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Reimagining Block Print Craft of Rajasthan in Interior Architecture

Designing of Feature wall and Furniture inspired by Block Printing techniques of Rajasthan

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Abstract

The arts and crafts of any region are the reflection of its environment, people, and traditions. Rajasthan is among the richest states of the country in the field of arts and crafts are concerned. Stone, clay, leather, wood, ivory, lac, glass, silver, gold, and textiles were given the most brilliant forms. It is the crafts and traditions of India that make it stand out in the world. However, the numerous arts and crafts are slowly getting extinct and so have to be renewed and brought back to life. Wooden blocks used for printing is one such art that is fading, due to screen printing and lack of awareness and a few other reasons. It is such an art which is used for making every piece of cloth, every design unique and different from others yet involving a sustainable process in production. The art, which was once flourishing and attracted customers from all across the world, is now struggling to survive. The artists who have been working in this field for several generations are struggling for livelihood. Incorporating the techniques of block printing along with modern technologies to create an interior space would provide a sustainable solution for both the artist as well as the designer. The feature wall and the furniture is broken down into modules, the wooden blocks used for the printing is used as modules, designed by an artist from their place. Later these blocks are arranged in the site by interlocking together. As designing of wooden blocks is a time taking process, Terracotta will be

used for mass production and to obtain seamless patterns yet maintaining the essence of art would reduce the cost and carbon impact on the environment. Thus, provides a sustainable solution for preserving of art, artist, and designers.

Key words: Rajasthan, Handicrafts, Block Printing, Sustainability, Interior Wall, Modules, Interlocking, Introduction

Handicrafts are defined as the products that are made by hand or using simple tools used by hands. It is the unique expression of art that represents a culture, tradition and the heritage of a country or a particular city. It is the crafts and traditions of India that make India stand out in the world. Rajasthan is one of the richest states in the country as far as the field of arts and crafts is concerned. May be it was a result of the war-like lifestyle of the people over here which enhanced the creative senses, artistic skills and inspired them to create the most opulent and richest of treasures. Like Stone, clay, leather, wood, ivory, lac, glass, brass, silver, gold and textiles were given the most brilliant forms. Kings of Rajasthan were patrons of arts and crafts & they encouraged their craftsmen in activities ranging from wood and marble carving to

otherwise monotone of the desert sands. The renowned artists, artisan, craftsmen and people related to handicrafts were invited from India and out of India. Many communities were invited to get settled in and make Jaipur city (the capital city of Rajasthan) their home. This made Jaipur a major centre for art and craft. Major crafts of Jaipur included block printing, bandhani, sculptures and stone carving. Zari work. For the

people who love handicraft shopping, Jaipur (the capital city of Rajasthan) is the perfect place for them. Mostly on all traveling guides, shopping portals, touring websites, online catalogues and blogs you may see this title awarded to Jaipur. This is also called as the **Treasure Trove** of India as no one ever goes empty handed from here. (paliwal, 2014). Along with the Agriculture, Handcraft industry and tourism have huge contribution for the economy of the state.



Figure 1: Handicrafts of Rajasthan

weaving and paintings. The use of lively colors intricate designs and floral patterns are distinctive in all forms of arts and crafts of Rajasthan. It will be injustice to say that artists of Rajasthan make decorative items only. Every household item here proves the statement false as we go through their embellished utensils, colorful attires, unique jewelry designs and embroidered shoes that infuse a new life and a cheerful look to the



Figure 2: Major crafts of Jaipur

The handicrafts of Rajasthan is not only famous in India but well known all over the world for its hand-printed textiles, furniture, leatherwork, jewellery, painting, pottery and metal craft etc., to name a few of the salient craft traditions, all have one thing in common – an exuberance, vigor and a desire to celebrate life. It is as if the monotony of survival in this vastly stretched landscape has



Figure 3: Exports of handicrafts from Rajasthan

been rendered sublime with exquisitely crafted handmade objects.

