

Design Resource

Cheriyal Painting - Telangana

Stylized Form of Nakashi Art

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and

Rohit C.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/cheriyal-painting-telangana>



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Introduction

Cheriyal is a small village in Warangal district of Telangana state. As other forms of folk paintings like pattachitra, warli and phad paintings, Cheriyal painting of the Deccan has also been classified as a form of painting for storytelling and to entertain the audience along which it carries the rich cultural history and heritage with it. Cheriyal paintings are stylized form of nakashi art that are believed to be brought from Mughal emperors to south along with them. As these paintings are called as one of the most important scroll paintings, it suggests that it is made on a long vertical piece of cloth in a narrative form and more like modern world's comic strip or film roll. These paintings are prevalent across the region and generally depict the scenes from Indian mythological epics such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Garuda purana, Krishna leela, Markandeya purana etc.

The artisan who does these paintings belongs to Chitrakara community. Interestingly in this old age form of storytelling method, a painter, narrator and listeners are from different community and are strictly bound to their professions. A narrator gives the order to a painter to deliver the scroll according to the folktale he narrates it, which in turn it also depends on the people's demand from the nearby regions. Generally in olden time the story teller used to carry the necessary piece of cloth from which the scroll has to be made and that would vary from anywhere between three feet to sixty feet in height. The cloth is prepared specially for this painting by using some elements like white mud, rice starch, tamarind seeds and natural tree gum. The mixture of these is applied in 3 layers, which acts as a thick canvas to paint upon. This process preserves the cloth and the painting done on it and lasts for hundreds of years.

A traditional Cheriyal painter always starts with the painting of lord Ganesh, as it is considered auspicious in Hindu tradition to start any new work with lord Ganesh followed by lord Bhramha, Vishnu and Maheshwara as they are symbolized as the makers of the world in Hindu mythology, which is an introduction to the formation of world, living beings and castes/communities that are described accordingly regardless of the theme. These are considered to be compulsory for a traditional storytelling scroll. In Cheriyal painting colors play an important role with regards to the appealing and the feel of the overall story. Most often, background is painted with bright red color so that it highlights everything that is painted on it. These paints are made from natural stone colors locally known as "Gaddalu ranga". The color palette is limited to certain colors such as white, black, yellow and green. The shades of these colors are obtained by mixing either black or white to the primary colors. In this scroll painting, characters are easily recognizable depending on the color schemes that are used in portraying the characters of the story. For example: Krishna's face is painted blue, Rama's black, Hanuman as green and all the female characters are painted mostly in red shades. This gives uniqueness to each scroll and also helps to differentiate the scroll from one another.

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The figures in Cheriyal paintings are flat in dimension and are facing one another. These figures are narrated in a profile outlook, which gives an idea that there is either a conversation or a war happening between the characters. The perspective and proportion of these characters are given least prominence but the expression in them has a flair of local influence and they represent the characteristics of the localities. Once the painting is completed, it is handed over to the storyteller and they celebrate it by making sacrificial ceremony of an animal to god. Storyteller also gifts the painter a new pair of clothes, rice etc., as a part of the tradition. After receiving the scroll, storyteller continues his journey to wander around the numerous villages where he performs his duty of narrating the story by unfolding the scroll. Musicians and dancers also accompany him to spice up the narration and gain the attention of the audience. All the people involved such as storyteller, painter and the audience are strictly authorized to a particular community and are not supposed to do any of the other job/work which does not belong to their community.

A scroll can be generally preserved upto hundred to hundred and twenty years in good condition, after which the storyteller has to order a new one from the painter. In the mean while the painter also produces Cheriyal masks, small scrolls for decorative purposes that can be framed and decorated at houses. Cheriyal artisan also does toys of the Cheriyal theme, Garuda vahana (known as god's chariot, in which procession of god takes place) and the wooden framework with the painting done on it by the painter is also made. Traditionally for mixing the colors, coconut shells were used as the containers and goats and squirrel's hair was made into brushes to paint.

