

Design Resource

Block Printing - Sanganer

Craft of Creating Patterns

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Ms. Anisha Crasto and Ms.

Anushree Kumar

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/block-printing-sanganer>

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Introduction

Rajasthan as the hub of craft and culture houses many traditional crafts and among them the most practiced and known craft is hand block printing. Printing is done at several places in Rajasthan and each place has historical, cultural and geographical impact and influences on the craft of hand printing. Regional variations do exist and each region has a distinctive style of its own. The region of Sanganer has emerged as one such centre for the age old craft of hand block printing. Sanganer is a small village situated around 30 km from the walled city of Jaipur and considered to be the most prosperous place in Jaipur. The village has been a major centre for very fine block-cutting and printing units accommodating more than 5000 block printers. The water of the river Saraswati flowing from Sanganer is considered to be having special quality that brings out the radiance from the natural dyed fabric. The village of Sanganer is also famous for its handmade paper industry and Jain temples. The prints of Sanganer have their own distinctive style and patterns. They are known for bright colors, delicate lines which are usually printed against a white background. The craft flourished under the royal patronage, and by the end of the 18th century this industry was fully developed in Sanganer.

The craft of printed textile is prevalent since olden days. In India it is believed to be dating back to 12th century. Since then the craft has been flourishing due to the royal patronages. Selected for its abundance of soft water and clay suitable for the process of sun bleaching fabrics, Sanganer was developed into a major printing centre under the patronage of the Jaipur royal family. The earliest mentioned centers for block printings were located in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. During the regime of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh in 18th century the craft started building its roots in Sanganer. The place was suitable for the craft as it had a river flowing through it which helped the artisans with constant water source for washing and dyeing the products. Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh invited printers from Andhra and Gujarat to settle in this newly developed block printing village.



Traditional Sanganer buta printed on a white background.

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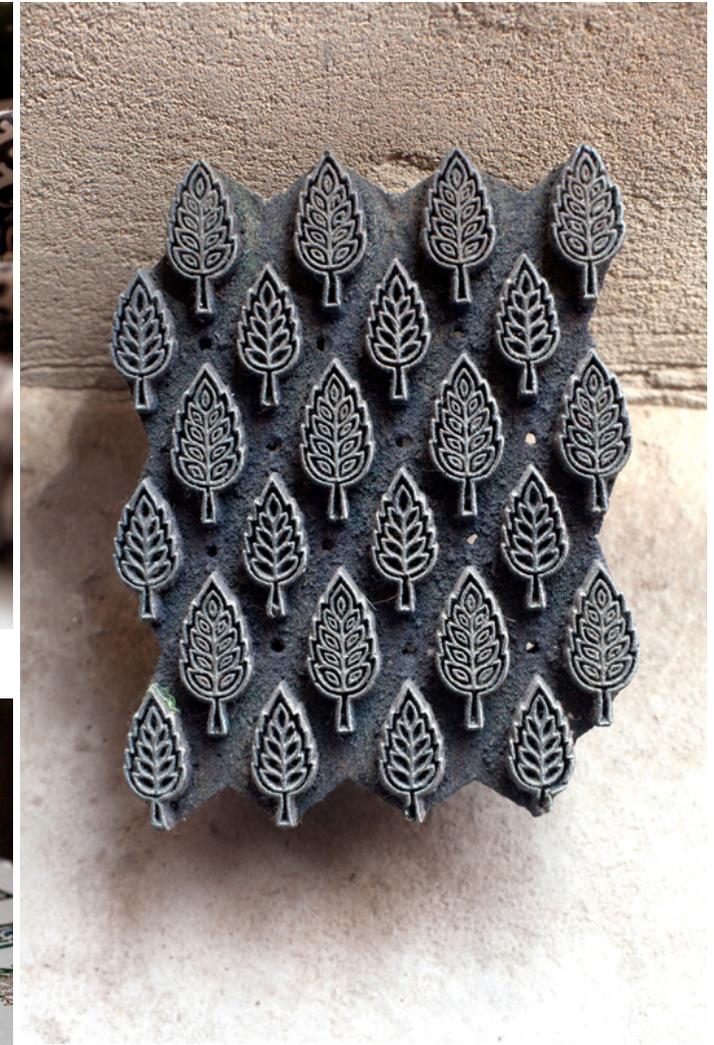
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Stack of printed running material.



