LESSON 4  INTRODUCTION TO PRINTED TEXTILES

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4. **Introduction to Printed Textiles**

In the previous lesson you had learnt about woven textiles. After making cloth man wanted to decorate it. There are many ways of embellishing it; by colouring it, printing on it, painting it or embroidering on it, etc. In the course of our study we shall learn about all these different processes. In this lesson you will acquire a broad overview of different printing methods.

In the second and third lesson of this unit, we will cover in greater detail two famous styles of printing, namely, Sanganeri and Bagru, respectively.

4.0 **Objectives**

After reading this lesson you will:-

- Become familiar with the basics of printed textiles of India.
- Be able to differentiate between the different printing styles and techniques prevailing in different regions of India.

4.1 **Introduction**

Textiles have been produced in India since antiquity. The creation and development of printed textiles has a pre-historic origin (Fig. 4.1). However, very few of the old printed textiles still exist. One reason is that cloth has long been regarded solely as an article of consumption, rather than as an art form. The designs are lost through everyday wear and tear.

The earliest designs were found on relief-carved sculptures of Mohenjo-Daro. The famous Ajanta wall paintings provide an invaluable record of the refined nature of designs. In the years to come, old traditional textiles and their designs might be seen only in the museums, art galleries or CD-ROMs.

Historically India has been the breeding ground of a variety of aesthetic modes of expression. It saw the growth of important schools in the fine arts. Also, it experienced a constant interchange of ideas between its northern and southern parts. Today, these attributes intermingle and are recognized as a strong design form of textiles. The beautiful colours and designs of printed textiles hold a special appeal for the modern generation.
India is very rich in its cultural heritage. However, our traditional art forms are facing a slow death; we are losing our core values in a blind aping of the western culture, unlike the western artists who look to our traditional art for ideas and utilize them by combining with their existing art forms.

Three basic necessities of life are food, clothing and shelter. Of these it is the ‘costume’ (clothing) which establishes man’s individual identity in society and which also links him up with the social hierarchy. In order to fulfil this necessity, work relating to manufacture of fabric, its production and ornamentation is assigned to certain communities in society. For example, weaver is responsible for weaving a fabric, nilgar is a dyer who dyes in indigo, rangrez an ordinary dyer, who dyes in all colours, chhipa is a printer who decorates the fabric by dyeing and printing it for festive occasions.

The prosperous Indian state of Gujarat and the princely land of Rajasthan have long been famous for the cultivation of cotton and indigo and for the early use of mordant dyestuffs; indeed the rivers themselves are legendary for their chemical properties which were said to impart a special brightness to the colours obtained through the dyeing and mordanting process.
Most of the hand and screen printed brightly coloured and patterned textiles used for summer dress come from Rajasthan. Large part of Rajasthan (Fig. 4.2) is desert, greenery is sparse and scarce and that also only for a few months. This unkindness of nature is compensated by bright colour of costume worn by people of this region. Innumerable shades of red, green, yellow and saffron are known to the dyers of Rajasthan. They have highly developed colour sense and handle the material efficiently.

The most important centres for printing are Sanganer, Jaipur, Bagru and Barmer in Rajasthan, and Anjar, Deesa, Ahmedabad, Jetpur, Rajkot, Porbandar, and Bhavnagar in Gujarat (Fig. 4.2). Ahmedabad produced screen printed and block printed designs of floral sprays and imitation Bandhani on a red background. The floral prints with Persian associations are made at Deesa in Northern Gujarat and in the Barmer and Jaisalmer regions of Rajasthan.

Self-check Question

1. Which are the most important centres of Textile Printing in India?

4.2 Historical Background

There is some evidence to indicate the presence of block printing technology as early as the 5th century B.C., but no printed material survived from this early period. The cotton fragments unearthed at sites such as Fustat and Quesir-Al-Qadim in Egypt appear to be the earliest known examples of printed Indian fabric, produced probably in Gujarat. While many of these date back to the 15th century and later, a few are almost certainly from an earlier period.

