



# Batik

V I S U A L M A G I C O N F A B R I C







Batik is an ancient form of a manual wax-resist dyeing process, which is practiced in Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, China, Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Middle East, India and some other countries. The exact origin of batik is not known, but it is widely practiced in Indonesia. In India, the resist method of printing designs on fabrics can be traced back 2000 years, to the 1st century AD. Religious tapestries of ancient India bear testimony of the fact that batik printing has existed in our country for a long time. Also, traditionally batik was done only on cotton and silk fabrics, using natural

dyes. India had abundant sources of cotton, as well as several plant and mineral sources from which the dyes could be extracted. Traditional colours of batik have always been indigo, dark brown and white – colours that represent the gods of the Hindu trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The art probably declined over the years as it was a tedious and labour intensive process.

The word batik means ‘wax writing’, and involves three major processes – waxing, dyeing and de-waxing – and several sub-







processes – starching, stretching the fabric on a frame and outlining the design using a special *Kalamkari* pen. Depending on the number of colours being used, creating a batik print on a fabric can take several days. The process involves covering part of the cloth with wax and dyeing the remaining part. The waxed areas retain the original colour and the un-waxed areas get the colour of the dye. The fabric is first dyed in the lightest colour and dried. Then, a coat of wax is applied over the area that needs to retain this colour and the fabric is dipped in the next lightest colour and dried again. The process is repeated until all the desired colours are on the fabric and the design has taken shape. Then the entire fabric is

dipped in boiling water to melt off the layers of wax, to get the final pattern. Colours are significantly changed by the preceding colour on the fabric as the process involves moving from the lighter colours to the darker ones. The only pure colour is the first one – all others are mixtures. Hence, it is important that the artist has thorough knowledge of colour mixing. A blend of 30% beeswax and 70% paraffin wax is







considered the best mix to use for the waxing process. The wax should not be overheated. Cotton and silk are not only highly absorbent fabrics that take up the dyes well, they are also strong enough to bear the heat and the wax. Nowadays, several other fabrics like georgettes, chiffons, voiles etc., are being used. Softer, less absorbent fabrics are block printed with hand carved blocks of wood and ink. This brings in uniformity in several pieces being made together. An original batik, made by this process of masking dyes and inks, does not have a good side and bad side like printed fabrics – both sides are identical.

Batik has a special connect with Bengal, as Rabindranath had first brought this exquisite dyeing technique to Santiniketan in 1927, after a visit to Java, Indonesia. Since then, the art of batik is being taught at *Kala Bhavan*, the arts college of Visva





Bharati University and it has become a local cottage industry that employs thousands of people. Batik textiles have become a part of the identity of the residents of Santiniketan. The technique, after being revived by Rabindranath, has been carried forward by the artists and artisans of the university. Experimentations continue till date on the on the most environment friendly and cost effective dyes and improvements on the technique. Leather craft of Santiniketan also uses embossed batik work with traditional motifs, making the wide range of items unique.

EZCC organized a batik workshop, with artisans who continue to use the traditional manual technique. The focus of the products was home décor – wall hangings, household linen etc., which will be sold through our outlet, so that the proceeds can be used to benefit more batik artists. The end result of this laborious and highly involved artistic process is visual magic on fabric.











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