The skilled woman artisan involved in printing works.



Wooden block in leaf motif called as buti.

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The overview of the working space.



Artisan laying the cloth to be printed, on the printing table.



Woman printing cushion covers.

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People and Place

The artisans practicing block printing belong to Chhipa community. Chhipas are predominantly Hindu and are believed to be the followers of the renowned Marathi Saint Namdev. They are engaged in the craft of block printing since ages. The traditional knowledge of craft skills is transferred from one generation to another. Every member in Chhipa community is involved in washing, dyeing and printing of clothes. However there are number of people who are indirectly involved in the craft as designers, block makers, dyers, tailors, suppliers of raw materials, dealers etc. The Chhipa community, which is engaged in this traditional craft, is settled in Sanganer and the inhabitants/craftsmen have come from various parts of Northern and Western India in different period of time. The dyers and block makers originally came from Punjab or Sindh. The printers are predominantly Hindus, while the majority of dyers and block makers are Muslims. Block printing is practiced all over India in different states with each area having its own particular local aesthetic and style of doing the craft. The main centers for block printing in India are:

- Andhra Pradesh (Kalamkari)
- Gujarat (Ajrakh)
- Rajasthan (Mud Resist and Sanganeri)
- Madhya Pradesh (Bagh Print)
- Uttar Pradesh
- West Bengal

The craft is highly dependent on water sources. Therefore the areas near water resource are much suited to prepare a beautiful hand block printed product. In Rajasthan block printing is done in Sanganer, Bagru, Jodhpur, Akola and Barmer. Each place has its distinctive design elements, color schemes and motifs. The final product can be easily differentiated in terms of region and origin.



Colors stored in the work area.

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Mr. Sanjay Chhipa (crafts person/practioner) explaining the process of block printing.



Woman artisans involved in printing process.



Shri. Raghunandan Tangoria ji (crafts person/practioner), showing the process of block Printing.



Storage place for color trays when not in use.

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Tools and Materials

• Tools:

The main tools of the printer are wooden blocks which are available in different shapes and size as per the design and requirement. The block makers mainly make two types of block

1. Wooden Block
2. Metal Block

1. Wooden Block:

These blocks are usually made on teak or seesham wood. Artisans make sure that the wood is seasoned and then carve the motifs on it. The design are first printed on paper and stuck on the block of wood. Artisan, then start carving the wood with steel chisels, of different widths and cutting surface. The motifs are carved on the base while the top has a handle. These handles are either carved out from the same wood or by a low cost wood attached to the surface with the help of nails. Each block has two or more cylindrical holes drilled into the block for free air passage and also to allow release of excess color. Blocks made are of rectangular, square, oval, semi-circular, circular etc. shape. Once the block is made it is soaked in oil for 10-15 days to soften the grains. The life of these block are approximately 600-800 meter of printing. The outline blocks are called as rekh and the filler blocks are called as datta.

2. Metal Block:

For making intricate patterns and getting high level of clarity in prints metal blocks are used. These blocks are made by engraving thin sheets of evenly cut metal strips into the wooden blocks. The metal strips are beaten to make them thin and then strips are cut of even length. The design is drawn on the wooden block and the metal strips are pressed onto the design by gentle hammering. Filling of the designs is done from center to outside. Once made the blocks are checked to see the strips are of the same height from the wooden base. Metal blocks are costly, time consuming but long lasting.

Printing Table:

These are specially made tables measuring approximately 3 feet high, 3 feet wide and 9 feet long. The surfaces of the tables are covered with several layers of cloth, jute and canvas which help in better printing. These tables allow 3-4 printers standing and working simultaneously. Traditionally these tables were of low height approximately 1 feet high, 2 feet wide and 5 feet long. The printer used to sit on ground and print.

Color Plates:

Colors used for printing are kept in a wooded tray called as saaj. Once the color is poured into the tray wire mesh is placed inside. This mesh is covered with a piece of felt. Felt soaks the color and finally a fine cotton/malmaal cloth is placed on the felt. This preparation helps in proper application of color on the block.

