



Reflecting on Values: International Day of Conscience

Observed every year on April 5, the International Day of Conscience highlights the importance of ethical awareness, moral responsibility, and peaceful coexistence in society. The day encourages individuals and communities to reflect on their actions and make choices guided by compassion, fairness, and respect for others. Promoted by the United Nations, it aims to strengthen a global culture of peace by nurturing values such as empathy, integrity, and accountability. Through education, dialogue, and community initiatives, the day reminds people that a strong conscience can inspire positive change and help build a more just, humane, and harmonious world for present and future generations.

#OUR OWN

Indian Intellectual Ownership In Printing

Machilipatnam and Pedana: Andhra's Textile Towns Turning into Global Fashion Icons



Tucked away on the coast of Andhra Pradesh, the towns of Machilipatnam and Pedana are quietly but powerfully making their mark on the global fashion map. Known for their centuries-old mastery of Kalamkari and Chintz textiles, these heritage-rich towns are experiencing a revival, one that blends ancient craftsmanship with modern fashion sensibilities.

A Glorious Past, Woven into Fabric

Machilipatnam was once a flourishing port under the rule of the Golconda Sultanate, and later, a significant trading hub for European powers. Alongside its port, the region's artisanal traditions flourished, especially textile printing and dyeing. Among these, Kalamkari and Chintz became standout exports, reaching as far as Europe, Persia, and Southeast Asia.

Kalamkari, meaning 'pen work', traditionally involves hand-drawn or block-printed patterns made using natural dyes. The style is rich in detail and storytelling, featuring motifs from Hindu mythology, nature, and folklore. The Pedana style, a variant of Machilipatnam Kalamkari, is block-printed using carved wooden stamps and washed multiple times to enhance vibrancy and longevity.

Weaving the Future

As Machilipatnam and Pedana step into the global spotlight, they represent more than just craftsmanship. They embody the power of local traditions in a globalized world, the timeless relevance of handmade artistry, and the possibility of sustainable livelihoods through cultural pride. In a fashion world increasingly defined by fast cycles and synthetic production, the story of these Andhra towns is a refreshing return to roots, where every thread tells a story, and every print carries the legacy of centuries.

A Global Comeback
Today with the global fashion world embracing sustainable, slow and heritage fashion, these textiles are witnessing a

spectacular comeback. Designers from India and abroad are incorporating Kalamkari and Chintz into their collections, celebrating their natural origins, hand-craftsmanship, and narrative depth. Major fashion houses and ethical labels are increasingly turning to artisan clusters in Pedana for eco-friendly prints and naturally dyed textiles, while high-end interior designers are rediscovering Chintz for luxury home décor. From New York to Milan, elements of Andhra's textile tradition are making their way into global showrooms and catwalks.

Craft Meets Contemporary

This resurgence is not just about preserving the past, it's about redefining Indian textile identity in the present. Collaborations between artisans and contemporary designers are leading to fresh innovations in patterns, colors, and garment styles. What was once reserved for saris and wall hangings is now being used in jackets, dresses, scarves, and even footwear.

Government bodies and NGOs are also stepping in to support this growth, offering training, design intervention, and marketing assistance to help artisans reach wider markets without compromising the authenticity of their craft.

Chintz, another prized textile, is a glazed cotton fabric adorned with vibrant floral and natural motifs. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Chintz from India became so popular in Europe that countries like France and England imposed bans on its import to protect their domestic textile industries. Despite this, its influence persisted in fashion, upholstery, and décor.



Rabindranath Tagore saw great potential in Canada

Tagore liked whatever little he saw of Canada and was full of praise for the country. In his last address before leaving for the United States, he said, "Canada is too young to fall victim to the malady of disillusionment and scepticism and she must believe in the great ideals in the face of contradiction, for she has the great gift of youth; she has the direct consciousness of the stir of growth within her which should make her trust herself, which is the only sure way of trusting the world."

● Ajay Kamalakaran

On an April morning in 1929, a small welcoming party waited patiently at the harbour in Victoria, Canada, for Empress of Asia. The steamship was arriving from across the Pacific with an esteemed passenger who had been described by the Associated Press as 'India's sublime poet and philosopher,' Rabindranath Tagore.

"Arrayed in a long flowing robe of gray, the white haired poet, with his long beard, presented a picturesque figure as he surveyed the scene at the promenade deck of the liner," the Associated Press said. "Sir Rabindranath had just concluded a long visit in the Far East in pursuit of both his studies and his teachings."

