5. SANGANERI PRINTS

In the previous lesson we had acquired an overview of the different styles of printing obtaining in India. In today’s lesson we will cover in some detail, the method of Sanganeri Block Printing.

Block printing is one of the ways of giving a fabric colour and design to make it more beautiful and vibrant. This technique is very versatile and is used for embellishing all kinds of cloth that we wear or use; such as quilt, bed and pillow covers, wall hangings, floor covering etc.

5.0 Objectives

After studying this chapter

- You will be able to gain a broad understanding of Sanganeri Prints and be able to identify them.
- You will gain an understanding of the style, motifs, colours and dyeing methods used in Sanganeri printing.

5.1 Introduction

Rajasthan is world-famous for hand block-printing, an age-old tradition in India. During the wars of Aurangzeb many of the craftsmen of Gujarat migrated to seek more settled employment in Rajasthan which was dominated by the Royal families who could afford to pay handsomely for the exclusive and artistic work. This led to a close interchange of design and technical methods between Gujarat and Rajasthan, and many of the Sanganer patterns have a strong affinity with Gujarati work, the clear bold outline being a distinctive feature.

The main centers of block printing in Rajasthan state are Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Nathdwar, Jaipur, Sanganer and Bagru. Of these, Sanganer and Bagru are solely devoted to the art of printing (Fig. 5.1). In Nathdwara, sandalwood blocks used to be made, which left its perfume in the folds of the cloth. A large part of Rajasthan is desert. The harsh, dry natural landscape of Rajasthan is contrasted by the bright colours of the dresses and costumes worn by people of this region. Innumerable shades of red, green, yellow, blue, and saffron, are known in Rajasthan. The craftsmen have highly developed colour senses and handle their cloth-material with fine artistic sensibilities.
Sanganer is situated about 15 miles to the South East of Jaipur (Fig. 5.1). The Sanganeri hand block-printing industry is blessed with natural factors that support it, such as water, sunshine, atmospheric humidity and the local herbs and flowers used during the printing process.

5.2 Historical Background

Various records suggest that printed fabrics existed about 2500 BC. Patterned garments are shown on wall paintings in Egyptian tombs of 2000 BC. The origin of block printing in India is hard to trace but there is strong indication that it existed in the Pre-Christian era. It is believed that China and India were first to make simple blocks for printing on cotton cloth. Textile printing was a fairly extensive industry in India during the earliest part of the Christian era, and printed goods from India were exported to west more than a thousand years ago. Printing was almost as universally practiced as weaving. Sanganeri printing reached great heights during the 16th and 17th century in all European countries and became one of the major exports of the East India
Company. Due to the migration of a large number of Gujarati cotton printers to Sanganer during the wars of Aurangzeb a close interchange of design and technical methods between Gujarat and Rajasthan occurred. Therefore, Sanganeri patterns have a strong affinity with Gujarati work. The clear bold outline being the distinctive feature (Fig. 5.2).

Block printing became popular because of the simple process which can create beautiful prints and that too in bold and vibrant colours.

The Sanganeri block-printing art and craft has traditionally been carried on by the Chippas, an artisan community of Rajasthan (Fig. 5.3). The Chippas never receive formal training. They learn by watching as a matter of daily routine. The whole process, from printing and curing, is executed manually at home by family members. The technique of printing is passed-on through the generations. Earlier, this fabric was used by only royal families but now it is used as a part of clothing for high-end domestic consumption and for exports. The fascinating range of block-printed fabric in bold colours may be further embellished by embroidery.

Self-check Questions

1. Why has Block Printing become popular?

5.3 Designs / Motifs

Fine lines and intricate detailing are specialties of the Sanganeri style Block printing which displays an extensive variety of butas. The designs are based on the traditional motifs (Fig. 5.4), paisley flowers, leaves, birds, centreline pattern, and
borders with grapevine movement with black or dark outline. Various floral designs and geometrical (Fig. 5.5) and religious figures are included in its prints. Now-a-days modern designs are also found on block-printed cloth.

Folk designs are also found quite often and are famous, as they retain the basic Sanganeri printing style. Fine lines and intricate detailing are specialties of the Sanganeri style. It is noteworthy that all the designs of printing have been named after vegetables, birds or animals and other objects of nature.