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Tray Trolley:

These are wooden trolleys' accommodated with two shelves and wheels in the base for the easy movement. On the upper shelf the color tray is kept while in the lower rack required blocks. The height of the trolley is 3 feet suitable for working on the printing table. These are locally called as patiya.

Scale:

For marking the areas to be printed scales are used.

Chalk:

For marking chalks are used. These chalks have sharp edges which gives fine line.

Brushes:

Metal or nylon brushes are used to clean the wooden and metal blocks after use. This helps in maintaining the life of the block.

Tambadi (Copper vessels):

Traditionally copper vessels are used for dyeing and washing of cloths.

Mogari (wooden roller):

This a cylindrical wooden roller on which the cloth is kept and beaten.

Kotan (Wooden mallet):

This is used to beat the cloth over mogari, in order to remove the starch.

• Raw Materials:

The process of block printing is widespread due to its intricate process, motifs and vibrant colors. The main raw material is the color used in the printing. Traditionally the artisans used natural colors but today it has been replaced by chemical and artificial colors.

The main raw materials are Colors/ Dyes.

Different types of dyes are used for silk and cotton.

- Vegetable/ Natural dyes
- Discharge Dyes
- Pigment dyes
- Reactive dyes
- Rapid fast Colors

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Vegetable/ Natural dyes:

Since ages artisans are using vegetable dyes for printing and dying. As they are extracted from the nature, vegetables, fruits etc., they are beneficial for the environment along with having traditional importance. There are few major colors produced naturally which are known internationally too.

- Indigo Blue:

Extracted from the indigo plant found throughout India.

- Red:

This is obtained by mixing alizarin with alum. The color ranges from pink to deep red.

- Black:

This is acidic solution of iron which is obtained by processing rusted nails, horse shoes, iron scrap etc. with jiggery and salt. The mixture is buried under the ground and allowed to rot for about 10-15 days. It is then taken out and the color is prepared.

- Green:

The skin of pomegranate is processed by boiling.

Apart from this artisans also use bark of mango tree, vinegar, slaked lime etc.

Discharge Dyes:

These dyes are used to print on dark background. The printing colors have chemical which react with the dark ground fabric and bleaches out the dark color from that particular place and prints the desired color. In this process a range of white and other light colors can be printed on a dark background.

Pigment Dyes:

These colors are readily available in the market and are easy to use. The mixed colors can be stored in plastic buckets after use. Pigment colors, brought from the market are further mixed with kerosene and a binder. The mixing has to be done carefully as the thickness of the material can give raised effects on the cloth while printing. These colors follow the direct printing technique. Colors applied are visible and do not change after washing. A number of colors can be obtained by mixing two or more pigment colors.

Reactive Dyes:

These are the chemical dyes which when mixed with second chemical produces a third color. Artisans therefore dye the cloth, to be printed, in one chemical and then print it with another chemical. These two chemicals react with each other and hence produce a different color. There are only few chemical dyes available in the market.

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Rapid fast Colors:

These colors are difficult to store and has to be used the same day. In rapid fast color process the color in the design and the ground color both are printed in one go. Generally white or light background is used. There are only few colors available in this process.

Cloth:

Traditionally the printing was done on white or pale background of cotton cloth. Today the craft is practiced on any material ranging from cotton, silk, organza, jute, kotadoriya, chiffon, paper etc.

Kambli (Woolen Cloth):

A piece of woolen cloth is laid in the color tray. This helps in proper application of color on the block.



Cotton cloth majorly used raw material.



Wooden Scale is used to mark the lines.

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Color tray which is locally called as saaj.



A wooden block having buti carved in it. These blocks are made in teak wood.



The Rekh of a jaal. Rekh is the outline block with the minute line patterns.



Rekh of a buta.

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The datta is the filler block printed in solid colors.



Metal block, where the motifs are made with inlay of thin metal sheet.



Pigment color container.

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Jaali used to place in the color container.



Woolen cloth called as kambli, is also used to place in the container.

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A mulmul cloth is placed over kambli.



Brush used to clean the wooden block.

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Traditional Jaali made by thin bamboo strips. These were reused strips from the torn kites.



Dyeing area and containers.



Water tub used for dyeing process.



Chalk pieces used to do the markings on the cloth.