Though Rajasthan being famous for Handicrafts there are numerous arts and crafts that are slowly dying and so have to be renewed and brought back to life. Hand Block Printing is such an art which is be used for creating each piece of fabric, every design unique and different from others. Rajasthan being the hub of craft and culture houses many traditional crafts and among them the foremost practiced and known craft is hand block printing.

It is performed at several places in Rajasthan and every place has historical, cultural and geographical impact and influences on the craft of hand printing. Regional variations do exist and every region features a distinctive form of its own. The region of Sanganer has emerged together 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 regarded to be the foremost prosperous place in Jaipur. The village has been a vital centre for very fine block-cutting and printing units accommodating over 5000 block printers.

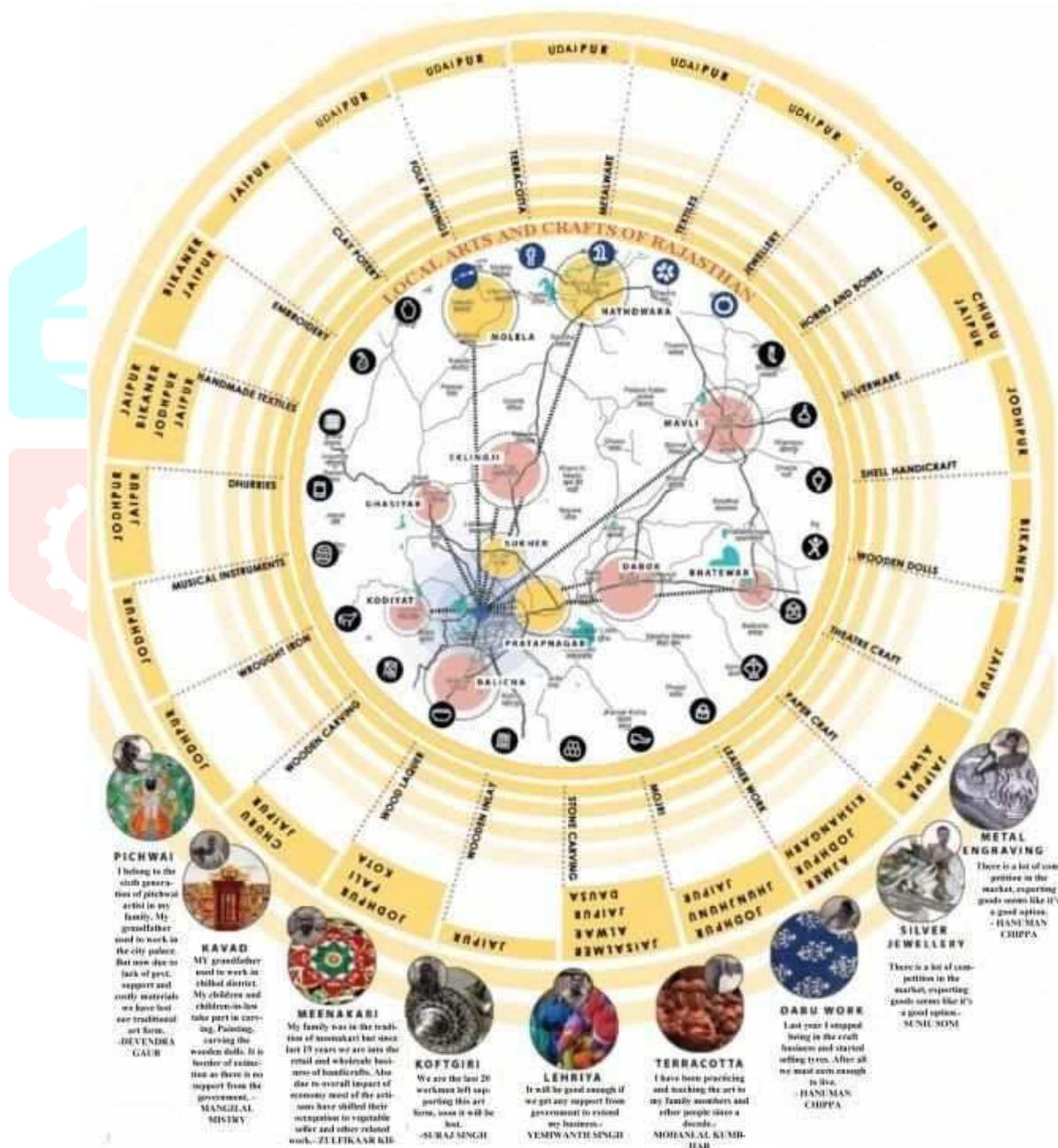


Figure 4: Local Arts and Crafts of Rajasthan

1. Background Study

Hand block print is one of the techniques of applying colour in a definitive pattern on a textile surface. As the name suggests, a block of wood is prepared and the desired pattern is carved out on one of the flat side. This side is dipped in colour and then placed on a textile surface. The tradition of making hand-printed textiles widely practiced in both Rajasthan and Gujarat, is distinguished by the use of imprints of geometric as well as stylized floral and animal forms. In Rajasthan block printing is prominent in Sanganer, Bagru, Jodhpur, Akola and Barmer. Each place has its unique design elements, color schemes and motifs. The final product can be easily differentiated in terms of region and origin. Sanganer (situated near Jaipur, Rajasthan) is the most popular for block printing.



Figure 5: Step1-the fabric to be printed is washed,

Step2-fabric is stretched over the printing table



Figure 2: Step3- Preparation of colour and Block, Step4- Preparation of Colour tray



Figure 7: Step5-Printing over the block, Step6-Printing of Multicolour

It is developed in sanganer during the 17th century when it got popular in European countries. Sanganer print got its identity because of its intricate and floral patterns. East India Company started exporting it. Sanganeri vegetable print has more than five hundred years old history. They are said to be the followers of famous saint Namdev and are known as 'Chhippa' or 'Namdev Chhippa'. Various invasions forced their ancestors to migrate to Jaipur region, where this art & technique developed with Royal courts support. However there are number of artisans who are indirectly involved within the craft as designers, block makers, dyers, tailors, suppliers of raw materials, dealers etc. The Chhipa community, which is engaged with traditional craft, is settled in Sanganer and therefore the inhabitants/craftsmen have come from various parts of Northern and Western India in several