Due to the constraints of the caste system, this folklore paintings had lost its existence but in the year 1978 this craft gained a quick popularity and Cheriyal artisans started exporting the scrolls to "Lepakshi" stores (Andhra Pradesh's handicraft export showroom) and they were also displayed at various exhibitions and stalls. Now a days small scrolls or canvases are made by selecting the theme from Indian Mythology, rural life and much more fusions of contemporary themes. Due to the print media and various other advancement in technologies all the Cheriyal artisans have evolved in diverting their occupations but an artist named D.Vaikuntam is keeping the tradition of doing Cheriyal painting alive, who currently resides in Hyderabad which is the capital of Telangana state and lies nearly hundred kilometers away from traditional village of Cheriyal. He is working on it from past five decades and this art is a hereditarily gift to him. He is also known as the only artisan for this craft form. Mr.Vaikuntam uses various mediums from wall, stone, brass, ply wood to the traditional canvas cloth. Now a days as there are no story tellers to order a scroll due to the film and other entertainment mediums. He generally paints on order, scrolls of smaller size and also prepares masks for interior decorative purposes.

In the year 2007 Cheriyal painting has got a GI (Geographical Indication) tag, for its unique folklore, rich heritage and cultural value.

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Artisan observing the painting, for its proportion and composition.



A typical Artisans workbench, consisting of brushes, color pallet and other equipment.

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Artisan giving features to Cheriyal mask.



Artisan making Cheriyal painting of much smaller size, for decorative purpose.

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A closer look of artisan's brush and painting.



A non-painted and painted Cheriyal masks.

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Artisan enhancing the Cheriyal painting with black outlines.



Artisan and his family, involved in this age old art form.

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A Cheriyal painting depicting the scene from Ramayana.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The material used in painting are:

- **Khadi Cloth:** Khadi cloth is nothing but a hand woven cotton cloth, used as a canvas for Cheriyal painting.
- **Rice Starch:** Rice starch is prepared by boiling the rice in excess water. The thick water that remains after the rice is cooked is known as rice starch.
- **Tamarind Seeds:** Tamarind seeds are used as a base for sculpting the shape onto the mask and as a natural hardener in both masks and canvas preparation.
- **Tree Gum:** Tree gum is a natural gum extracted from the barks of specific tree, which is used in mask making and canvas preparation in Cheriyal painting.
- **White Mud:** White mud is a type of mud available in local and is extracted from a specific depth from the ground. It is considered as the purest form of mud and locally known as “Sudda matti”.
- **Goat and Squirrel Hair Brushes:** These brushes are used in painting traditional Cheriyal style of scrolls and masks.
- **Stone Colors:** Colors like red and blue are extracted from the stones to prepare colors.
- **Turmeric:** It is used as yellow color while painting.
- **Sea Shell:** Sea shell is used for extracting the white color.
- **Kerosene Lamp Ash:** It is used as the black color in Cheriyal painting.
- **Coconut shells:** Coconut shells are used as containers to mix colors and as a base to prepare Cheriyal Masks.
- **Pencil:** To mark a primary outline of the scene from Indian epics/mythology on canvas.

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A scissor used in cutting the canvas of required dimensions, for painting.



A small container, in which paint is stored, which is feasible for the artisan to use.



A wooden and steel measurement scale, used to measure the canvas and to put accurate horizontal and vertical lines.



A blank canvas ready to be painted upon.

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Clutch pencil, wooden pencil and eraser to draw the initial outlines of the scenes.



A set of polyester haired brushes, used in modern age for painting purpose.



A goat hair brush, traditionally used to fill up the background.



A set of squirrel hair brushes used in giving finer details to the paintings.