Although the poet had been reluctant to come, Tagore's brief visit endeared him to Canada, a country that was founded just seven decades earlier. "The Poet had been repeatedly invited to visit Canada by the National Council of Education of Vancouver, but had always declined to do for a variety of reasons," scientist and statistician Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, who served as Tagore's secretary, wrote in his

book *Rabindranath Tagore's Visit to Canada and Japan*. "This year, however, it was represented to him from certain influential quarters that he should accept the invitation for the sake of a better understanding between the peoples of India and Canada, and he finally agreed to do so."

The poet set sail from Bombay in the last week of February, halting at Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Moji, Kobe and Yokohama. Along the way, he spoke to the media about education since he was travelling to Canada to attend the Triennial Conference of the National Council of Education.

"All my life I have devoted (myself) to the cause of education, and I do not see any factor which will lighten India's load except the free and intensive dissemination of learning among the lower classes," Tagore told the United Press correspondent in Shanghai. "In this programme, I look to America and Canada for aid, since it is in these countries that education has attained its highest form and the student class has the greatest freedom."

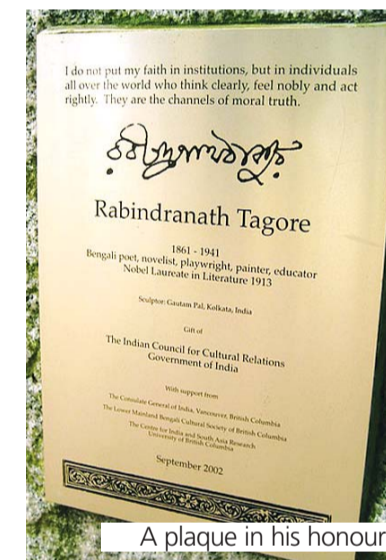
Philosophy of Leisure

The local media in Victoria took great interest in Tagore right from the moment of his arrival. For one,

#REMEMBERED



Victoria Harbour, Canada.



A plaque in his honour.

journalists were fascinated with the Nobel laureate's physical appearance. "In his long robe, with his beard and long curls falling upon his massive shoulders, he was an arresting figure," The Gazette wrote. "His features with dark glowing eyes, aquiline nose and fine mouth appeared to be of great beauty and there was an air of calmness and utter detachment as he told Western Civilization what he thought of it."

On the very day that Tagore arrived in Victoria, he delivered his lecture titled 'Philosophy of Leisure.' In it, he spoke of Western materialism and how a disproportionate focus on accumulation of wealth and possessions would lead to intellectual and spiritual decline. "The creative genius of man is every day losing its dignity," Tagore said. "It accepts cheap payments from the multitude. It makes faces at things men hold sacred."

The conference participants listened carefully as he continued with his strong critique. "In the present age, the larger part of our growth takes place on the outside, and our inner spirit has no time to accept it, we grow accustomed to a spiritual slovenliness," Tagore said. "The

mind chronically pursued by a frenzied haste develops a chronic dyspepsia. It comes to believe that reality is truly represented by nightmare."

Tagore called on Western society to slow down. "It is evident that the modern age is riding on a tornado of rapidity, jealously competing with its own past, every moment in speed and production," he said. "We cannot stop its course, and should not, even if we could. Our only anxiety with regard to it is that we may forget that slow and mature productions of treasure are of immense value to man, for these only can give balance to a bloated atmosphere of infinity in a width of leisure across which come invisible measures of life and light, bringing their silent voices of creation."

Life of Difficulty

He said people should give more importance to leisure. "And we say time is money, while we forget to say that leisure is wealth, the wealth that is a creation of human spirit whose material may be money."

He stressed that the use of leisure could not be standardised. "Some people must have physical recreation after their working hours

outside the theatre, and even after he had commenced speaking, they waited before the theatre door reluctant to leave."

Those who managed to get inside the theatre listened to the speech in awe and with admiration. "To the two thousand persons who crowded the Vancouver Theatre, the picture of a serene old man, in whose mind burn the unquenchable fires of genius, enunciating his credo, will outlive his words," the Vancouver Sun added. "He carried his audience far beyond the outposts of every day thought, past the details of, and immediate activities of life, into the realm of pure aesthetics."

Harmony Among Races

Tagore liked whatever little he saw of Canada and was full of praise for the country. In his last address before leaving for the United States, he said, "Canada is too young to fall victim to the malady of disillusionment and scepticism and she must believe in the great ideals in the face of contradiction, for she has the great gift of youth; she has the direct consciousness of the stir of growth within her which should make her trust herself, which is the only sure way of trusting the world."