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. (Baral).

2.1. Making of wooden Block

Hand block prints are made using sheesham wood. The wood is carved by hand with the motifs, outlines and fill blocks. 1. Block per colour in the int. Each block fits exactly into the overall design the carving is quite precise the slight overlap and ap in the actual handwork is the emblematic look f blocks which is a result of imperfect alignment uring printing. The first step is to draw the motif n color for the carver. Traditional types of motifs re in several types: an all over floral print which is nown as a 'jaal' print and can be in 1-6 colors, a single motif set across or in half drop. Once the design has been approved by the carver, he prepares the block by hand sanding and then coating the surface with a white paste so that the surface is uniform and smooth for carving. He then traces out the design, one colour of the design at a time and then taps it onto the surface of the block so the

details are clearly visible for carving. Carvers then tap out the empty space from the wood block so that the design remains along the printing surface. This is done by hand with very small chisels. It is a labour intensive process which requires skill, experience and patience. The completed blocks are checked for accuracy and soaked in oil to cure the wood so it doesn't crack and are then ready for use in printing. (Keller, 2017)



Figure 9: Tools used for making Block

Typically blocks range in size from 7cm to 25cm, sometimes bigger with individual motif size being from a few mm to 10 cm. Modern trends in printing include oversized motifs of 20-25 cm across which creates an antiqued surface texture in printing as the wood does not absorb the dyestuff evenly. The sizes of blocks depends upon the design, sometimes it may be smaller and sometime may be larger than it. These blocks follow a specific



Figure 10: Holes drilled behind the block for air circulation

terminology which consists of the outline or lead block, known as the rekt. the dorte or the foreground filler block, and the godh, the background or blotch block. (Ranjan, 2009)

The specialty of the blocks from Jaipur is the depth and intricacy of the carving, which



