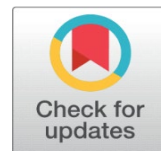


SOME ICONIC TEXTILE CRAFT OF HAND BLOCK PRINTS IN INDIA

Dr Anjali Pandey ¹✉

¹ H.O.D. Drawing & Painting Department Maharani Laxmi Bai Government Girls P. G. Autonomous College Bhopal, India



ABSTRACT

In India the practice of block- printing goes back to the ancient period. Near about 4000 years ago from the period of Indus valley civilization the Ajrakh of Kutch and Sindh uncovered the history.

Ajrakh, Sanganer, Bagru, Kalamkari, and Bagh all have some specific specialties. Other places like Umedhpur, Tarapur are special for traditional prints using indigo. The other styles of hand-block printing are mostly in movement within the local area. The products made using this printing technique include saris, shawls, dress materials, dupattas, turban etc. and furnishing material, usually bed sheets, curtains, tablecloths, and pillow covers are used to print. Today for catching up with the youngsters, Shirts are also used to print in a new ethnic look.

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Corresponding Author

Dr Anjali Pandey,
anjali_pandey11@yahoo.com

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Keywords: Hand Block, Looms, Cotton Fabric, Natural Dye Colors, Dress Material



<https://www.google.com/www.esamskriti.com/History-of-Hand-Block-Printing-in-India-images>





Bagru Prints

www.unnatisilk.com/

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. ART OF HAND BLOCK PRINT: HISTORICAL ASPECT

"From very early times the universe has picturesquely been described as woven fabric. The garment became a symbol and added to the significance or efficacy of the object of worship. So, the image began to be clothed in different garments for different parts of the day, which involved constant changes. There were also special clothes with special colours and Designs at festivals for deities and man alike, to augment the wealth and variety. [Chattopadhyay \(1980\)](#)

India for millennia has been famous for the variety and beauty of its printed and dyed hand-woven textiles. Handloom is a Loom operated by hand. The evidence of cotton fabric was disclosed by the excavation of Mohenjo Daron and other Harappan sites indicates the antiquity of cloth to more than 4000 years. India was perhaps the first to perfect the art of weaving and its exquisite fine gorgeous brocades of gold. [Pal \(1984\)](#)

The period of Ramayana and Mahabharat refereed, that the woven silk and woollen fabrics were in vogue. The Megatheres (304 BC-299 BC) mentioned that Indians wore flowered Muslins, and the aristocratic families wore embroidered pure gold dresses.

The cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora also depicted the fine work of design and patterns on the fabrics. The different kinds of dresses are unique and marvelous.

The products of the ancient weavers of India have been compared to divine poetry in colourful fabrics. In the words of Pupil Jaikar "To discover the sources of their inspiration and to comprehend the inherent significance of the vast fold of Indian fabrics they should be seen in context against the social and historical background from which they have emerged and on the tone bodies of the people for whom they were made. For in India, textiles have really been concerned with fashion or individual separateness and uniqueness rather than garments have always been only one part of complex ritual of Life One aspect of preordained Milieu in which man is born, grows to texture, and dies". [Pal \(1984\)](#)

With the arrival of Mughals in India, some new elements were introduced in textile craft. New forms of floral and geometrical designs and patterns took place,

new material and tools were innovated. To promote the weaving craft, a new function, that of designer, was established. The distribution of work divided in two parts; the work came out as a separate workmanship. The ladies of aristocratic families encouraged the craftsmen. They also took interest in royal textile workshops and gave some suggestions and ideas to artisans.

The impact of Islamic culture and Royal promotions came out with new dimensions of creativity and vision that brought out the best pieces. The painters and craftsmen were recognized with their individual names. To the dyers of India, a new plant chemistry was introduced. Instead of native lac red, Hared, and Manjusha (*Rubia tinctorum*) Light Pistachio green, lush green and rosy, red was innovated. The great flowering of craftsmanship with the introduction and assimilation of Islamic influences and an aesthetic reflects in Art and Craft of India. [Mathur \(1987\)](#)

“Miniatures of the period reveal textiles of an extraordinary beauty and richness of texture and pattern. Heavy Gold cloth was often used for end pieces in the finest Muslins. As the goldsmith fashioned the beaten sheet of gold and glowing, Jewel- like enamels, so the printer, weaver or embroiderer used his skill to bring life to the Jewel- like ornaments on the heavy gold and pieces.” [Mathur \(1987\)](#)