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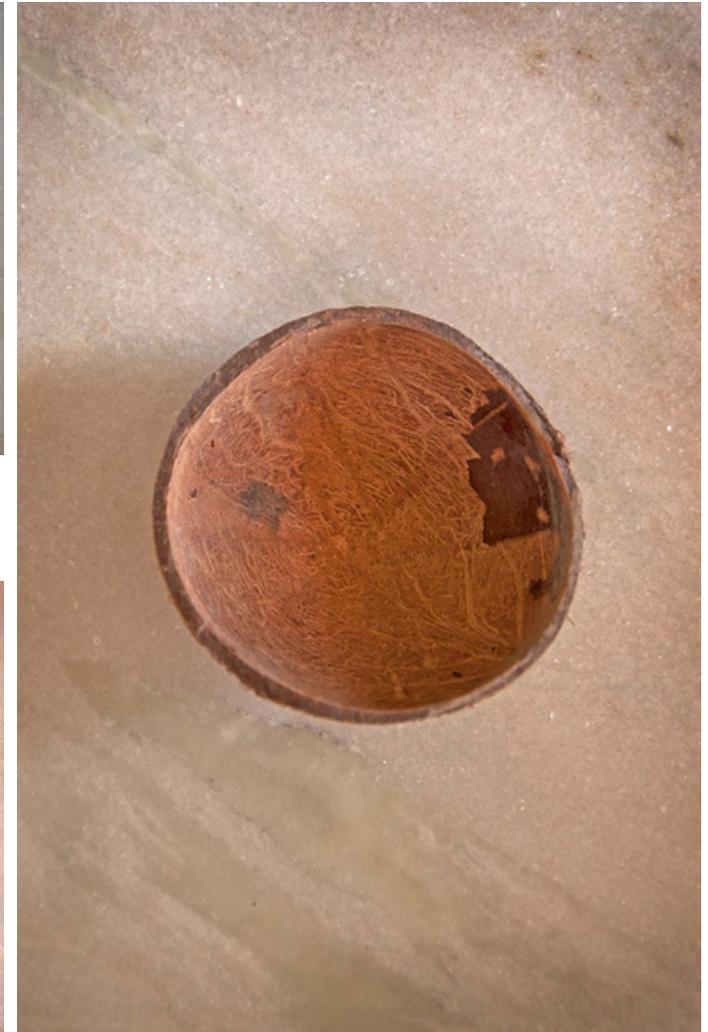
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A coconut shell pallet used traditionally by the Cheriyal painting artisans, to fill with color and to mix different shades of colors.



A stone grinder used in grinding stone colors.



An empty coconut shell, which will be used as a color pallet.

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Color stored in powder form, to protect it from varying seasons.



Tree gum in crystal forms, which are used in paint, canvas and mask preparations.

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A wooden pole, used along with stone grinder to crush the stone colors.



Crushed paint crystals, stored in large containers.



Stone crystals, from which color is extracted.



A plate containing tamarind seeds and saw dust, used in making masks.

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Boiled and pasted tamarind seeds to be mixed with saw dust.



Rice starch used as a binding agent for preparation of canvas.



“Sudda matti” local name, known as a type of clay, which is white in color.



A mixture of rice starch, white mud, tree gum and water.

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Cheriyal Painting

Making of Cheriyal Painting:



The making process of Cheriyal painting involves various steps.

They are:

1. Preparing the Canvas Cloth
2. Preparation of Natural Colors
3. Painting

- 1. Preparing the canvas cloth**
 - The mixture of suddha matti, rice starch, tamarind seeds paste and tree gum is mixed in proportion and made into slurry paste.
 - This mixture is evenly applied on the khadi cotton cloth on which the painting has to be done.
 - After the application of this mixture on khadi cloth for three times, the cloth is allowed for drying.
- 2. Preparation of natural colors**
 - Colors are extracted from stones and ash of an oil lamp and sea shells.
 - For black color a kerosene lamp is lit and its ash is collected on lid and it is mixed with tree gum.
 - For white color, sea shells are rubbed on a rough surface and the powder is mixed with tree gum and then used.
 - For yellow color turmeric is used.
 - For blue, green and red colors natural stones are used.
 - All these stones are crushed in the stone grinder and the tree gum is added to it and are used for painting.
- 3. Painting**
 - Once the canvas and the colors are ready, the outline is drawn lightly with a graphite on the canvas.
 - The background is filled with red color excluding the outline.
 - The figures are colored in primary colors with the help of a thick goat hair brush and allowed it for drying.
 - Outlines are made in black color and the details like jewellery and hairlines are made with the help of the squirrel hair brush.
 - After depicting the scenes, borders are made with decorative floral designs and are framed.

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These steps are described in detail below with the exact traditional method of making Cheriyal painting.

1. Preparing the Canvas Cloth:

The preparation of the canvas cloth is very elaborative and it is traditionally very strict and particular about the entire process. The preparation of the canvas carries an even consistency that is prepared at numerous times by the artisan. This process helps in preserving the artwork for several years.

