

Dheeraj Chhipa

BAGRU AND DABU

NATURAL DYEING PROCESSES OF INDIA

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BAGRU, RAJASTHAN





Dabu refers to a printing and dyeing technique on cotton fabric specific to the Bagru* village (an industrial town traditionally dedicated to textile dyeing and printing in Rajasthan). It is a deposition technique in which wooden blocks are soaked in a mud - dabu - printed by hand on the fabric in patterned repetitions and then dipped in the pot of indigo. Once they have dried in the sun and the indigo has been transformed from green to blue by oxygenation, they are washed in the river and the dried mud is removed, leaving the areas in contact with the mud undyed. Bagru is not only the name of a village, but also the name of the technique of printing on fabric with natural dyes that originated there. The village gives its name to the technique. Like dabu, bagru is complex and even more intricate, phased, implying a very vast and experienced knowledge of mordants, times and plants. Both dabu and bagru are not intended to make votive fabrics, but to liven up the traditional rajasthani clothes.

Dheeraj Chhipa is a printer whose profession is reflected in his surname - Chhipa - the Rajasthani word for printer. It is a highly specialized practice - a craftsmanship - and is very well respected throughout India. Dheeraj, as is almost always the case in North-West India, acquired his knowledge from his father. Once again, the generational thread is continuous and crosses the ages. I contacted him to give me a dabu and bagru workshop, where he told me that he has a degree in Textile Design from the Indian Institute of Crafts and Design (IICD in Jaipur). Times are changing and the web of relationships between so-called artisans and the academic world is getting stronger. I also learned that welcoming foreigners and students to his workshop in Bagru is part of his way of life.

The workshop started in the morning at nine o'clock and finished at seven in the evening. We barely stopped for lunch. I told him that what I wanted most of all was to film, to document, since I had already worked with both techniques in 2018. He collaborated both as an instructor and a cameraman, since he took the initiative to pick up the camera and film me printing dabu. I mentioned mud as the main medium of the dabu technique, as you can see in the picture, the ingredients that make it up are gum arabic, lime stone, river mud and wheat flour processed by insects.

* “Bagru, a large town located on the Ajmer highway 30 km west of Jaipur, has a long tradition of hand-block printing because of its original proximity to the Sanjaria river. Lacking elite patronage, Bagru thrived as a marketplace for the local populace who wore the ghaggras full skirts, dupattas and angochhas every day. The prints can be read as a text with colors and motifs indicating the complexity of the wearer’s specific community and marital status. Inspired by daily life, floral motifs and geometrical patterns decorate the cloth along with animal and bird forms”.

in “Hand Blockopedia – A Beginner’s Guide”, por Suki Skidmore, Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing, Jaipur.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6