He saw immense potential in Canada's future. "Let her feel the

scared dawn of her life, that the expectation of human destiny is upon her as upon other sister countries which have just entered into the cycle of their promise," he said. "Canada will have to solve for the salvation of man the most difficult of all problems, the race problem, which has become insistent with the close contact of communities that had their isolation for centuries in their geographical and cultural exclusiveness."

Acknowledging that the country possessed powers of character and material resources, Tagore said of Canada, "She will have to reconcile the efficiency of the machine with the creative genius of man, which must build its paradise of self expression, reconcile science with religion, individual right with social obligation that it must acknowledge."

Close to a century after Rabindranath Tagore's visit, Canada stands out as a country that makes an effort to solve the 'race problem.' It is committed, at least in principle, to atone for the atrocities committed on its indigenous peoples. Leisure is taken seriously by it. Vancouver, which briefly hosted the great poet, has a Tagore Society, which actively promotes Indian art and culture.

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Tagore's bust in Vancouver, Canada.

#POETIC TRADITION OF BEAUTY

"No such roses see I in her cheeks"

"O my lady, your eyes are not like lotuses, they are like the leaves of the tamarind tree"

Throughout history, poets have often praised the beauty of women using specific, repeated metaphors, with the most common descriptions found in both Sanskrit and Western literature. Yet, not all poets were content to remain within these well-worn paths. In particular, poets like Nilakantha Dikshita and Mallinatha Suri questioned the tradition of idealized descriptions of female beauty, advocating for innovation and novelty in poetry. Their works provide a fascinating contrast to the more conventional, formulaic depictions of beauty found in earlier verses.

Traditional Praises of Beauty in Sanskrit Poetry

Sanskrit poets, especially during the classical period, often employed a fixed set of metaphors to describe the beauty of women. The beauty of a woman's eyes was commonly compared to lotuses (padma), her teeth to pearls (mukta), her hair to dark clouds (megha), and her face to the moon (chandra). These images were intended to convey an idealized form of femininity, an almost divine or celestial purity.

While these descriptions had aesthetic and cultural significance, they also became repetitive and predictable, sometimes lacking the depth to capture the true variety of human experiences. This sameness, however, did not go unnoticed by some poets.

Nilakantha Dikshita: Critiquing the Poetic Formula

Nilakantha Dikshita, a 17th-century poet-scholar, was one of the critics of the overly formulaic use of such metaphors in Sanskrit poetry. He was not pleased by the fact that the beauty of women was continually compared to 'lotuses,' 'pearls,' and other similar objects without any sense of originality. In his work, he questioned the habitual reliance on these overused comparisons, urging poets to uncover novelty and explore fresh ways of representing beauty.

Nilakantha believed that true art in poetry arose not from repetition but from the



Mallinatha Suri.

creative reimagining of subjects. He advocated for a new way of describing the female form, one that didn't just rely on traditional imagery but also recognized the diversity of beauty that existed in the world.

Mallinatha Suri: Rejecting the Conventional Metaphors

Mallinatha Suri, a poet of the 14th century, took a different approach altogether, opting for a satirical and playful twist on the conventional imagery of beauty. Rather than following the standard tradition of comparing a woman's eyes to lotuses and her waist to a lion's tail, Mallinatha Suri challenged these traditional descriptions with humour and irreverence.

In his verses, he famously turned the traditional metaphors upside down. For example, instead of saying 'your eyes are like lotuses,' he boldly stated, "O my lady, your eyes are not like lotuses, they are like the leaves of the tamarind tree." A much less glamorous image. Similarly, he described a woman's waist not as delicate but "like a celestial kettledrum," and her chest not as full and round, but as "dried-up arka fruit."

By rejecting the conventional praise of beauty, Mallinatha Suri made an important statement about the limitations of traditional poetic conventions. Rather than adhering to idealized and overly polished

descriptions, he invited a more grounded, possibly more human, perspective. His work reminded readers that beauty could also be found in the everyday and the unidealized.

Shakespeare and the Subversion of Beauty Conventions in the West

Shakespeare's sonnet mocks the usual poetic descriptions of women's beauty. By doing this, he seeks to reveal the inherent flaws in these overblown praises, suggesting that true beauty lies not in artificial comparisons, but in authenticity and sincerity. Shakespeare's no such roses see I in her cheeks becomes an assertion that beauty does not have to conform to idealized standards to be real or powerful.