The cloth on which the process has to be done is of khadi cotton material. A mixture of suddha matti (White Mud), rice starch, boiled tamarind seed paste and natural tree gum is mixed in proportion and is made into a slurry kind of paste. The color of this mixture is off white and it is evenly applied with bare hands on the khadi cotton cloth. This process is repeated for three times for each piece of cloth. At every single application the consistency of slurry is made thinner by adding more tree gum into it. After the application of three coats on the khadi cloth piece, it is allowed to dry naturally under the sun and is ready to be used for painting.



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2. Preparation of Natural Colors:

Natural colors are prepared for painting a traditional Cheriyal scroll, which are extracted from different elements such as stones and ash of an oil lamp and sea shells. For black color a kerosene lamp is lit and its ash is collected on a lid, further tree gum is added into it to preserve it and to make it a sticky paint. For white color sea shells are used. Sea shells are collected from the sea shore and are individually rubbed on a rough surface like stone. Later water is added to it to ease up the process, further the thick white paste is collected and tree gum is added to it. For yellow, turmeric is used. For blue, green and red colors there are natural stones available which are collected by the artisan. These stones are similar to that of those used in Ayurvedic medicinal purposes. These stones are crushed in the stone grinder and water is added to it to make a thick paste out of the crushed stone. Once the artisan ensures that there are no particles of stones remained in the grinder and it is finely crushed, it is collected into the container. Tree gum is also added to these crushed stone powder to increase its shelf life and to make it stick to the canvas evenly after the painting is dry. In Cheriyal painting, only the primary colors are used. The shades of these colors are obtained by adding either black or white to the primary colors.

3. Painting:

Once the canvas and the colors are ready, Cheriyal painting artist starts with a very light outline with a graphite on the canvas of whatever the scene he has to depict in the scroll. He then fills the color to the background in bright red but excluding the outlines which he has drawn. He then fills the basic colors with thick goat hair brush (which is numbered in the range of 3 to 12) onto the characters and allows it for drying. As it dries quickly, he starts outlining the characters and its features in pitch black color with the help of finer squirrel hair brush (which is numbered as 00, 0, 01 and 02). Artisan then enhances the details such as jewels, hairlines, eyes with much finer brush strokes. He does the detailing part quickly due to the experience he has gained over the years of practice. After the scene is depicted he adds attractive border to the complete painting, which are decorated with flowers and leafs with the finer brush strokes. By this, it completes the process of painting and it is usually rolled and stored. The one which depicts single scene and are of much smaller size are framed.

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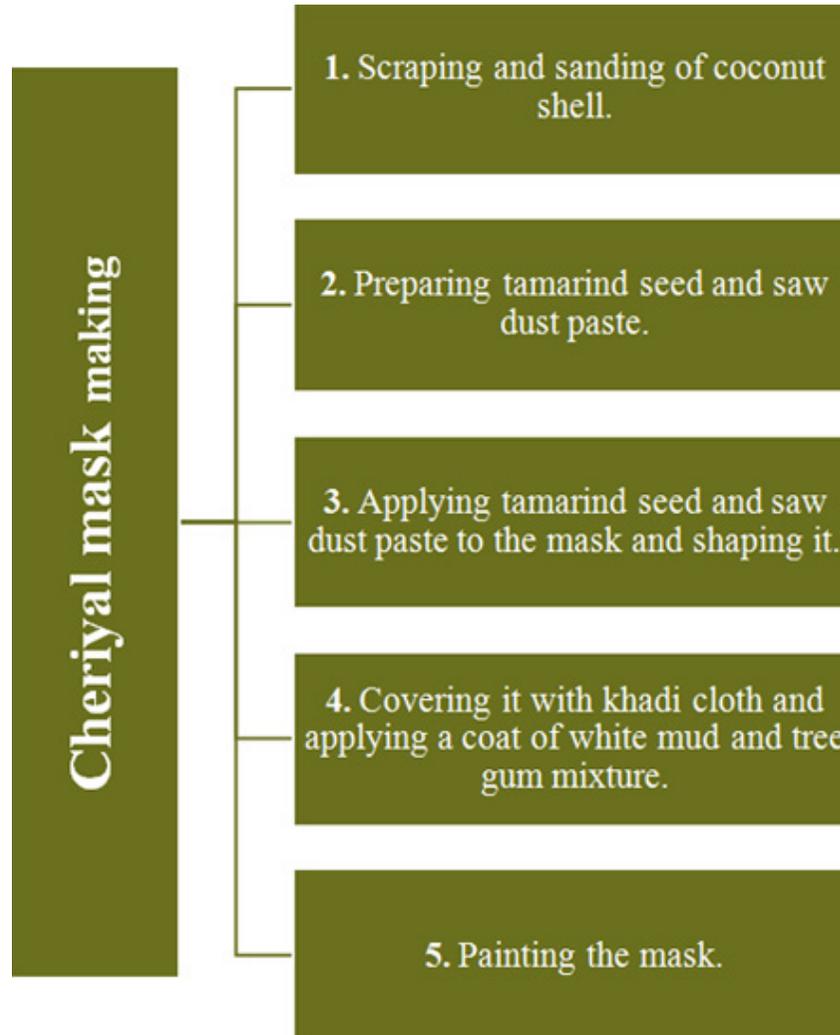
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Mask Making