5.4 Colours

Originally, printers used the colours derived from natural dyes, yellow from turmeric and buttermilk, green from banana leaves, black from iron rust, blue from indigo plant, red from sugarcane and sunflower and purple from kirmiz insect. The names of colours were not red, green or yellow, as they are called today. Instead the colour names reflected nature and life. The terms usually used were kasumal for red, toru phooli for yellow, moongiya for dark green etc. Traditionally, the chippas used Indigo and Manjistha (a local herb) for the blue and red hues, a trademark of Sanganeri prints. They also used turmeric roots and pomegranate peels to make green and yellow.

Red and black (Fig. 5.6) are the two main colours used all over the state. Both these colours are given multiple shades for use, through dyeing. As the dyeing is from vegetable colours, the cloth emits a peculiar smell of its own. These colours look soothing and do not hurt the eye. Nor do they fade in the sun as the present-day chemical colours do. As local vegetation is used in dyeing and printing, it costs less. Colours are prepared keeping in view the local demand. Small communities of chhipas have been doing the work of printing at local levels.
In Rajasthan, gold printing (Fig. 5.7) is also centuries old. Colours were obtained from vegetables and metals as per their local availability. The art of overprinting in gold is practiced in Sanganer.

Originally natural dyes were used but today they have been replaced by chemical and artificial colours, like scarlet, black and brown, but now with increasing technology and use of synthetic dyes, unusual combination of scarlet and pink, purple and orange, turquoise and green are gaining market demand. About twenty years ago, German indigo and alizarin were introduced to them, which then led the Chippas switching over to synthetic dyes. The new generations of Chippas have not learnt the art of making natural dyes. They find the process too expensive and time-consuming.

5.5 Utility Articles and Materials

An endless range of articles, like mainly saris, dress material, turbans, razais, quilt-covers, tablecloths, bedspread etc., made of malmal (very fine, thin, light cotton) and cotton are being made with the beautiful art of block printing.

5.6 Techniques

Sanganer became the prestigious work center for block printing with elaborate techniques:

i) Direct process

ii) Resist method

iii) Discharge process

iv) Rogan printing

i) Direct process - Two blocks are used one for filling and the other for outline. They are used in direct technique of printing. These blocks are manufactured at Sanganer and Purani Basti, from seasoned teak wood with designs on the underside of the block. The new blocks are soaked in oil for 10-15 days to soften the grains in the timber. Each block has a wooden handle and two to three cylindrical holes drilled into the block for free air passage and also to allow release of excess printing paste. The blocks are dipped into dye to print the pattern on the cloth. The blocks have different floral motifs carved on them (Figs. 5.8a, 5.8b).
ii) **Resist Method** - For this method colouring matter obtained from plants and vegetables was resisted using wax, clay and raisins as in Dabu or Iha method (Fig. 5.9).

iii) **Discharge process** - In the earlier part of the nineteenth century it was discovered that it was possible by chemical means to bleach out or 'discharge' a pattern in re-printing.

iv) **Rogan printing** - In this technique, the cloth has outlines over-printed with gold (Fig. 5.10). It was reserved for the more luxurious work for gold printing could not withstand heavy wear-and-tear, and could not be washed. The design was used for the royals. Now-a-days, chemical dyes are being used for rogan style which is far less expensive.

The printing table was long enough so that a good length of fabric could be printed altogether (Fig. 5.11). Wooden trolleys with racks having castor wheels fastened to their legs to facilitate free movement were used. The printers use to drags it along as they worked. On the upper most shelf trays & dyes are placed. On the lower shelves, printing blocks are kept ready.

The fabric to be block printed is washed free of starch and soft bleached. The fabric to be printed is pinned over the table and printed block by block. The printing starts from left to right. The colour is evened out in a tray with a wedge of wood and the block dipped into the colour. When the block is applied to the fabric, it is slammed hard with the fist on the handle so that a good impression may register.
Since 1948 there have been serious efforts in India to keep the traditional crafts alive despite the competition of twentieth century industrialization and growing commercialism. The All-India Handicrafts Board has sponsored many schemes for the revival and development of old centres of craftwork, so that the few skilled workers who remain may continue to practice, and pass on their knowledge and skills to the new generation. Unfortunately, the popular commercial designs west are all too easy to copy quickly and cheaply. The hand block printers who had been working in Sanganer for centuries have resorted to screen printing instead of the time consuming and costly block printing and some infiltration was inevitable as India’s own rapidly expanding industrialization made it increasingly difficult to gain a livelihood under the slower techniques which require fine craftsmanship.

