

Mendh Printing: Traditional Art Of Printing Of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT: Present paper gives an account of mendh craft which is almost on the verge of extinction. Information for documentation of craft was collected by field survey and through observation techniques. Sample size was 30. Respondents were selected by purposive sampling method. An interview schedule was prepared to collect data. Result is presented in frequency and percentage.

Keywords: *Colour, mendh printing, motifs, natural dye*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mendh printing is one of the ancient traditional craft forms showcasing the local lifestyle and culture of people making the craft. The ancient craft of 'Mendh' printing was once prevalent throughout the Rajasthan, but at present it is limited to a very few groups of traditional artisans in an extensively dispersed location. One considerable center of this craft exists among associated groups of families in Bagru and Sanganer in Rajasthan. Every tribe, region and individual reflects the influence of tradition form in their textile and costumes, which is found to be an ancestral gift. These textiles are preserved by the craft man but transformed to other forms by the rest of the people to fulfill their quest for new fashion of the current market environment. Mendh is a valuable traditional block printed textile that needs to be preserved. The preservation requires a detailed documentation of the craft, process, motifs, color and products.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Karolia and Buch (2008) did a study on Ajrakh, the resist printed fabric of Gujarat. The objectives were to document the craft of Ajrakh printing in detail and record the changes that have come about in its manufacturing process, colours and motifs. Data regarding the craft was collected from a purposively selected sample practicing the craft in the traditional manner. Ajrakh, traditionally a double sided resist block printed cotton textile has undergone a number of changes in production, in the motif and colours used.

Naik and Vastrad (2008) made an effort made to revive and preserve the traditional negi motifs of Kasuti embroidery by way of computerizing and mechanizing. She found that many professional do not adopt negi stitch and hence this stitch of kasuti is unnoticeably going extinct. The technology of computerizing negi motifs and incorporation through jacquard on the handloom hastened the production process and thus made traditional textile available for women consumers of all income groups.

Chowdhury (2012) conducted a study on Nakshi Kantha, the traditional needlecraft of West Bengal of early 19th century to late 20th century. These motifs are deeply rooted in strong religious beliefs, underlay a strong symbolism and also signify the desire for self expression and manifestation of the artisan's aspirations.

Gupta (2012) conducted a study on textile crafts and their contribution in Indian Fashion. The crafts that were being lost to time were revived with the help of leading design institutes and design studios and are a major contributing factor in contemporary Indian Fashion.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is primarily empirical. But both primary and secondary source have been effectively used in this study. Secondary data has been collected from various published and unpublished documents which include books, magazine, journals, old research papers, articles as well as internet. Primary data has been collected through the field survey.

Survey has been conducted in Sanganer and Bagru. Sanganer is located 15 km away from Jaipur whereas Bagru is 30 km from Jaipur. 30 artisans of Sanganer and Bagru regions of Rajasthan have been selected using purposive sampling technique.

An interview schedule has been prepared to collect information about mendh printing. Data is personally collected by researcher. In addition, observation method has also been used.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Personal Profile of the Artisans

The personal profile of the 30 artisans as respondents has been given in Table 1.

Table 1: Personal profile of the artisans (N=30)

S. No.	Variables	No. of Artisans	Percentage
	Age		
1	Below 25 years	0	0
2	25-35 years	03	10
3	35-45 years	19	63.33
4	45-55 years	02	6.66
5	Above 55 years	06	20
	Sex		
1	Male	18	60
2	Female	12	40
	Education		
1	Illiterate	15	50%
2	Primary school	09	30%
3	Secondary school	06	20%
4	Technical training	0	0%
	Occupation		
1	Primary	18	60%
2	Secondary	12	40%
	Membership of any Organization/society		
1	Associations	0	0
2	Co-operative	9	30%
3	NGO	0	0
4	None	21	70%

The majority of the artisans (63.33%) are aged between 35-45 years, 20% artisans are in the age bracket of above 55 years, followed by 10% artisans who belong to the age group of 25-35 years. Only 6.66% artisans are in the age group of 45-55 years while none of the respondents are below 25 years in age. The reason may be the fact that due to the languishing nature of crafts in the region, young people are moving to cities after completing education. Out of all the respondents investigated, 60% artisans are male and 40% artisans are female, clearly indicating that printing is done by male community though women help in dyeing and other printing processes.

