



RURAL HAND BLOCK PRINT FABRICS IN INDIA: INTRODUCTORY REVIEW BASED STUDY

Dr. Hitaishi Singh

Associate Professor, Department of Home Science, A.N.D.N.N.M.M. Kanpur

ABSTRACT

Real India lives in the rural areas. Indian civilization is considered as one of the oldest civilizations in the world inherited with colorful diversity, rich culture and variety of handicraft prepared by rural artisans since ages (Kumar & Kaptan, 2006). Handloom and handicraft sectors are the major source of income for rural people after agriculture sector in India. Fabrics or clothes are one of the basic needs of civilized society. Rural India is rich in producing handicrafts and handloom items in a traditional manner without use of any machinery. Hand block printing is one of the important handicraft arts practiced in various parts of India.

INTRODUCTION

In past, natural or vegetable colors were used in both dyeing and printing which are replaced by synthetic and artificial color dyes. The demand for hand block printed fabrics is because of its aesthetics, design pattern and use of vegetable colors in both printing and dyeing but today chemical color is also used to dye and print fabrics. In past yellow, red, blue and black colors were mainly used but today with the advent of chemical colors a large variety of colors are used in both printing and dyeing. History of hand block printing in India is 800 years old when it was practiced in various places in east, west, and southern parts. A few of the evidences show that it was in existence 4000 years ago as a trade link in between India and Babylon. Later on hand printed and hand woven fabrics traveled to Malaya, Indonesia and other eastern countries. During seventeenth century Surat became a major hand block printed fabrics exporting hub in India. Today at few of the places it is still alive and practiced by traditional artisans. In eastern part "Kalam" (Pen) is used to print the fabrics and resist technique is used. A process of dyeing and printing with the use of wooden blocks developed in Gujarat and Rajasthan during medieval period mainly.

Hand block printing in India is in use since ancient times but during 12th century hand block printing prospered in India with the backing of royal families. Although in the beginning it flourished in the southern parts but gradually it spread all over India. In the early age Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh were two major centers for hand block printing work.

In the beginning of 18th century, Sanganer emerged as the major center in Rajasthan for hand block printing and another center Serampur emerged in West Bengal during 1940. Soon urban centers like Calcutta in West Bengal and Jaipur in Rajasthan also emerged as prominent centers. Today hand block printing is practiced mainly in rural and town areas of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh states of India. Presently Bagru and Sanganer in Rajasthan, Bagh in Madhya Pradesh and Kutch region in Gujarat have emerged as important centers for hand block printing in India.

REVIEW BASED RESULT

There are various kinds of hand block printing techniques used to print fabrics across geographical areas in India. Mainly three different techniques are used for hand block printing are there:

1. Discharge Printing: In this technique fabric is dyed first with the chosen color. Once dyeing process is completed, we remove the dye from those areas which need to be printed with the chemical color. Printed portion is treated to re-color and discharge process is completed.

2. Direct Block Printing: Any cotton or silk fabric can be used in this process. First the fabric is bleached to create a white background then it is dyed with the chosen color. Border is printed first and then printing is done inside the border of the fabric.

3. Resist Printing: Under this technique the portion which does not need to be dyed is covered with the mixture of clay, lime stone powder and resin. Then fabric is dyed in the chosen color which slightly



enters through the cracks and creates a curly effect of color on the fabric. Now at the final stage fabric block is printed with the desired design.

INTRODUCTION TO RURAL INDIA

As per the latest census conducted in the year 2011, approximately 60-69% of the total population still lives in the rural areas in more than 6 lakh villages. It shows the importance of rural areas in India though urbanization of India is happening at a very fast growth rate still a large section of its population lives in rural areas.

This large rural population involved mainly in agriculture and traditional rural industries like handloom, handicrafts and others to earn their livelihood. Rural areas or villages are very important for the growth of Indian economy. On the importance of village once Mahatma Gandhi had said that "If the village perishes, India will perish, too. It will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited". Seeing rural as a potential market will ruin the economy in long run it must also be seen as a home of traditional rural industry for sustainability of the Indian economy. After agriculture; handloom and handicraft are the two most important rural non-farm industries in rural India. These two industries are providing maximum employment and source of income for rural population after agriculture.

"Rural" word is interchangeably used with the terms like rural society, village, countryside or folk society. The most common word used in sociology for "rural" is "village". In defining rural areas the basic unit used by Indian administration is known as revenue village, which may contain some hamlets drawn by physical borders. There is no standard definition used to define the term „rural“. There are few government departments, agencies and private organizations which defined the term rural as per their understandings, experience and scope of work.

a) Rural Industries

Indian economy is based on the primary sector i.e. agriculture which is considered to be a major rural economic activity. More than 70% rural population is dependent on the agriculture business but non-farm sector is also emerging in the rural India. There is a huge scope to promote rural industries for the overall development of villages and for the growth of Indian economy as a whole. Apart from agriculture rural industries like handloom, rural arts and crafts play a very important role in providing employment and as a source of their livelihood (Rao, 1978). Khadi and village industries contributed significantly in the growth of rural people by adding economic value in their life.

In general terms rural industry can be defined as any industry established in the rural areas known as rural

industry. There are few government institutions dedicated to the development of rural enterprises defined rural industries in a proper way. Rao (1987) discussed that apart from agriculture rural arts and crafts provide the productive employment and opportunity to earn. Rural industry is also interchangeably used as cottage industry and village industry. KVIC defines rural industry as "any industry located in rural areas which produces any goods or renders any service with or without the use of power and in which the fix capital investment per head of artisan or worker does not exceed Rs. 50000 or such other sum as may be specified by central government from time to time".

b) Handicraft in India

An Overview Handicraft and handloom is considered as one of the traditional product found generally in rural areas and represents culture of a specific area. It is also deeply rooted with traditions and there are many areas in the country where people are involved in the handloom and handicraft business since generations. The simple meaning of handicraft is any craft or art made with using bare hands or minimal tools without using any mechanical machine. International Labor Organization (ILO) recognized handicrafts as an important activity to earn livelihood through utilization of indigenous available resources, using traditional knowledge and technology, labor intensive and unorganized yet competitive market.