<https://textilevaluechain.in/in-depth-analysis/articles/textile-articles/textiles-of-madhya-pradesh/>

2. HAND BLOCK PRINTING: AN OVERVIEW

Enrichment of designs were employed by many methods rather than changing the patterns of weaving from the loom. Painting is referred to as the earliest way of decoration on textiles. Another way of colouring was the dyeing. Rangrezz of Rajasthan and Gujarat used to dye them by tying it in different ways. The most practised work to embellish the cloth, was the printing with a wooden block. Hand block printing has been recognized as an old craft that is here through generations in different clusters in the country.

Mohenjo Daron excavations reveal that the hand printing was the most practised craft. Evidence of this has also been found from the tombs of Egypt, indicating that the hand printing was used universally. The design and technique are different from place to place. [Chattopadhyay \(1980\)](#)

The practice of printing on cloth with wooden stamps is still in practice today. The printing is done on textile mainly using wooden moulds. The person who used

to print from the mould was called Cheep Sant Namdev used to call himself Cheepa. [Gupta \(N.D.\)](#)

The Word Chintz comes from the Hindi word 'छिंट' meaning spotted, variegated, speckled, or sprayed. The aesthetic of Coromandel Chintz was so popular that's why the textile mills of England and Europe were overshadowed so in 1686 all imports were declared banned on all Chintz by the French government. The British Parliament enacted a law in 1720 to ban the import, use, or wear of the Chintz Because they didn't know how to make Chintz cloth. [Gupta \(N.D.\)](#)

“As the early communities lived in close proximity with nature, their Textiles were patterned on the local contours of the countryside. There is a blaze of bright shades in the desert area, while in the lush green region the fabric gets divested of pigments as though to let man enjoy the magnificence of the colours of the sky, water, and forests. Where the landscape is brown and rocky, designs blossom out more boldly and richly”. [Gupta \(N.D.\)](#)

Textile is undeniably correlated with social and ritual events. Garments are represented as a significant object of worship. The fabric craft flourished under royal patronage since the 12th century. India has been renowned for its printed and dyed cotton cloth. The present states of Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat region were the earliest centres for block printing. From these centres, in the 18th century the craft appears to have spread gradually with the migration of craftsmen to Sanganer in Rajasthan and other areas. Each and every region traditionally had distinct design elements with unique colour schemes and motifs. The very local social influences also contributed to the big range. There are various specialties of hand block printing. The main centres where block printing is practised are: -

Hyderabad, Machalipattnam (Kalamkari) in Andhra Pradesh; Kutch, Ahmedabad, Porbandar, Rajkot in Gujarat; Sanganer, Bagru Barmer and Jodhpur in Rajasthan; Farrukabad in Uttar Pradesh; Serampore in West Bengal and Bagh, Behrongarh, Burhanpur and Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh. Benars and Pilakhuan are the centres of Block-makers.

Environmental influences made a vast variety in textile. Traditional material and locally available colour give local impact. However, the blending of elements is due to interaction between regions. Block printed fabric by expert craftsmen from each of these regions are still identifiable by their region of origin. Rajasthan and Gujarat are neighbouring states, so the similarities are found in the prints of Barmer, Sanganer, Bagru, Pethapur and Ahmedabad. [Mishra \(2007\)](#)



<https://www.google.com/https/the-art-of-ajrakh-and-a-maker>

3. AJRAKH — KUTCH GUJARAT & BARMER RAJASTHAN

The term “Ajrak”, may be derived from “Azrak”, meaning blue or indigo in Arabic, as blue happens to be the one of the principal colours in Ajrak printing. These prints are mostly found in Pakistan and Sindh and Ajrakhpur in India. It is identified as a tradition of Sindhi culture.

The antiquity of this craft culture shows from the bust of a priest, wearing Shawl in a trefoil pattern excavated from the Mohenjo Daron from the period of Indus Valley Civilization. Similar patterns from Mesopotamia are also notable.

The main characteristic of this printing is that it is done on both sides Pal (1984) and the method is known as the resist printing generally having the length of 2.5-3.00 metres. Ajrak (2010) Dark colours are used to protect from the fierce heat of the desert. Bed sheets, dupattas, scarves, turbans, and shawls are found in daily usage.