Figure 11: Different Blocks with same design, 1. Filler block with entire flower raised, 2. Filler block with only lead pattern is raised, 3. Background block

allows for a cleaner surface and clearer printing. Also peculiar to Jaipur blocks is the number of air passages, or povanser, drilled through the blocks to ensure circulation of air in the block during the printing, thus preventing the fabric from lifting when the block is raised. Sanganer is renowned for its small decorative and delicate floral patterns, known as Buta & Buti, Bel (creepers) & Jal (floral net) printed on fine cotton. These patterns consist of the motifs of different types of flowers & leaves, trees & plants along with animals & birds. Known as "Design" in English, "Tarah" in Persian, these motifs are conventionally called "Bhant" in Hindi. Bhants are fine composition of flowers & leaves, tree & plant.



Figure 12: Intricate pattern on block

2.2. Types of blocks:

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

1. Wooden Block
2. Metal Block

2.2.1. Wooden Block

These blocks are generally made on teak or seesham wood. Artisans confirm that the wood is seasoned then carve the motifs thereon. The planning are first printed on paper and stuck on the block of wood. Artisan, then start carving the wood with steel chisels, of various widths and cutting surface. The motifs are carved on the bottom while the highest features a handle. These handles are either carved out from an equivalent wood or by a coffee cost wood attached to the surface with the assistance of nails. Blocks designed in rectangular, square, oval, semi-circular, circular etc. shape. Once the block is formed it's soaked in oil for 10-15 days to melt the grains. The lifetime of these block are approximately 600-800 meter of printing. (Ganguly, A brief studies on block printing process in India, 2013)

2.1.2. Metal Blocks

For making complicated patterns and getting high level of clarity in prints metal blocks are used. These blocks are made by embedding thin sheets of evenly cut metal strips into the wooden blocks. The metal strips are beaten to form them thin then

strips are cut of even length. The planning is drawn on the wooden block and therefore the metal strips are pressed onto the planning by gentle hammering. Filling of the designs is completed from center to outside. Once made the blocks are checked to ascertain the strips are of an equivalent height from the wooden base. Metal blocks are high priced, time consuming but long running.



Figure 13: Wooden block

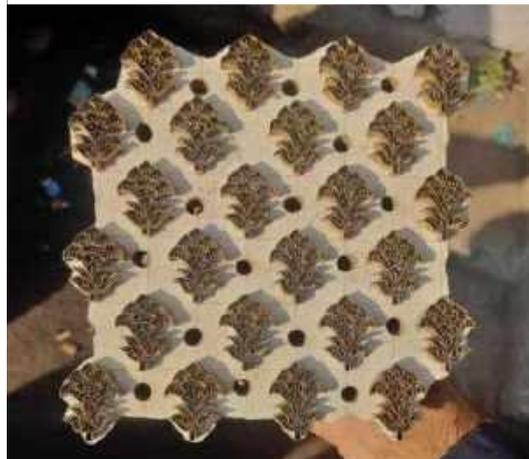


Figure 14: Metal Block



Figure 14: Different sizes of blocks

3. Importance of study

The handicraft sector of Jaipur is a cultural heritage of the pink city. This sector requires conservation in the same way as the certain species of plants and animals whose survival is at risk. Urbanization and westernization have made a disastrous impact over the continuation of the traditional art and craft and this is often gradually resulting in change in the quality of traditional masterpieces done by the artisans, artists and craftsmen of older era. This sector is facing shortfall of recognition which is slowly resulting in extinction of its identity. This study is giving an insight about the challenges faced by these artisans and proper measures taken for its upliftment.