From the technical point of view Fustat fabrics (Fig. 4.3) can be categorized into two groups: (1) block printed with a resist, perhaps of wax or mud and dyed in a single colour, generally indigo blue or red, and (2) block printed with one or more mordants, and their patterns occasionally outlined by means of a resist. In both the styles and techniques, it is interesting to note that the Fustat garments may have been the antecedents of fabrics still printed in centres such as Dhamadka (Ajrakh) in Gujarat.

In the traditional Rajasthani costumes we find more colours and designs than seen anywhere else. The cultural environment of Rajasthan is largely based on its Varna-Vyavastha (Caste System), owing to which the diversity of its foods and drinks, its customs and behaviour, is quite sharp and clear-cut. The colours and designs of costumes have been chosen with such great skill that a close look will readily reveal the identity and social status of the wearer. Man’s love for nature is reflected in the printing styles. As printing and dyeing is largely done with vegetable
colours it is a great achievement to produce multi-colour printing and dyeing with variety.

As we go across the country several methods of hand printing are seen, such as direct block printing, printing by resist, Khari or Rogan discharge printing, and screen printing besides various styles of machine printing (Fig. 4.4). Block printing displays an extensive variety of butas, whereas dyeing shows a variety of colours. The gold printing too is centuries old. Every caste and every region has its own variety of design. Colours were obtained from vegetables and metals as per their local availability.

4.3 Designs / Motifs

It is significant to note that, whereas the designs were named by the local language and local style in use, the designs of printing have been named after vegetables, birds or animals and other objects of nature. In dyeing, the names of colours also were not red, green or yellow, as they are called today. The colour names also in vogue reflected nature and life, such as kasumal (red), toru phooli (yellow), moongiya (dark green), rata etc. (Fig. 4.5).

4.3.1 Bagru

Bagru is a small village of Rajasthan, at 32 kms from east of Jaipur city. Its traditional processes of hand block printing on textiles with rich natural colours have been known for many centuries (Fig. 4.6).

In the past, the Bagru prints have been mainly used by the local population, particularly females. Patterns in rich colours like indigo blue, alizarine red, iron black and bright yellow colours were produced on coarse cotton cloth by indigenous processes of dyeing and printing. In
building up patterns geometrical forms were adopted along with floral animal and bird forms. Synthetic dyes have replaced natural dyes but the resists and their application, the processes and their sequences have undergone little change. The styles and motifs have been adapted to some extent to the changing markets.

4.3.2 Sanganeri

Sanganer is situated about 15 miles to the South East of Jaipur. The Sanganeri hand block-printing industry is blessed with natural factors that support it, like water, sunshine, atmospheric humidity and the local herbs and flowers used in the printing process (Fig. 4.7). Hand block-printing is a traditional form of imparting motifs and colour on fabric dyes. Block-printing is widely practiced all over India. Today, Sanganer is filled with block makers and printers. Sanganer prints have a white background. The colours are usually red and black with occasionally violet. The patterns are floral motifs and are known by the names of the plants. The outlines are clear and delicately drawn. In the 18th century, a number of headgears, safas and pagaris and material were printed.

4.3.3 Ajarakh

The village of Dhamadka in Kutch is noted for their reversible prints, known as Ajarakh textiles. Ajarakh is produced in Kutch and in Rajasthan. These textiles featured geometric and floral patterns.

Ajarakh cloth is block printed on one or both sides. The name is most probably derived from ‘azrak’ the Arabic word for ‘blue’, certainly indigo blue is the predominant colour for these clothes. Ajarakh cloth is used as marriage wear by Muslim males (Fig. 4.8).

4.3.4 Farrukhabad

The prints of Farrukhabad are known for its finely drawn patterns in pink and blue outlined with black. The Farrukhabad industry was known for the excellence of its brass blocks. Moreover, it pioneered the adoption of the heated print table which enabled rapid curing of the printed fabric (Fig. 4.9).

