

ART

Tanjore and Pattachitra come together in Tejasmi Das' paintings



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Tejasmi Das' exhibition of paintings is a unique mix of Tanjore art and Odisha Pattachitra techniques

“Tamil Nadu is a long way from Orissa.” This is what was on Tejasmi Das' mind when her husband, Ashok Das, an IPS officer was transferred to Madurai district in 1995. In Odisha, she was an artist, a published poet, and active in student politics.

The move to Madurai was a seismic shift but it was love at first sight. Das fell in love with Tamil Nadu. She says, “I loved the people, their cuisine, their simplicity and their rich diverse culture. I learnt to read and write in Tamil and I started cooking dishes like *puli kozhambu*, *pongal* and *rasam*.” When her husband was transferred to sleepy Ramanathapuram, she started spending a lot of time with the local artisans and became a passionate student of Tanjore art. After a four- and-a-half year stint there, her husband was transferred again, this time to Thanjavur where she continued to interact with the artists and spend hours daily, learning their techniques.



A series of 18 paintings, all done in Tanjore style resulted from this. She planned on having an exhibition in early 2016 when calamity struck: in 2015, the family had been transferred to

Chennai and the December floods completely submerged her house, destroying entire sets of Tanjore paintings. Years of love and labour were lost overnight.

She says, “I was heartbroken. Those 18 paintings were the memories of the happy years spent in Ramanathapuram and Thanjavur and I decided to quit **painting** altogether. But with my daughter and husband’s encouragement, I started painting again.”

This time Das decided to do something different. She started mixing and fusing the different styles of Tanjore, from her adopted state, with the intricate brush strokes and drawings of Pattachitra, from her home state.

The visuals, the detailed brush strokes, the borders and the drawings were predominantly done in Odisha Patachitra style while the gold foil work, the inlaid stones, the wooden plank and gesso work, were all done in the Tanjore tradition.

Having blended the two techniques, Das’ passion returned and in a couple of years, she had completed 37 paintings. She says, “The theme of all these paintings are Radha and Krishna, as seen through Radha’s eyes. I’ve invited the viewer into the mind of Radha.”

She goes on to explain how Pattachitra paintings depict mythological and folk stories from *The Panchatantra*, *The Puranas*, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. “Much before Amar Chitra Katha, parents were reading out stories to their kids from Pattachitra paintings,” she adds.



“Tanjore paintings on the other hand, were originally done for royalty on wooden planks, and hence referred to as *palagai padam*. Because of the inlaid stones and the relief work, Tanjore paintings have a 3D effect”, she says.

Das elucidates the deeper connection between Odisha and Tamil Nadu, telling the story of Tamil princess Padmavati, who married Purushotama Deva, the king of Odisha 500 years ago. “Padmavati’s Tamil influence is still felt in the kitchens of the Jagannath temple in Puri, where they serve Tamil delicacies like *murukku*, and *medu vada*,” she says. In future, Das would like to experiment with different styles from other states. “Look at Tanjore painting, it was started under the Cholas, furthered by Telugu speaking artists under the Nayaks, and later given patronage by the Marathas. The richness of Indian art is its pluralism.”

Yes, Tamil Nadu is a long way from Odisha, but Das has bridged the distance with effortless ease.

Das’ paintings will be exhibited at Art Houz, Nungambakkam, from 6.30 pm today to July 26, 6 pm. 7411626337

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