Out of total artisans, 50% is literate and 50% is illiterate. Though the literacy rate is good, standard of education is not very good. A small number of artisans, only 20% have studied till secondary school; however 30% artisans have studied till primary school. None of the respondents have received any technical training.

Out of total working respondents, most of the (60%) peoples are engaged in Mendh art as primary occupation, whereas 40% are engaged in secondary occupation also such as agriculture, labour work and service. It is clear that majority of people involved in Mendh craft are trying to sustain their traditional craft. Both male and female members are actively involved in pre and after processing, dyeing and printing process of Mendh craft as the mendh making is a part of daily rhythm of the village. Most of the respondents are working on their own, not being part of any cooperative or other group (70%), and only (30%) were member of cooperative.

3.2 Specific Information Related to the Craft

The other part of the interview schedule administered to the artisans for obtaining in depth information was related to the specific aspects of the craft. The result is presented below-

3.2.1 Learning nuances of this craft-The gathered data confirmed that majority of respondents (56.66%) started learning the finer nuances of the craft of printing and dyeing at the age of 18-25 years. Some of them (40%) inherited the craft know-how from their fathers and grandfathers, few (6.66%) also attended a training program conducted whereas most of the artisans (53.33%) learnt the craft from someone who was not the part of their family e.g. their neighbor or *chippa* community.

Out of the respondents who had inherited the craft, majority had been practicing from 1 to 2 generations and (86.66%) artisans doing works for others. Only (13.33%) respondents said that they took up the task of learning to mendh craft, out of curiosity.

Table 2: Age of learning the Mendh craft

S.No.	Age of Learning	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	15- 20 years	04	13.33%
2	18-25 years	17	56.66%
3	25- 30 years	09	30%
4	30-45 Years	0	0

Table 3: Source of learning the craft

S.No.	Source	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Parents	12	40%
2	Training workshop	02	6.66%
3	Chippa community	16	53.33%

Table 4: Purpose of pursuing the craft

S.No.	Pursuing the craft	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	For others	26	86.66%
2	For own	04	13.33%

3.2.2 Years of Traditional Craft Experience- The majority (93.33%) of the respondent’s has 5- 10 years’ experience. None of the artisans has experience less than 5years or more than 20 years. Most of younger members even from the artisan’s family are no more practicing this craft. On further investigation, it was revealed that 50% family members and relatives assist each other while processing, dyeing and printing works and 50% workers from the village involved in procuring, dyeing, printing and marketing themselves.

Table 5: Duration of pursuing the Mendh printing craft

S.No.	Duration	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Less than 1 year	0	0
2	5- 10 years	28	93.33%
3	10-20 years	02	6.66%
4	More than 20 years	0	0

Table 6: Assistance in the craft

S.No.	Assistance in the craft	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Family members	15	50%
2	Workers from the village	15	50%

3.2.3 About “Mendh” Printing-Most of the respondents (80%) expressed about the term “Mendh” means nature and its surroundings and some respondents (20%) expressed that mendh is the origin place of this traditional craft.

On the basis of the response of artisans and observation of traditional Mendh printing pharads, it is found that generally the Mendh printing is a resist style of printing that was carried out in the town of Sanganer for the tribal Meena, Jat and Mali women. Usually **artisans use an especially prepared beeswax mixture to make impressions on cloth.** Resist-wax printing style is used on these pieces through fine blocks. The designs come out sharp not only because of the colour but due to the fineness of the blocks.

Cloths printed with this technique used to give out a fragrance of perfume that was retained by the fabric even after quite a lot of washes. **Wonderful and exhilaratingly refreshing, this hand crafted process is one which has encouraged the creative and visual minds of both the artists of Mendh and the connoisseurs of this art.**

Table 7: Meaning of term mendh

S.No.	Meaning	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Nature and its surroundings	24	80%
2	Soil	0	0
3	Origin Place	06	20%
4	None	0	0

3.2.4 Raw material for Mendh Printing

Fabric: All of the respondents affirmed that the specific fabric used for Mendh Printing was known as Reja cotton fabric that is thick, coarse, hand woven cloth. This raw material is easily available, cheaper in cost,

durability and is purchased from whole sellers mostly. However, it is also purchased from by small scale artisans from local traders and retailers. Traditional Mendh pharad were generally made with low cotton count; has substance and thickness, providing cool in summer and warmth in the winter season. But now hand woven reja fabric has been replaced by the machine woven sheeting, cambric 20's and 40's according to the present clientele demand.