In the year 1989 Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) of India gave a definition for handicrafts is "Items made by hand, often with the use of simple tools, and generally artistic and/or traditional in nature. They include objects of utility and objects of decoration." Export of handicraft is one of the important sectors to earn foreign exchange needed for the growth of the country's economy. With keeping in the mind potential of handicrafts to earn foreign exchange for India ministry of commerce & industry selected it in the export items and kept it under the first five year plan to promote its production. Since then Indian handmade sector is growing at a moderate speed. In the year 2000 estimated exports of handicraft goes up to US\$ 2000 million and domestic market stands for US\$ 4000.

c) Hand block printing in India

India is very rich in both culture and handicrafts. Hand block printing is one of the most important sectors under handicraft industry. History of hand block printing is very old and due to unavailability of authentic documents it is not easy to reveal the exact time of its origin but few researches suggested that it is 4000 years old. Skidmore (2014) suggested that during 300 AD hand block prints of Rajasthan origin found in Palmyra town of Syria. Gillow (2010) mentioned in his book on hand block printing that some pieces of mordant dyed and printed cotton



found in Mohenjo-Daro of today's Pakistan which is 4000 years old. According to the documentation of AIACA (All Indian Artisan & Crafts Association) the art of hand block printing started during twelfth century in different parts of India. This art of hand block printing was supported well by Kings and royal family. At that time its spread in various centers of western, south and eastern parts of the country. These centers were very famous for their quality printing techniques on the cotton. In southern part kalam (pen) or brush used to print the cotton clothes using resist dyeing technique. Wooden blocks commonly used in Gujarat for printing fabrics and in Rajasthan art of hand block printing and dyeing specially developed for cotton textiles.

d) Hand block printing v/s Screen printing

Hand block printing is very old and traditional way of printing fabrics using hand blocks continuously followed by various generations of Chippa community in several parts of rural India. Chippas are still following the natural and traditional techniques to produce designed fabrics in Bagh village (Madhya Pradesh), Bagru and Barmer village (Rajasthan) and Kutch region of Gujarat. Hand block printing requires intensive labor work because it involves manual techniques in production. Screen printing came into practice after industrial revolution took place but in it started flourishing just after independence. Nandi & Chaudhary (2009) stated that screen printers in Sanganer flourished during 1960s using not only chemical colors, mechanized production processes, consuming more water than traditional hand block printers but also polluting river and ground water. As per the UNIDO (1997) report the uneven competition and rivalry among screen printing units and hand block printing units is increasing day by day is a matter of concern because both have their distinct qualities. While traditional hand block printers are using traditional designs and natural color dyes on the other hand screen printers are using chemical dyes and copying the designs of hand block printers is a matter of concern. Screen printed fabric is a low cost product as comparison to hand block printed fabrics. Screen printing is known for mass production and hand block printing is production by masses.

CONCLUSION

Dhar and Lydall defined "cottage industries are mainly traditional industries which produce traditional goods with the traditional techniques". Expert consultation in Rome in the year 1986, distinguished cottage activities, village enterprises and rural industries in terms of location, ownership, scale and organization of business mainly. In Indian perspective to extend the scope of rural industry government of India defined it as "Any industry located in rural area, village or town with a

population of 20000 and below and an investment of Rs. 3 crore in plant and machinery is classified as village industry". Considering all the definitions above and with reference to present study, rural industries can be defined as any traditional or non-traditional business establishment in rural area with a population less than 25000 and below and provide scope for production by masses. Mainly rural economy is divided into two types of industries one is agriculture or farm industry and other is non-farm activities. According to government of India economic activities divided into three major sectors primary sector includes agriculture and allied activities like pisciculture, poultry, floriculture, sericulture and forestry. Secondary sector includes manufacturing and mining activities and tertiary sector includes financial, community, transport and other services. Rogerson (2000) discussed the importance of rural handicrafts for South Africa as a non-agriculture industry which not only provides employment but also provides livelihood to many people in the country.

Soundarapandian (2010) discussed and emphasized on the textile, bakery, poultry, plastic conversion, handmade paper and village oil industry under the entrepreneurship and industries potential in rural areas. Joshi (2013) discussed the various types of rural industrialization in agro based, forest, mineral, animal dairy, renewable energy and traditional industries in rural areas.

On the other side Handicraft sector is one of the most important sectors for Indian economy. It provides employment to maximum rural people after agriculture sector. More than 78% of the handicraft units and more than 76% of the artisans belongs to rural parts of India. It shows the importance of handicraft sector for rural economy. Out of total production of handicrafts in India 60% exported to different parts of the world and rest 40% sold in the domestic market. Statistics shows that handicraft artisan rises from 6.57 million in the year 2005-06 to 6.8 million in the year 2011-12. India is known for its handloom and handicrafts and it is one of the most important industries after agriculture sector providing maximum number of employment to rural population. Both handloom and handicraft sectors as a unit is the largest non-farm employment generation activity in the rural areas. Steering Committee on Handlooms and Handicrafts (2012) referred the handloom census conducted in the year 2009-10 there are 2.873 million handloom units cum households working in which 87% are situated in rural areas. These total handloom units are providing employment to more than 4.3 million weavers and allied workers. The same study shows that total artisans are 6.8 million in the year 2011-12 working in the handicraft sector.

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