Self-check Questions

2. What colours were originally used by printers for Sanganeri block printing?

3. Which two villages in Jaipur are devoted solely to block printing?

5.7 Assignments

5.7.1 Class assignments
   i) Make a replica on a drawing sheet of a Sanganer Printing.
   ii) Draw sketches of various motifs used on Sanganer Printing.

5.7.2 Home assignment
   i) Find samples of printed fabrics in your house. Paste them neatly on clear pages with labels under each photo or picture.

5.8 Summing Up

Rajasthan is famous for hand block-printing. Sanganer, a village 15 miles south-east of Jaipur is solely devoted to the craft of block-printing. Fine lines and intricate detailing on cotton and mulmal are specialties of Sanganeri block printing, which displayed an extensive variety of butas. The designs are based on traditional motifs, paisleys, flowers, leaves, birds, centreline pattern and borders with grapevine movement with black and dark outline. Traditionally, Sanganeri block printing was carried out by Chippas an artisan community of Rajasthan who learned the vocation by watching rather than by a formal training. Originally natural dyes were used. The colours were referred to by natural terms such as kasumal for red colour, toru phooli for yellow, and moongiya for dark green. Chippas used Indigo and Manjistha (a local herb) for the
blue and red hues, a trademark of Sanganeri prints.

The techniques used in Sanganeri printing are: i) Direct process, ii) Resist method, iii) Discharge process and iv) Rogan printing.

During the last two decades the eco-friendly natural dyes are being replaced by synthetic dyes and block printers are shifting to screen printing which they find cheaper and less time consuming.

5.9 Possible Answers to Self-check Questions

1. Block printing has become popular because of the simple process which can create beautiful and attractive designs.

2. Originally printers used the colours obtained from natural dyes, for Sanganeri block printing. They used Indigo for blue, Manjistha for red, yellow from turmeric, black from iron rust etc.

3. Sanganer and Bagru are devoted solely to block printing.

5.10 Terminal Questions

1. What are the motifs used in Sanganeri block printing?

2. What are the utility articles made from fabric with block printing?

3. What are the various techniques used in Sanganer block printing?

4. Why cylindrical holes are drilled into the block used for printing?

5. Why are new blocks soaked in oil?

6. In which direction is printing started?

7. What are the materials used in dabu printing?

8. Fill in the blanks:
   i) ____________ is an artisan community of Rajasthan.
   ii) Sanganer is situated about _______miles to the south east of Jaipur.
   iii) ____________ and ________________ are specialties of the Sanganeri style.
   iv) _______________ block are used in direct technique of printing.
v) New blocks are socked in _________ for 10-15 days.
vi) The other name for dabu method is _________.
vi) Red colour is known as ___________.
ix) ________, ______ and pomegranate skins are mixed together to make a green dye.

12. Indicate whether the statements are true / false
   i) Large part of Rajasthan is coastal.     True / False
   ii) Sanganer is situated 15 miles to the south west of Jaipur.     True / False
   iii) Sanganer block printing reached heights during 16th & 17th century.  True / False
   iv) New generations of chippas find the art of making natural dyes cheap and time conserving. True / False
   v) The blocks are manufactured at Sanganer. True / False
   vi) Upper most shelf of wooden trolley is used for keeping printing blocks. True / False

13. Match the following
   i) Kasumal a. Yellow
   ii) Toru phooli b. Dark green
   iii) Moomgilya c. Red

14. Write a note on wooden blocks used for printing?

15. Write a brief historical account of Sanganeri block printing?

16. Write a short note on Chippas?

17. What are the techniques of preparing the cloth for printing?

5.11 References and Suggested Further Reading


5.12 Glossary

1. Vibrant Strong and bright
2. Extensive Widespread
3. Intricate detailing Minute and complex design work
4. Turquoise Gem of greenish blue colour
5. Scarlet Brilliant red
6. Infiltration Enter gradually and secretly
7. Inevitable Sure to happen