Table 8: The fabrics used for Mendh printing

S.No.	Fabric	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Silk	0	0
2	Reja/Cotton	28	93.33%
3	Synthetic	0	0
4	Any Other	2	6.66%

Dyes: The second important part of the raw material of the craft is dye. Natural/ organic dyes is used, which is generally extracted from the barks of trees, flowers, leaves, skin of the fruits, roots etc. indigo, pomegranate, alizarin, harda etc. are most commonly used dyes. Conventionally the artisans used natural dyes but nowa days it has been replaced by synthetic dyes.

Cheedkaras: It is used in the mendh printing of the *pharad* to give them a special fragrance that was retained by the cloth after washing it. It is very difficult to procure from the forest. Now Andoli ka tel is also used as substitute of *Cheedkaras*.

Beeswax: The honeybee of the genus *Apis* produces a natural wax that is known as Beeswax (Ceraalba).It is used to resist the dye from penetrating the fabric.

Table 9: Tool used for Mendh printing

S.No.	Tool	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Screen	0	0
2	Blocks	30	100%
3	Any other	0	0

Wooden Hand Blocks- Wooden blocks are the main printing tools of traditional Rajasthan printing. These blocks are generally half an inch deep and usually made of seasoned Sagwaan, Gurjan, Shisham, Teakwood or Rohira wood. For mendh printing very fine blocks are used.

There are three types of blocks, named – *gadh*(background), *rekh*(outline) and *data*(filling). One is the buti block and other is mendh block that is used to resist the printed pattern. The mendh blocks should be of the same precision as that of the main butis. Both are of same types.

Colour Palette: Red, black and blue colours are used as primary colours in Mendh printing. Various shades are available by changing the quantity of the dye used. The red colour printing paste is known as *begar*, black as *syahi* and indigo is *aasmani* or ‘like the sky’.

Many respondents have started sometimes (76.66%) using other colours apart from tones of red, black and blue colours but (23.33%) respondents strictly deny for using any other colour apart from tones Red, black and blue colours in the mendh printing.

Design Repertoire-On the basis of the response, the designs for the mendhkiphardas/ fabrics are derived from nature and its surroundings which are traditional in nature. The motifs have been inspired from the easily recognizable flora, fauna and objects in their surroundings like the flowers, leaves, shrubs, creepers, vines and plants, a stylized modification of day-to-day life.

Most of the respondents mentioned that in traditional mendh printing normally (83.33%) plants motifs are used, 10% bird motif are used and 6.66% also use animal motifs. Some of the respondents expressed that the most common traditional specific placement or order used for mendh printing is dhaniya /coriander leaf pharad (40%) and chaubundi pharad (60%).

Table 10: Motifs normally seen in traditional Mendh printing

S.No.	Motifs	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Bird	03	10%
2	Animal	02	6.66%
3	Human figure	0	0
4	Plants	25	83.33%

Table 11: Placement of motifs

S.No.	Specific order used for placement	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Chaubundi [Pharad]	18	60%
2	Dhaniya [Pharad]	12	40%

The usually used traditional designs are lati, nathdi, panja, vegetable creepers, gulab buti/rose flower, suyakabuta, daakhbel, machhi or pandi, kelekabuta, pataasi, turi, nargis, budauli, bevda, panchklya.

Table 12: Printing style used for Mendh printing

S.No.	Printing style	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Direct	0	0
2	Resist	30	100%
3	Discharge	0	0
4	Combination of two	0	0

3.2.5 Mendh printing technique

A detailed discussion with artisans was done. Besides, observation method was followed to know the Mendh printing technique. Printing is done in two steps:

STEP I: Printing by Sanganeri style

Fabric to be printed is pretreated with *harda*. Then marking of the design is done carefully with the help of scale and coloured chalk on the pre-treated fabric. Printing is locally called '*chappai*'. Printing paste is prepared by mixing mordant with other substances.

The fabric is printed in two colors— red and black.

Red – Alum (fitkari) is mixed with sticky local tree gum, water and *geru* (iron oxide) to prepare printing paste of red colour which is locally known as *beggar* (Alum +gum +water +geru).

Black - Rusted horseshoe, scrap iron nails, jaggery (gur) and water are mixed in an earthenware vessel and left for 30 days to decompose. This process gives printing paste of black colour locally known as *syahi*. (Rusted iron+ jiggery+ water). This is added to alizarin dye bath. At present dyers are using Hirkashish (Ferrous Sulphate) along with alizarin powder to obtain black colour.