Making of Cheriyal Painted Mask:



As the traditional Cheriyal painting lasts more than hundred years, painters prepared smaller scrolls and most importantly Cheriyal Painted Masks were made which represented the characters from traditional scrolls such as tiger, cow and few neutral characters. These masks were prepared to entertain children and also to decorate homes.

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The same colors are used for painting the mask as those which are used in painting a scroll or Cheriyal painting.

Mask making involves the following steps:

1. Scraping and sanding of coconut shell.

- Dry and hard coconut shell is used as the base.
- The coconut shell is dried and it is sanded with the help of the sand paper to scrap out the uneven surface and coconut fibres from the shell

2. Preparing tamarind seed and saw dust paste.

- Tamarind seeds are boiled till it becomes soft and then it is grinded to prepare a paste.
- Then the tamarind seeds paste is mixed with saw dust.

3. Applying tamarind seed and saw dust paste to the mask and shaping it.

- Once the paste is prepared, it is applied on the coconut shell and the features like nose, eyes, lips and other features are rendered. This process provides the mask a three dimensional structure.

4. Covering it with khadi cloth and applying a coat of white mud and tree gum mixture.

- After moulding the required shape the mask is covered with khadi cloth and it is stuck to the base with the help of the mixture made of rice starch, white mud and tree gum.
- This mixture is then spread evenly and allowed for drying.

5. Painting the mask.

- Once the mask is dried, it is painted with single base color and then the detailing like eyes, lip, hairs are done with the respective colors.
- After the painting is completed, it is allowed for drying and used later.

These steps are described elaborately below:

• Scraping and sanding of coconut shell:

For making a mask traditionally, dry and hard coconut shell is used as the base. Due to its bulge structure it is easy to further shape it into a face kind of structure. The coconut shell is dried and it is sanded with the help of sand paper to scrape off the uneven surface and coconut fibers off from the shell.

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• Preparing tamarind seed and saw dust paste:

Due to the extensive use of tamarind, in local market tamarind seeds are available in plenty. These are best to prepare the paste and it becomes rock solid as it dries. To prepare the paste, tamarind seeds are collected and is boiled till it becomes soft and then it is grinded to a paste like consistency. It is then mixed with saw dust, which is available in carpenters shop, as waste.

• Applying tamarind seed and saw dust paste to the mask and shaping it:

Once the paste is prepared, artisan applies the paste on the coconut shell and shapes it by adding features like throne, nose, lips, eyes and eyebrows and other ornamental details. This process provides the mask a three dimensional structure.

• Covering it with khadi cloth and applying a coat of white mud and tree gum mixture:

After moulding the required shape, artisan covers the structure with khadi cloth and sticks to the base with the help of the mixture made of white mud, tree gum and rice starch. Then the artisan spreads the mixture evenly with his bare hands and allows it to dry naturally. The mask is now solid and also has a smooth surface to paint upon.

