

A Study of Technological Influence on Hand Block Printing in Jaipur (With Special Reference to Sanganer and Bagru)

Abstract

Jaipur is known for its colourful art and culture. It has been a major centre for block printing in Rajasthan. There are two remarkable centres of block printing in Jaipur region, namely Sanganer (printed on white background) and Bagru (printed on black and red background). Hand block printing on textile is practised as a craft with its ethnic designs has thrived since the 12th century when the art received a royal patronage from the kings of the era. The fabric was printed mainly for the use of royal families and rich traders but later it started to be used as part of clothing for urban families and also exported. About four decades ago these printed products were mainly fulfilling the demands of the domestic market. With the increase in market demand at national and international level and low production capacity by the traditional block printers; a comparatively faster, more mechanical and economical way of printing was taken up. This gave an opportunity to mass production of similar looking product with the help of synthetic dyes and chemicals. The screen printed fabric is ideally suited to meet the requirements of price conscious consumer. Now, the conventional hand blocks printing process of taking impression through small carved wooden blocks on the fabric apparels is looking forward for new technology as it is involved in screen printing, dyeing, cutting, and other modes of printing in more cost effective, more qualitative and more finished form by the use of computer graphics, patternmaking software and CAD technology for more modern and effective designs. Through this study we will trace out the technological impact on traditional block printing, which will enhance their efficiency in production.

Keywords: Hand block printing, Sanganer, Bagru, Technology, Screen printing

Introduction

Textile hand printing is geographically and in terms of its product range, a well diversified industry. Textile printing finds its early existence in the Seventeenth century in India. Similarly by the end of the 17th century this art-form developed in Rajasthan also. During the Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries some colorful printed fabrics existed here. With the constant wars of Mughals and Marathas, many printers migrated from Gujarat to Rajasthan. By the end of the 18th century this industry was fully developed under the royal patronage and became the finest art of Rajasthan which has international demand since many years.¹

There are several modes of printing, such as, hand block printing, printing 'dabu' (resist printing) and 'chhint' (sprinkling of colour) printing.² However, the most famous among them is the hand block printing. This industry is influenced by the natural environment, such as; availability of water sources, abundant sun light, atmospheric humidity and the local herbs and flowers. As water has always been available in abundance here, washing of fabrics has formed the basis³ of dyeing and printing. Each village in Rajasthan possess the Chhipa caste engaged in block printing activities - be it mud resist or discharge or wax resist process. The Chhipas hand over their craft skills down the generations, from parent to child, the expertise remains within the family. This stable tradition is still very much in fashion despite the accessibility of modern techniques like screen-printing.

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The major centres for traditional block printing in Rajasthan are Bagru, Pali, Jodhpur, Barmer, Sanganer etc. Over the time, each centre has developed its distinguished design, style and techniques. The two important centres of printing, namely, Sanganer and Bagru which have unique characteristics of their own are considered under this research.

Sanganer is situated at a distance of 15 kilometres south of Jaipur. It has been a major centre for very fine block-cutting and printing. Almost 500 years' old, Sanganeri printing⁴ gained high popularity during the 16th and 17th centuries.

At present more than 315 Micro, Small and Medium size Sanganeri Printing units are operating at Sanganer⁵. Total number of artisans varies from 1800 to 3000. More than 1200 families are directly dependent on these units⁶. It is estimated that 25% population of Sanganer is directly or indirectly dependent on Sanganeri Print Industries for their livelihood.⁷

Almost every member of the 'Chhipa' family is involved in the washing, dyeing and printing of clothes. While, the printers are predominantly Hindus, majority of dyers and block makers are Muslims⁸.

Water of the Saraswati River that used to flow graciously through Sanganer, was known for its special quality that used to bring out radiance from the natural dyed fabric.



Sanganeri printing is famous for its Calico printed bed covers, quilts and saris. In Calico printing⁹, the outlines are first printed, and then the color is filled in. Bold patterns and colors are used repeatedly in diagonal rows while printing. Doo-Rookhi printing is also famous here, in this technique artists print on both sides of the cloth.

Sanganeri prints are famous for their delicate floral sprigs and it is done mainly on white background



with somber colours, fine lines and intricate details.

The motifs are strongly dominated by Mughal style, specially printed on sari designs, borders and end pieces consisting repeated bands of twines and flowers of various sizes. The remaining space is covered with repeated designs varying from simple dots or geometric shapes to large butas and kalgas. Usually motifs are a blend of flower, bud and leaves or other forms like keri (mango), pan (betel leaf), katar (dagger) or jhumka (ear-ring). Interestingly, an animal was never used on these fabrics for costumes. Sometimes we also find geometrical, folk designs and God figures in prints.

Bagru is situated at a distance of 30 kilometers from Jaipur. It is the hub of the traditional method of block printing and has an important place in printing industry because of the use of eco-friendly vegetable dyes. The *Chhipa* community has been printing in Bagru for about 350 years, developing a unique process with natural colors¹⁰. About three dozen families are engaged in dyeing, block making and printing. These craftsmen have kept the three-centuries-old tradition of block printing alive not only in Rajasthan but also on the international fashion map for the excellence of the craft.

There exists a special type of print based on two colours - red and black, which is famous as 'Bagru Print'. The patterns are simple bold floral designs and rich in colors like indigo blue, alizarine red, iron black and turmeric yellow¹¹. Today Bagru produces some of the loveliest bed covers and other materials but earlier the fabric was mainly printed for the local women.

There are two types of hand block printing in Bagru

Bagru printing: Prints are on a dyed background (indigo, red blue or yellow colored ground) and motifs are more geometrical and large with bold lines than the Sanganeri motifs. Local water of river Sanjari also has its effects on print as it comes out with a reddish tinge.

Dabu

At Bagru, where water is comparatively scarce, 'Dabu' resist printing and indigo work is mostly done. This process produces a reddish black shade with motives such as wild flowers, buds and foliage providing inspiration to the printers of Bagru¹².



Findings

Previously manual Block Printing with natural dyes was the only method of production. This method was easily taken over by the screen printing industry in terms of volume of production.

After analysing the process of traditional hand block printing, we found that it is highly laborious



and time consuming. Usually the coarse cloth produced in Rajasthan is used for printing. Preparing the cloth for printing took rounds of washing and drying manually which takes a few weeks of time. Natural dyes also takes days of soaking flowers, leaves, cereals and metal strips before printing. Traditionally the wooden hand blocks of size up to 6" X 6" engraved manually with various shapes and designs for printing. The printer uses the block dipped in the natural color or we can say stamp the impression on the cloth one after the other. Usually 32 layers of coarse cotton cloth are spread over the entire surface for printing forming a durable and soft padding¹³, which is further covered with two layers of coarse thick handloom cloth. The top layers help to absorb surplus colour from the block that might seep through or drop out.

This lengthy traditional process was not been able to cope up with the pressures of the demand which grew rapidly during the decade of 1990s. Slowly and gradually technology is taking place in this sector. This led to new ways of printing with the help of screen process (stencil printing) in order to fulfil the increasing market demand. Although the process is manually operated, yet it is capable of large scale printing which is several times faster and requires less labour. As a result Screen printing technique gain recognition in mid seventies.



It is very convenient for the printers to print by the screen process in a faster way because; once the screen stencil is ready it can easily print three to five thousand metres of cloth in a day. While with hand printing this much work will take continuous printing for around ten days. In screen printing mainly ready-made chemical based dyes are used for the printing which are comparatively more shining.

So with the development of screen printing techniques in this industry many technologies were adopted by the printers. With this heavy manual labour was reduced, the design of artwork are simplified, reduction in the garment processing cost and also improvement in efficiency. Through

Computer Aided Designing (CAD), which was born in the early 80s helped in designing patterns, fitting system, design system, Grading and marker systems, and automatic spreaders cutting¹⁴ etc. by the use of various software.

Designers are creating garment details and patterns with the help of patternmaking software which include different features: drawing tools, linear and shaped drawing, color, fabric textures and patterns and stitching detail etc. These software also ensures a clear outline and exact garment production details. Thus it avoids manual grading pattern which in terms saves the expense and also manufacturing and factory valuable production time. These computerized designs are then used by the screen printing textile units for production which fulfils the demands of the market.

But still exclusive items with ethnic designs and eco-friendly dyes are fascinating the selective buyers. Due to this the traditional block printers didn't change themselves with changing scenario and remained segmented and competing with low cost screen printing technology.

Conclusion

Hence we can conclude that the hand block printing of Sanganer and Bagru are very important areas in textile printing industry of Jaipur. Now-a-days printing industries are moving towards new technologies which has tremendous advantage in future market. However, the Hand block printing has established itself in the international market but the technology adopted by the print industry should be worked out in the right direction by using new technology for more modern and effective designs and print technology to fulfil the market demands by using different software. Thus the use of technology in the apparel industry will lead to the result of cost-effectiveness, innovation, time-saving, higher productivity, higher efficiency, accuracy, and environment protective. Also in present scenario government is arranging trade fairs to promote this sector at the lower duty.

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