Printing is done by hand from wooden blocks in a repetitive pattern. The Ajrakh has the principal colours of indigo blue and crimson red. Locally available natural dyes are eco-friendly and creates harmony with nature. Barmeri prints in geometrical patterns all over and has dark shades of blue and red. Ajrakh is acraze with youngsters of urban areas. Pal (1984)



<https://www.google.com/www.indiamart.com/bagru-hand-block-printed-fabric>

4. BAGRU PRINTS — RAJASTHAN

Bagru prints are a three centuries-old traditional textile printing technique of block printing of a small village named Bagru of Rajasthan state that is only popular for textile printing craft keeping alive. The unique and splendid efforts of artisans of using these wooden blocks in their own distinctive way and using native methods of printing are known as “Bagru printing” Mishra (2007)

The fabric is considered as eco-friendly. The use of some locally available natural materials and motifs makes them different from others. Before printing, fabric should be washed, free from starch and soft bleached if desired. The fabric was stretched across a waist high 3 feet table, measuring approximately 3 feet wide and 9 feet long. The printing starts from left to right.

The colour is levelled in the tray with a block of wood. Black or a dark colour is used for outline. Block has a point which guides and helps in repeat impressions.

This Maintains continuity and design remains disconnected. Artisans press the block from the back of the handle for a good impression of design and colour. Motifs carried with wooden blocks in two styles that are direct and resist style. Single colour designs carry out easily and rapidly while multiple colours take time and adeptness. Usually black, brown, mustered, red, and orange colours are used to apply. Natural dyes and colours are used, indigo dye is the prominent. Colour variation is a little difficult and it is hard to determine the quality or depth of colour while printing. Different dyes are used for silk and cotton. Skill is required for good printing results. [Mishra \(2007\)](#)

The traditional art of Bagru hand block printing is still in practice.



<https://www.google.com/httpswww.utsavpedia.com/motifs-embroideriy/the-dainty-sanganeri-prints>

5. SANGANERI PRINTS — RAJASTHAN

Sanganer, a small town near Jaipur is famous for the sanganeri textile prints rich with delicate floral patterns in soothing hue style. The patronage of former rulers encouraged the artist to bring elegance and proficiency to their work. The tradition has been continuing for more than 200 years. [Live History India \(N.D.\)](#) The Sanganeri textile art flourished under the patronage of Sawai Jai Singh Ji IInd. He was the founder of Jaipur City. He wants to develop Jaipur as a centre of trade and commerce. Craftsmen from other parts of India were invited for the promotion of the textile craft. The amalgamation of the craft culture of Rajasthan with the other states such as Present-day Artisans who migrated to Rajasthan from the present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat produced a marvellous combination of design, pattern, and technique.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Calico prints of India were excessively in demand in all European countries. It was one of the major exports of the East India Company. Sanganeri prints obined fame and esteem for styled motifs in attractive and exquisite patterns and shades. Designs are mostly floral based with complex detailing. The execution of designs is very creative which gives the look of embroidery in lieu of printing. The wide range of floral motifs includes Sunflowers, narcissus, roses, and other flowers with luxuriant foliage. These prints are also acquiring various ways of tinsel printing technique. The colour applied by means of tinsel process is the most elegant and stylish in a class by themselves. [Pal \(1984\)](#)

The prints also have their names on the name of deities and objects. The techniques of printing are more than the same with Bagru. Motifs have an impact of the patterns of Mughal design. Birds, flowers, and leaves are mainly used.

Before the Printing, fabric should be washed to remove the starch. Natural dyes are used to apply. Today chemical dye colours are also used for printing. White background identifies the Sangneri Prints but nowadays Rangrezz are also applying the colours in background.