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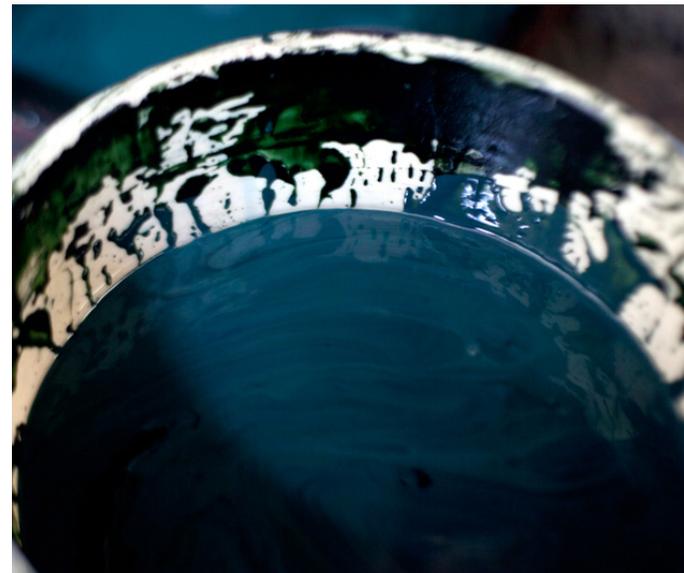
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Making of a color by mixing pigment colors, kerosene etc.



Color is mixed in small plastic tub. Earlier the artisans used terracotta utensils for storage.



Patiya, wooden trolley used to place the color tray.

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Wooden blocks are stored on cartons with proper color co-ordination and coding.



The long wooden printing table used for printing.

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Making Process

The process of printing can be divided into following major parts:-

- Washing
- Marking
- Printing
- Drying
- Washing

Washing:

The fabric brought from the market contains starch, dust etc. Therefore it goes through a preprinting treatment in order to get good results while printing. The fabric is therefore dipped in a solution of water and bleach for 1-2 days. It is then boiled and washed with water. Finally the cloth is stretched and spread on ground and left for drying. This process known as Hari Sarana takes 3-5 days depending on the weather conditions.

Marking:

The cloth to be printed is spread on the printing table and fixed with the help of pins. With help of scale and chalk areas to be printed are marked and proper gaps are left for cutting and stitching.

Printing:

Printer dips the block in the color and stamps the design on the cloth. The blocks are then pressed hard with the fist on the back of the handle so that registration/imprint of the color is even. Printing starts from left to right. Number of colors used in the design defines the number of blocks to be used. Generally one printer handles one color and application is done simultaneously. In the case of sarees the pallu is printed first and then the border. First the outline color is applied and then the filling colors. Specific point in the block guides the printer for the repeat impression. The process of printing is called as Chapaai.

Drying:

After the printing is completed the fabric is dried out in sun for the colors to get fixed. This is done specially for the pigment dyes. The printed fabrics are handled with utmost care so that the colors are not transferred to other areas. Therefore they are wrapped in plastic or newspaper after drying. The process is called as Sukhaai.

Washing:

Fabric then goes through the process of steaming in the special boilers constructed for this purpose. After steaming, the material is washed thoroughly in large quantities of water and dried in the sun. Once the fabric is washed and dried ironing is done, which further fixes the color permanently. This final process of washing is called Dhulaai.

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Initially Jaali, mulmul cloth and woolen cloth is placed in tray and color poured on it.

The color is spread evenly with the help of a metal plate.

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The surface of the block is dipped in the color.



The color is initially tested on the rough cloth.