• Painting the mask:

Once the mask is dried artisan paints the mask with a single base color, usually off white, red or yellow. Then the detailing like eye, jewels, lips, hairs are done with their respective colors. Once the painting is done, it is allowed to dry and used later.



Artisan boils and pastes the tamarind seeds in a steel container.

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Design Resource

Cheriyal Painting - Telangana

Stylized Form of Nakashi Art

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and

Rohit C.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/cheriyal-painting-telangana/making-process/mask-making>



An image showing a ready paste of tamarind seeds.



It is then made into thick dough by mixing it into saw dust.



The dough is then pasted upon a coconut shell, as it acts as a base to give a face like structure.



Artisan adds features to the mask like eyes, eyebrow, nose, ears etc.

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An image showing a mask which is completed and dried with basic features.



An image showing the mask after the process of application of cloth and mixture of rice starch and white mud.



An image showing masks which are of different process from starting to end.

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Products

- Cheriyal Paintings:

Paintings, sizing from one square feet to 6x3 feet are done as per the modern day demands with the media ranging from traditional cloth canvas to wall, bronze and wood. And it is priced from a minimum of rupees 3000 to the maximum price depending on intricacy, medium and size of the art work. Now a days these paintings are majorly used for interior decorative purposes.

- Cheriyal Painted Masks:

Cheriyal painted masks are used as decorative purposes in interiors of houses, commercial spaces and in exhibitions etc. Sometimes these masks are also used as toys for entertainment purpose.



A Cheriyal mask of cow, used in decorating interiors or for children's to play.

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A Cheriyal mask of a goddess.



Image showing mask of lord Hanuman and Ravan.



A Cheriyal doll figure of the god.

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A Cheriyal painting showing a scene where lord Krishna, attracted by cows for his flute's tunes.



A vertical painting of 6X3 feet, depicting village life in general.

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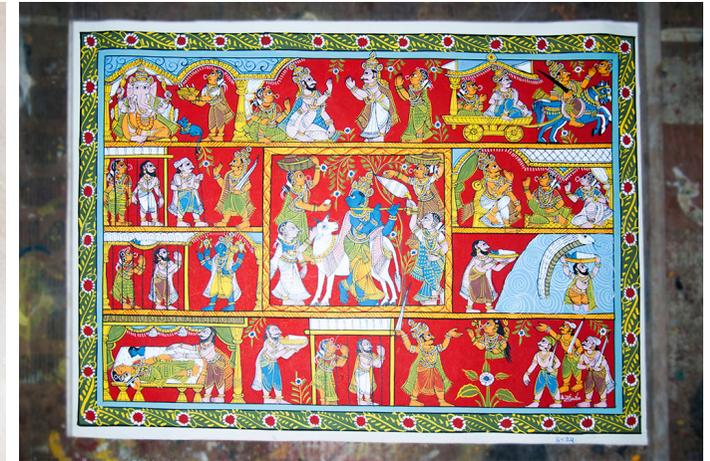
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A smaller size painting of lord Krishna, which is being mounted and framed.



A scroll showing birth story of lord Krishna.



A scroll-depicting story of how villagers locally get their food from and celebrations.



Scroll depicting the farming that is done in countryside, which makes most of their occupations.