Long table, a variety of Hand blocks, and a tray of Colour are necessary tools of printing. Do-rukhi and Calico printing are the two techniques of printing used in Sangner. With its name Do-rukhi is double sided printing on fabric while in calico printing outlines apply first from the filling of colours. [Mishra \(2007\)](#)



<https://www.google.com/www.indiamart.com-wovens-crafts/block-printed-kalamkari>

6. KALAMKARI- ANDHRA PRADESH

Kalamkari is a type of hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile of Andhra Pradesh. There are two distinctive styles of kalamkari art in India — the Srikalahasti style and the Machilipatnam style. The word Kalamkari is derived from the Persian word 'Kalam' which means Pen and the word 'Kari' stands for craftsmanship. The Srikalahasti style of kalamkari is done using a pen for freehand drawing of patterns and filling in the colours and is entirely hand worked. The Machilipatnam style of Kalamkari is the earliest and composite work involves vegetable Dyed block-printing of a fabric, which was developed during the reign of Mughal Empire and being practised under the constituency of Golconda Sultanate then it spread to along the eastern coast up to Tamilnadu. Originally it was known as Pedana style.¹⁹ It also became popular as Coromandel Chintz. Mainly cotton cloth is used for the printing

The process of block printing completes in various processes. Before printing they prepared the cloth for good results. The cloth is treated with buffalo milk for fixing the colour and 'Harad' is used to avoid the smell of milk. After this process the cloth is washed, and dried in sunlight.

Colours which are used for printing and dyeing are prepared from vegetables, flowers, and minerals. Black, red, blue, and yellow colours originated from iron ore, tamarind seed, indigo and turmeric.

Rose wood is preferably used to make the hand blocks, as it has an enduring tendency. Printing is done in three steps. First, they print outlines and backgrounds. Then black and red colours are used to print inside motifs. After this the cloth was left to dry for two days. Then cold water is used to wash the fabric to remove the remainder. Dhavdi flower and madder dye is added in boiling water for fixing of colours, the fabric is submerged in this boiling mixture. Again, it laid to dry. The rest of colours viz yellow, green, blue is used to apply in the third step. Finally, it is washed with soap and water and let it dry in the sun.

Today the artisans of kalamkari block printing have extended their products. Prints used to be on dress material, but now furnishing articles are also produced. With the time of digitization some changes have also come out 20 <https://isha.sadguru.org>



<https://textilevaluechain.in/in-depth-analysis/articles/textile-articles/textiles-of-madhya-pradesh/>

7. BAGH PRINTS - MADHYA PRADESH

Madhya Pradesh is also famous for various printing techniques of hand-block printing using natural dye colours. [Textiles Of Madhya Pradesh \(2020\)](#)

Bagh hand block prints of Madhya Pradesh are the classic hand block prints, practised over 1000 years probably. The Bagh textile craft originated at Village Bagh in Dhar district. [Textile Tourism In Madhya Pradesh, \(N.D.\)](#)

Bagh prints have their own distinctiveness which is the use of natural colours for dyeing and printing. Colours are made from the extract of plant roots, turmeric, pomegranate skin, lac, iron, vegetables, and indigo.

Black and red colour with white background is prominent in Bagh print. Due to intricate carved motifs sometimes, it gives a 3D effect. Geometrical and floral designs are mainly applied. Cotton and silk are mainly used for printing. Before printing the fabric is washed and dried, then it is dipped in the solution of Sanchra, goat dung and Arandi ka tell then it is again washed. Treatment with Hared gives an off- white background. The mixture of Iron sulphate and hared is used for black and for the red colour mixture of Dhawda flower and Alum is used. Red and black are prominent dyes. Washed fabric is now ready for Printing. Small wooden blocks of designs are used for printing. Once the printing is done the cloth is left to dry on

pebbles in the sun. To remove the excess colour, printed fabric dipped in River water for a very short period and taken out and left to dry

"Indians were the earliest in the world to use cotton for manufacturing cloth. Textile technology is said to have begun in this country 4500 years ago, since that time cotton was produced in India it is quite natural that weaving must have also begun here"

In the world of textile almost everything seemed decorated. From the very beginning ornamentation looks like a part of the object. Motifs have their native significance as running water is rhythm of life. There are many ways to produce different styles and different colours for ornamentation of textile. Textile is not only a part of fashion or utility, but it is also an essential part of our life. like a Tana Bana.

Hand block printing is much more popular in all over India since ancient times. Natural dyes and colours were used to print. Technique and the regional artistic touch seem in the regional textile craft. Methods of the hand block printing are almost same but some skilful treatment, patterns of designs, and use of karigarhi (craftsmanship) make them unique and icon of the region.

The dynasty rulers also played very important role in promotion, extension, and conservation of regional traditional textile craft. Today this is the demand of that of time that these textile craft which are diminishing should be taken care of, for which some supportive steps and innovative changes should be taken in favour of craftsman, so that this traditional art can survive for a longer time.

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