Generally, ferrous is printed with the outline block ('*rekh*'). Outline of design is printed in a particular sequence using the *Syahi* (ink) printing paste. After the black outline is made, filler block ('*datta*') is used to fill *beggar* (red colour) on predefined area of design.

The printed fabric is left for drying for at least three-four days so that the prints (mordant paste) penetrate into the fiber structure. Longer the ageing, better is the result.

The fabric has to be carefully washed in order to eliminate the natural gum. The next process known as *Ghanki Rangai* involves use of a copper vessel 'Tamdi' on a Bhatti where it is boiled in the presence of alizarin (root of Indian Madder Tree) along with dhavraka phool. Drop of castor or sesame oil is added. *Begar* printed yellow colour turns into red colour. The printer washes the printed fabric in the running river water and allows drying in the blazing sun with sprinkling of water from time-to-time. This results in a bright white background and apparent richly colorful designs.

STEP II: Resist dyeing

Preparation of mendh paste: For resist printing of fabric, a resist paste is prepared. The ready mendh paste (*Andolikatel* (1 kg), *Cheed* [Pine] *ka tel* (1/2kg), Bee Wax (1/2kg) and Paraffin Wax (1/2kg)) are mixed with small quantity of pure ghee and heated to a certain temperature. The solution obtained is strained directly in the earthen vessel or iron vessel known as '*mardia*' (mud pot) and put over the heating coal. Whenever there was a need, this solution was again heated to use.

Application of resist mendh paste: A wet fabric is put over the printing table locally known as *paatiya*. This is a very important step in the wax printing because this helps to cool off the wax on the fabric. Fabric to be printed is put on the printing table. Then, resist paste is applied on the fabric as per design through hand-blocks. The impression of cracks is equal and clear in this printing. The drying after wax printing is done in shadow otherwise the wax may melt on the fabric.

Dyeing: After the application of mendh paste, the fabric is dyed in blue neel or indigo. The blue dye is frequently used in the region. It is extracted from the *Indigofera Tinctoria* plant. Indigo dye solution is put in a

nine feet deep *maat* (pitcher) in the ground; the cloth is soaked for 15 to 20 minutes and then taken out. It is quickly dried by two people holding the cloth lengthwise and blowing it in the wind. Then it is soaked once more. Two dips in indigo vat produces green colour while more dipping in the water creates a deeper blue colour and one can dip a fabric for maximum of 6 times. Dyeing is always done from lighter to darker shade.

The fabric is again dried in shadow and then washed in hot water to remove the wax. The process of taking off this *mendh* paste from the fabric is known as *Ukala*. The process is done by adding 5% of soda ash/*khar* in hot water for cleaning. After that the printed fabrics is given a final wash, rinsed and dried. Thereafter, it is ready for commercial use.

Table13: Ultimate users of Mendh printed fabric

S.No.	Users of Mendh Pharad	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Rajput	0	0
2	Jat	0	0
3	Mali	14	46.66%
4	Meena	16	53.33%

Traditionally Mendh printed fabric locally called *pharad* was used by the tribal Meena and Mali women for apparel purpose. The main communities' using Mendh Pharad in Rajasthan are (53.33%) Meena and (46.66%) Mali.

Table 14: Fuel utilization

S.No.	Sources of fuel	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Wood	27	90%
2	Coal	03	10%
3	LPG	0	0

For dyeing and printing of fabric wood from nearby forest, coal and cow dung cakes are used. Fuel wood from nearby forest is easily accessible and it is free of cost. Out of thirty respondents, (10%) artisans used only fuel coal and mostly (90%) used fuel wood and cow dung cake as fuel.

Table 15: Source of water

S.No.	Source of water	No. of Artisans	Percentage
1	Drinking water	0	0
2	Water tankers	06	20%
3	River or pond water	24	80%

Table Source: Field Survey

In Bagru and Sanganer region, river or pond water plays a major role in respect to other drinking water sources. On the basis of the response, generally majority of the (80%) artisan's use river or pond water for the processing and dyeing of *mendh* printing fabrics and some (20%) also use water-tankers.

V. CONCLUSION

It can be said that *mendh* printing is carried out with hand blocks on coarse cotton cloth in red, black and blue colours. Dye is prepared using natural sources. Mainly plant motifs are used. It is accomplished in two steps- printing and then resists dyeing. Printed fabric is used by tribal Meena and Mali women for apparel purpose.

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