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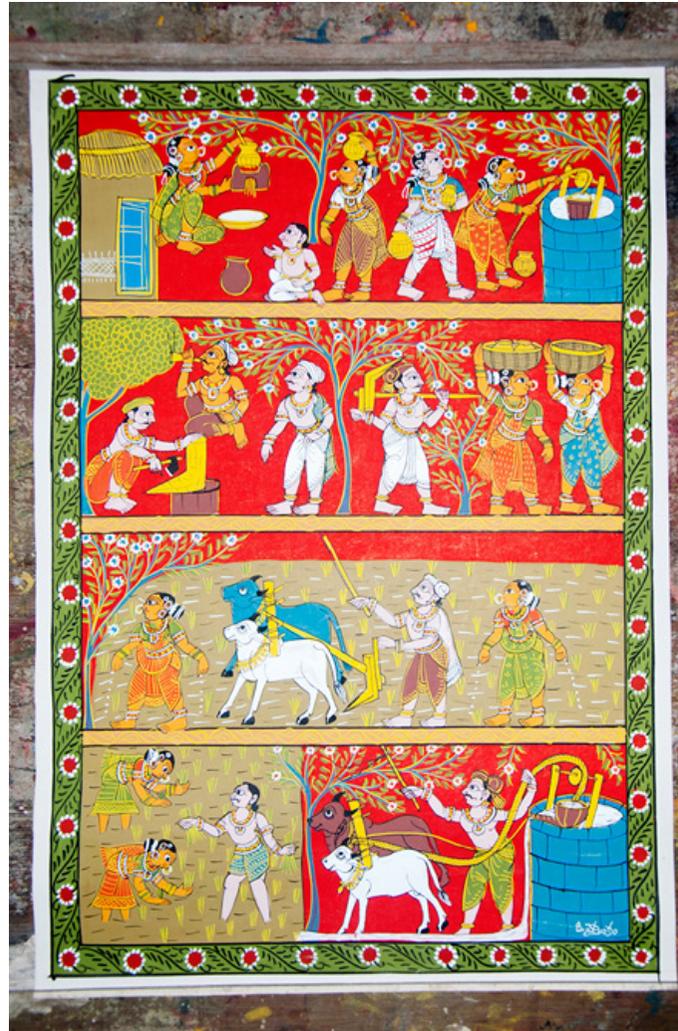
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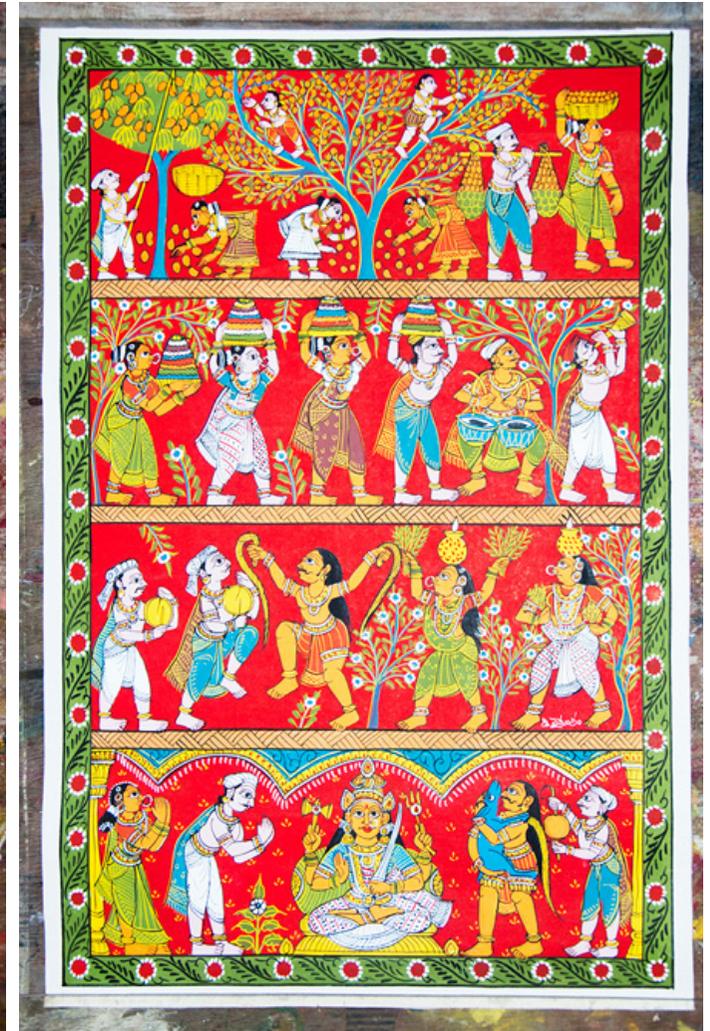
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A scroll showcasing the farming and other professional activities done locally.



Scroll narrating the occasion of festival that is native to the region.

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A scroll showing, people worshiping cow and offering grains as a ritual.



A scroll depicting women's offering food to a Brahmin person, which holds a greater history in Hindu mythology.

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Scroll showing a person letting its cows graze in field.



A scroll showing a village man plucking fruits from a mango tree.

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Video



Cheriyal Painting - Interview



Cheriyal Painting - Making Process



Sawdust Mask - Making Process

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