

## BLOCK PRINTING – PART I

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### Introduction

Block printing is an ancient technique of printing which involves carving the pattern onto a large block, covering the design with a dye, and pressing it onto the fabric.

Block printing is believed to have originated in China towards the early 3rd century. Later, the record confirms its presence in other parts of the world. In India, the block printing started since the 12th century. Evolution of different designs of block printing has taken place in different parts of India with a local touch.



### Block Printing clusters in India

Block Printing is mainly practised in the following places in India –

- 1) **Andhra Pradesh** - One of the earliest and complex techniques of block printing is Kalamkari, developed in Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh. It uses vegetable dyes for printing.
- 2) **Gujarat** - The well-known centres for block printing in Gujarat are Kutch, Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar, Porbandar, Vasna, Rajkot etc. Various patterns and styles of each place make each of them unique.
- 3) **Rajasthan** - In Rajasthan, colourful block prints of birds, human figures, animals, gods and goddesses are well known.
- 4) **Madhya Pradesh** - Printed textiles are created by a community of printers called Chheepa in Madhya Pradesh. In some areas, printers use vegetable and Natural Dyes, in bright shades of red and black and occasionally indigo.
- 5) **Uttar Pradesh** - Uttar Pradesh is an important centre for hand-block printing with the paisley designs, classical butis and other traditional motifs.
- 6) **West Bengal** - Kolkata & Serampur are the main areas in this region. Traditionally had distinct design elements with unique colour schemes and motifs.



## Types of Blocks

There are mainly two types of blocks used by the printer at the time of printing

- i. **Wooden block** - Blocks are hand carved of teak wood. On the bottom face, the motif is engraved with steel chisels of different widths and cutting surface by the carver. Each block has a wooden handle and two to three cylindrical holes drilled into the block for free air passage and also to allow the release of excess printing paste. To soften the grains in the timber, the new blocks are soaked in oil for 10-15 days.



Fig 1.1 Wooden Blocks for Block Printing

- ii. **Metallic block** - Metal sheets are beaten by hand and made thin and malleable. Thin sheets are cut into strips of even length. The designs of the block are drawn on the wooden block and the thin metal strips are pressed onto the design and gently hammered in. The designs are filled in from the centre to the outside. Brass blocks are used in case of very fine designs and for a high level of clarity in print.



Fig 1.2 Metallic Blocks for Block Printing

To be continued...

Wishing you a great week ahead!

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