4.3.5 Bagh

Bagh is an isolated village of Madhya Pradesh, and known for hand block printed patterns. Red, blue, or black cotton grounds are often patterned with a lighter shade of the same colour (Fig. 4.10).
Self-check Questions

2. Which are the three main types of Printed Textiles from Rajasthan and Gujarat?

3. What are the local and common names of the colours usually used for dyeing in Rajasthan?

4.4 Assignments

4.4.1 Class assignments
   i) Make a replica on a drawing sheet of any one Printed Textile.
   ii) Draw sketches of various motifs used on Printed Textile.

4.4.2 Home assignments
   i) Find samples of Printed Fabrics in your house. Paste them neatly on clear pages with labels under each photo or picture.

4.5 Summing Up

The art of textile printing has a distinguished history. Of the numerous centres that existed across the length and breadth of India, each one had a distinctive style of print. The choice of base fabric, the pattern vocabulary, the colour range and the end used varied from area to area. In fact the traditional block has been abandoned altogether in several areas in favour of silk screens that are fast to produce very fine quality prints.

The important centres of printing in India are in Rajasthan and Gujarat states which have been for long famous for the cultivation of cotton and indigo and for the early mordant dyestuff.

In India, several methods of hand printing are used, such as direct block printing, printing by resist, Khariar or Rogan discharge printing and screen printing. Whereas block printing displays an extensive variety of butas, dyeing shows a variety of colours. In dyeing, the colours used are red, yellow and green locally called kasumal, toru phooli and moongiya respectively. Some of the well known types of textile printings of India are Bagru, Sanganeri, Ajarakh, Farrukhabad and Bagh.
4.6 Possible Answers to Self-check Questions

1. The most important centres for Textile printing are: Rajasthan (Sanganer, Jaipur, and Bagru), Gujarat (Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Anjar and Porbandar).

2. Bagru, Sanganeri and Ajrakh are the three main types of Printed Textiles from Rajasthan and Gujarat.

3. The local names of colours are Kasumal for red, Toru phooli for yellow and Moongiya for green.

4.7 Terminal Questions

1. What are the most important centres for textile printing in India?
2. What are the three main types of printed textiles of Gujarat and Rajasthan?
3. What is the background colour of the three main types of printed textiles in Gujarat and Rajasthan?
4. What are the different methods of printing in Rajasthan?
5. What are the local and common names of the colours usually used for dyeing in Rajasthan?
6. What are Ajrakh textiles?
7. What is Bagh and what is it known for?
8. What is special about the prints of Farrukhabad?
9. What are the characteristic features of Sanganeri prints?
10. Fill in the Blanks:
   i) __________ is 32 kms east of Jaipur city.
   ii) Sanganer is situated about _______ miles to the south east of Jaipur.
   iii) Bagh is an isolated village of ____________________.
   iv) Bagh is known for ____________________.
   v) The Farrukhabad industry was known for the excellence of its ____________ blocks.
11. Indicate whether the statements are true / false:
   i) Sanganer prints have dark background.  
      True / False
   ii) Block printing displays an extensive variety of butas.  
      True / False
   iii) Kasumal is the colour which means yellow.  
      True / False
   iv) Sanganer patterns are floral motifs.  
      True / False
v) Farrukhabad patterns are outlined with black. True / False
vi) In Bagh hand block prints, red, blue or black cotton grounds are patterned with lighter shade of contrasting colours. True / False
vii) Bagru prints were mainly used by females. True / False
viii) Bagru is a small village town in Madhya Pradesh. True / False

12. Match the Following:
   i) Nilgar  (a) ordinary dyer, who dyes in all colours.
   ii) Rangrez (b) printer.
   iii) Chippa (c) Dyer who dyes in Indigo.

13. Write a short note on Ajarakh?
14. Give a brief account of Bagru?
15. Describe block printing of Rajasthan?

4.8 References and Suggested Further Reading

## 4.9 Glossary

1. **Adapted** Adjusted, made suitable for a purpose

2. **Antiquity** Ancient times

3. **Basic fabric** Cloth that supports from beneath, fabric that serves as foundation

4. **Headgear** Head dress, hat

5. **Hierarchy** A system in which classes of status are ranked one above the other

6. **Motif** A decorative design or pattern

7. **Relief-carved sculptures** A method or moulding or carving or stamping in which the design stands out from the surface

8. **Replica** An exact copy