4. Reasons for the fading of the Art

The art, which was once flourishing and attracted customers from all across the world, is now struggling to survive. The brutal competition, use of chemical colours, digital and screen prints all add to the artisan's woes

The work, which used to provide employment to about 100 people, can now be done with the help of only two people. If people stop this (use of chemical colours and screen printing) then a lot of people can get work. So many artisans have become unemployed because of screen printing," said Rinku Chhipa, a block print artisan from Jaipur. (Pareek, 2018)

"Digital and screen prints have severely affected our work. People are not getting employment. Traditional artisans who were earlier using natural colours and were in hand block printing are shifting to screens. Also, the cost of original hand prints is higher than the screen print because ours is an authentic work. So people who do not

have much knowledge they go after cheaper and screen printed products," said Lal Chand Derawala, a traditional hand block print artisan from Bagru. (Pareek, 2018)

Not just the printers, even wooden block makers have not been able to escape the adverse effects of screens. Meherbaan Khan, a block maker from Sanganer who has been in this business for 50 years, said: "The demand for blocks has decreased a little after the screen printing. We try to come up with new designs to meet the market requirement, but mostly we stick to our classic and



Figure 16: Problems faced by artist

cannot compete with a computer." (Pareek, 2018)

5. Statement of the problem

It is a work that requires a lot of patience, hard work, and dedication. Most artisans are not literate, they cannot find other jobs neither they continue this profession. This way, unemployment is gradually increasing. Artisans who were involved in block printing are shifting to screen printing. But the other artists like block makers are going unemployed as block print is taken over by screen-prints.

This paper emphasis on block maker artist, and provide employment to artist yet maintaining the age-old art

6. Design solution to sustain the art in the field of Interior Architecture

Solution for sustaining the art is use the blocks made by block makers in a new way not restricting it for printing.

One of the solutions is to use the wooden blocks as interior elements for designing feature wall and furniture's.

A **feature wall** is a wall that adds interest and energy to a room through texture, colour and contrast. It's like standing out from the crowd. A feature wall can impact how the space looks and feels, reinforcing your design style and creating a visual impact. Feature walls give interior or exterior space a decorative focal point. They can also be great way to give a space a new look and feel, reinvigorating the style of the space.

Wood is a much-loved building material. It has been used for many years in the construction of houses and other buildings. Teak, oak, beech, mahogany... every type of wood has its own appearance and strengths. These strengths in combination with the warm appearance of wood make it the perfect material for decorating an interior. Wood can be used in a variety of ways in an interior. Namely:

Wooden Floors

Panelling

Separating /Partition Wall

Ceilings

Furniture

Lighting, and

Decoration

In this study, we are going to discuss using wooden blocks for designing a feature wall and furniture. The wall or the furniture is broken down into modules of 25-30 cm. These blocks are designed with a specified pattern

by the artisans from their place, and it is exported to the site once the design is done. By doing this procedure the chance of artist settling in the city where the work is proceed can be avoided or which in turn results in the forming of slums due to unemployment after the particular work at the site is done.

The design on the blocks depends on the space it is used and as per the user. Modules are joined by using dowels which gives a seamless look for a wall. The patterns on the modules are designed as per the requirement; modules



Figure 17: Design of module with dowels

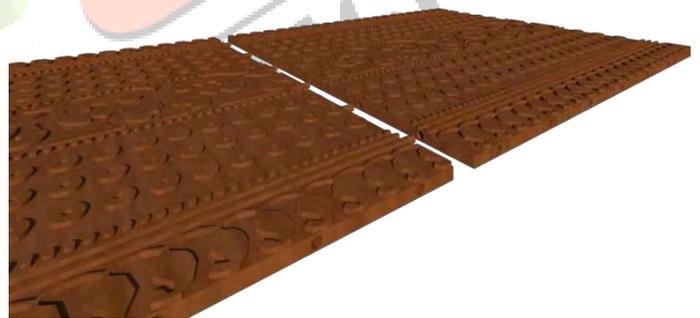


Figure 18: Joinery details of two modules using dowels

are joined together using a dowel joint. Each module is designed with punctures on all sides to fasten the dowels at the site. By using dowels the final result will have a seamless look. The blocks can also be used for creating 3d patterns on walls. E.g. it can be used while plastering on the walls like clay plastered wall, which gives a rustic ambiance (fig21).



Figure 20: Final product



Figure21: Using blocks while plastering

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