice of subject matter, habitual and ceremonial Indian folk art in its formative phase thrived within isolated locations to yield in remarkable variety in the art styles. The differences in style took place district wise, cast wise and even gender wise. An open flow is only evident in the contemporary expressions as a result of substantial changes in social structures, mode of communicative devices, cross-cultural exposures and multimedia interactivities. To decipher the complex nature of popular cultural taste of contemporary India it is important to categorically identify its root in vernacular symbolism. The realization of modernity through European primitivism was rather elevated as a perplexed identity in Indian cultural margin in the light of nationalist and postcolonial ideology. To trace the guiding factor that has still managed to obtain 'Indianness' in today's Indian art, researchers need evidences from the past that are yet to be listed in most instances. They are commonly created on ephemeral foundations. The artworks are also found in endangered state and hence, not counted much friendly for frequent handling. The museums are in dearth of proper technological guidelines to preserve them. Even though restoration activities are emerging in the country, the existing withered and damaged artworks are in threat to perish. An immediacy of digital achieving is therefore envisioned as an alternative to save this cultural legacy. The method of this study is, two folded. It primarily justifies the richness of the evidences by conducting categorical aesthetic analysis. The study is supported by comments on the stylistic variants, thematic aspects, and iconographic identities alongside its anthropological and anthropomorphic significance. Further, it explores the possible ways of cultural preservation to ensure cultural sustainability that includes technological intervention in the form of digital transformation as an altered paradigm for better accessibility to the available recourses. The study duly emphasizes on visual description in order to culturally interpret and judge the rare visual evidences following Feldman's four-stepped method of formal analysis combined with thematic explanation. A habitual design that emerges and thrives within complex social circumstances may experience change placing its principle philosophy at risk by shuffling and altering with time. A tradition that respires in the modern setup struggles to maintain timeless values that operate its creative flow. Thus, the paper hypothesizes the survival and further growth of this practice within the dynamics of time and concludes in realization of the urgency to transform the implicitness of its knowledge into explicit records.