Debunking Poetic Conventions: Common Threads

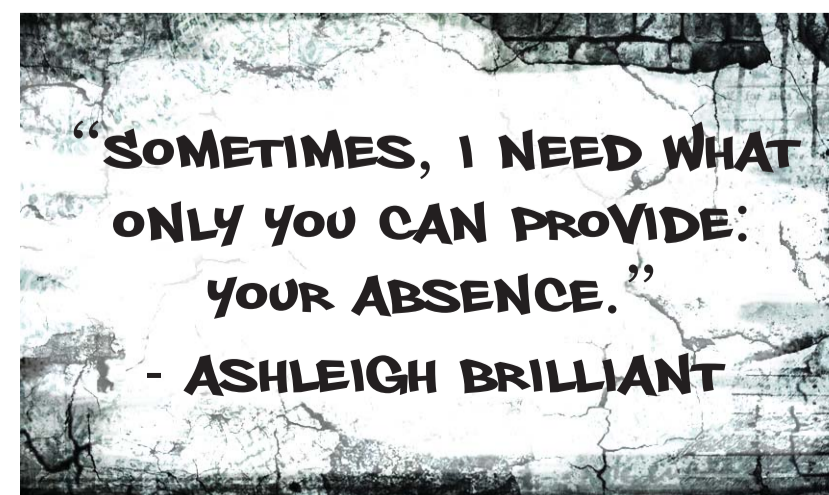
Both in Sanskrit and Western literature, poets like Nilakantha Dikshita, Mallinatha Suri, and Shakespeare critiqued the repetitive and overly idealized descriptions of beauty, urging their audiences to look beyond conventional imagery and embrace new, more authentic representations.

In Sanskrit literature, the praise of beauty was often tied to divine, perfect forms, focusing on a woman's physical traits through objects like lotuses and pearls. However, poets like Nilakantha and Mallinatha broke away from these conventions, adding complexity and subverting expectations. Mallinatha, in particular, was radical in his use of humour and realism, suggesting that beauty could be found in less-than-ideal forms.

Similarly, in Western literature, Shakespeare's challenge to the typical poetic praise of female beauty led to a more grounded, less idealized portrayal of women. His critique aimed at freeing women from the unrealistic standards imposed by poets and providing a more honest and human portrayal of beauty.



THE WALL

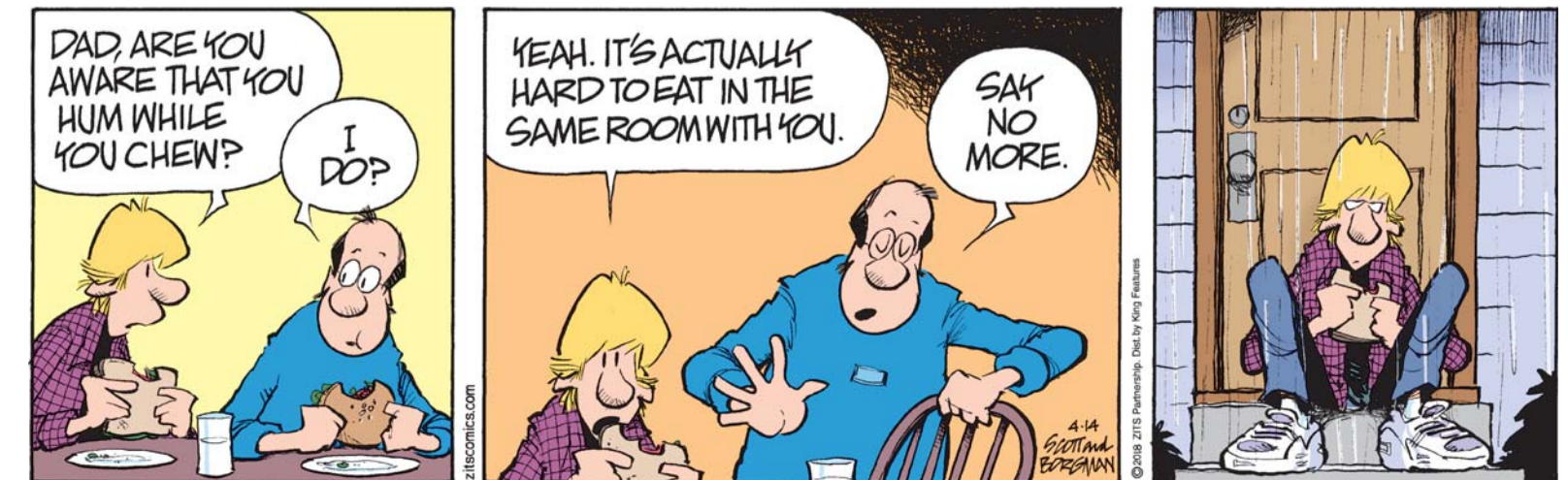


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman