

DABU PRINTS : HAND BLOCK PRINTS OF AKOLA

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India's traditional fabrics and textile crafts have enjoyed undisputed supremacy for centuries in the world. From the dawn of history, as caravans started hauling merchandise across the continents, the fabulous fabrics of India became a rage in the premier trading centers of the world. Indian textile crafts have been aptly described as the material symbols of the country's unique cultural heritage.

Indian block prints are the gorgeous aspect of textile crafts. Rajasthan is also famous for its skill in hand printing. The saline water of the rivers of Rajasthan is Akola in Raj or Gujarat facilitated the development of dyeing and printing cottage industries. One of them is a printing village Akola, which is located on the bank of *Bedach* river and known for its unique mud-resist printing. These prints are known as Akola-prints or 'Dabu prints.'

Presently, 70-75 families are working in this direction. Caste wise these families are known as 'chippa' thus the village is also called as 'Chippon ka Akola'.

They embellish various articles like sari, salwar suit, duppatta and house hold items. But till now these cottage industries are under developed and very few studies are available on focusing different aspect of this craft.

A study was therefore, designed and undertaken to explore this dabu-printing work in the field of art and fashion. Simple random sampling method of data collection was used and an exploratory research design of survey method was followed in this study. Investigation was carried out with an objective to study the existing status, organizational set-up and functioning of these hand-printing units of Akola.

This mud-resist printing is known as 'dabu-print'. The word Dabu means "to press", so it refers to a method in which mud-resist is applied on to the cloth by a pressing block.

It has been found in this study that maximum block printers of Akola fall in the age group ranging from 30-50 years. Traditional printers are not very educated and most of them had studied till primary school, 70% of the printers belong to joint families and the whole family works as a self-sufficient unit. All the family members are equally engaged in block printing. Men do the printing and women do washing, drying, etc. Income level of the block-printers of Akola ranges between 500-5000 Rs. per month. Most of them are not earning sufficient to meet their daily needs even. For raw material printers of Akola depend on industrial cities like Bhilwara, Byawar, Mumbai, Udaipur etc. Cotton is the most frequently used fabric and its cost depends upon quality of fabric.

Block printers of Akola are using both synthetic as well as natural dyes. Natural sources of colour are pomegranate rinds, indigo leaves, iron shavings, turmeric, mahua (ippi) flower and jaggery etc. Speciality and uniqueness of Akola prints lies in their natural colours. Printers have their own traditional procedure for mordanting preparing dye both from plant sources and for applying mud resist.

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For preparing resist, they mix jaggery, lime water and oil in clay, keep this solution for ripening and then print the cloth with this thick solution by means of blocks. Fabric is then dyed to obtain white pattern on coloured background. In dyeing, indigo is used for blue colour, turmeric for yellow, alizarin for red, iron dust for black and Mahuva with indigo is used for green colour. Harad (Myrobalan) is used as mordent for all colours.

The total beauty of Akola prints depends upon the effect produced from combination of these colour and various traditional motifs. Block printers of Akola use both stylized and natural motifs. Geometrical motifs are used specially for borders. Floral motifs are used in suits, Sarees and bed sheets. Each motif is named differently in local language. Rebari is a foliage design, chunari is a design produced by assembling dots in a definite pattern, large flowers are called "Bunta" etc.

In Akola 75% printers are using traditionally followed designs and do not want to incorporate new design because they are uncertain about their consumer acceptability, thus do not want to take risk. They produced mainly bed sheets, suits, sari, odhani, turban etc. Cost of items depends on fineness of work and fabric used. Although these block printers are having a very beautiful art in hand, yet there is no trademark for their own products. Dress materials from Akola are exported too, but workers are not involved directly in this trade. Marketing agencies export their products.

In spite of their hard work and skillful art, block printers are earning very less. Government institution are helping them but workers are not getting desirable benefits due to poor implementation of government policies and interference of middle men. Industrialisation and introduction of roller printing is an another problem for these workers. Consumers prefer cheaper machine printed imitation in cloth. Therefore, these crafts men are finding it difficult to keep pace with changing trends of fashion. Their children are also moving on to other profession.

Moreover, due to lack of funds available to them and shortage of credit facilities they can not develop their own business, thus working hard for very low income.

The findings of the study revealed that these traditional textile cottage industries possess a lot of potential which is yet to be exploited. There is an utter lack of any organised efforts to promote this traditional art of block printing. It is a matter of concern and government should come forward to help the artisans.

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