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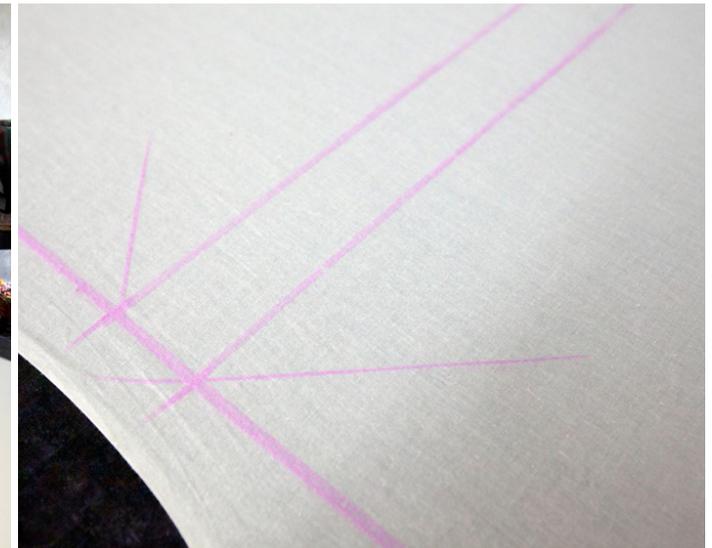
The cloth to be printed is spread on the wooden table.



Cloth being stretched tightly to remove any kind of wrinkles.



Stretched cloth is pinned using ball pins at regular intervals to obtain tightness.



Marking is done to obtain accurate printing.

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The outlines are printed with Rekh.



The closer view of minute line patterns or rekh.



Bold forms, datta being printed in solid color blocks.



The artisan stamping the borders.

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The borders are filled with another color using another block.



Finally the printed fabric is washed to remove excess color and dirt.

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Products

The main items that are printed includes, sarees, dupattas, salwar-kameez, bed cover, curtains, scarves, running material, bedcovers, angocha, stoles etc.

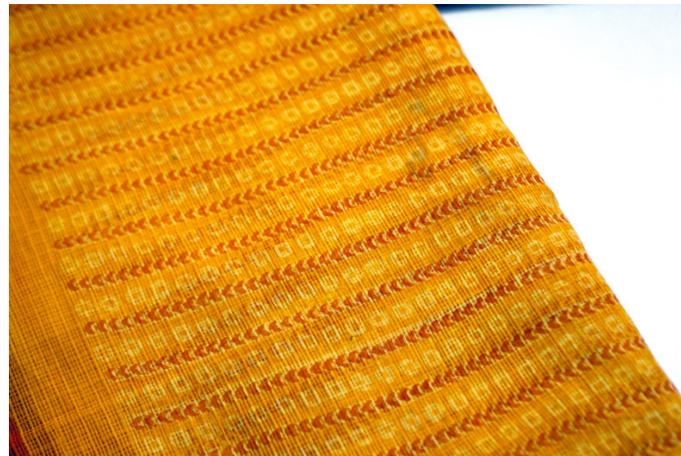
Along with above items, printing is also done on handmade papers.



Stitched dress in vibrant colors.



Dress materials in different hues and motifs.



A sari printed in Sanganeri style.



Stitched Kurtas are ready for the market.

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Design

Patronized by the rulers Sanganeri motifs are exclusive and intricate done over sun bleached white or cream fabric. The designs and styles of the Sanganeri block prints are mainly inspired by the nature and local sources. Taking inspiration from several resources artist used to develop buta, buti, jaal and borders. Sanganeri motifs are famous for its curves, fineness and delicacy. Generally curvature of floral motifs is towards the right side. A typical Sanganeri printed cloth has yellow, green or blue background. The motifs can be broadly classified as flowers, plants, fruits, animals, human figures and geometrical patterns. Each of these designs, colors and motifs specify certain community, their occupation as well as the season.

Traditionally the printing was done for the royal families and motifs are highly stylized. Mainly, motifs are modeled after sunflowers, narcissuses, roses, rosettes, lotuses, lotus bud, lily, champa, canna, nargis, marigold, sosan, gulmehendi, javakusum, guldaudi, kachnar, kaner, etc. Fruits like, keri, dhatura, banana, dates, grapes and pomegranate are also developed. Apart from this bel, betel leaf, animals like parrot, fish, camel, elephant etc are also taken as models to create motifs. In some traditional prints katar (dagger) and other weapons are also seen as motifs. Sawai Ram Singhji of Jaipur was a huge devotee of lord Shiva and therefore during his regime a lot of motifs related to Shiva were made like, rudhraksha, bel patra, trishool etc.



Traditional Sanganeri buti, a floral motif.

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Sanganer products are identified by their base i.e. white or off white.



Floral pattern in vivid colors.



Buta's printed all over in beautiful color combination.



Sanganeri traditional but and border printed on a bed sheets.

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