Tracing the Journey of a Craft from ‘embeddedness’ to ‘commercialisation’ : A Case of Hand Block Printing from the Jaipur Region.

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Abstract: Karl Polyani’s theories on embeddedness and disembeddedness help unpack the transformation of exchange systems and emergence of markets in societies. This paper analyses a process of such transformation observed in context to the hand block printing industry of Jaipur and its nearby areas. Through an ethnographic study of the craft, we observe the extent to which hand block printing has undergone heavy commodification and commercialisation while dis-embedding from society. The impact of this process is studied with respect to design, labour and authenticity that help understand how the socio-cultural identity of this craft and crafts(wo)men engaging in it has changed. Some of the underlying forces behind this are commodification of labour and commercialisation of the craft. While expanding on these, the paper also provides some policy recommendations on the aspects of recognising artists and standardising labels in the industry.

Keywords: Craft, embeddedness, dis-embeddedness, commodification, Hand block printing, Jaipur, Polanyi

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1. Introduction

India has an ancient and unique kaleidoscopic history of art and craft. Diversified art forms (kalas) emerged in and across India, with aesthetic influences from various religions like Hinduism, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh, Islamic as well as unique tribal aesthetics. Each of these crafts were unique to the cultures that influenced them as well as the region. Traditionally, these were carried out within a community by sharing the resources that were readily available in the area.
In this manner, these *kalas* played an instrumental role in reinforcing social integrity, crystallising social solidarity, fortifying communal harmony, and intensifying value systems within the community. The economy of ancient craft communities have been submerged in social interactions and the economic system (including occupational patterns) was, in effect, a mere function of social organisation. In such a close-ended socio-economic functioning of a community the idea of profit-making is inhibited; higgling and haggling is decried, ‘giving freely’ is acclaimed as a virtue, and the supposed propensity to barter, truck, and exchange does not appear.¹

However, with movement of people and goods, art and craft products moved out of their original spaces. As the products reached the market and came in competition with others, the social control over the economic process of production and distribution started deteriorating.² This further diminished with an increase in global popularity and the consequent demand once India’s traditional textiles were exposed to trade opportunities. As a result, the economy of the craft community that was once embedded in the social interactions became dis-embedded as it adjusted to the market dynamics.

With the advent of globalisation, a synthetic homogeneous macro-culture emerged that was dominated by the forces of demand and supply. To exploit the growing demand, external players entered the market and moulded the original form of art and craft products to ensure a quick supply at the cheapest rates possible. The expansion of production was met by dismantling various steps of the original process. Each part of the procedure which was once carried out by certain specific communities is now outsourced based on comparative advantage. As the handicrafts lost their
originality and identity, they merely became objects of trade and capital, in other words, they were reduced to commodities. iii

This paper tries to analyse the journey of a craft through the lens of Polanyi’s theories of embeddedness and disembeddedness. It seeks to understand the impact of the changing economic structure on the identity of the craft and craftsmen associated with it. It examines how the craft’s processes evolve to adapt to market dynamics and result in the disintegration of the original format as a result of commodification and commercialisation.

We focus on the craft of hand block printing in the Jaipur cluster to understand the trajectory of the transformation process through an ethnographic approach. Hand block printing has been chosen because of its rich history and vast popularity both domestically and internationally. On the other hand, Jaipur has been chosen because of its historical association with the craft that makes it a suitable witness to its journey.

Section 2 sets the tone for the paper. It throws light on the concepts of embeddedness, disembeddedness. It also gives an introduction and background of hand block printing. Section 3 covers the methodology and Section 4 reviews the literature that enabled to build the conceptual framework for this paper. Section 5 shares the observations from the fieldwork to trace the trajectory and details of the journey. Section 7 highlights the way forward as recommendations and Section 8 concludes.

2. Background
Theory of Embeddedness and Dis-embeddedness

Karl Polanyi writes in *The Great Transformation* that all economic systems are embedded in social relations and distribution of material goods is ensured by non-economic motives. His theory of embeddedness is drawn from the works of anthropologists and economists such as Thurnwald and Malinowski. According to Thurnwald, a primitive economy is a “social affair, dealing with a number of persons as parts of an interlocking whole”. iv

This is equally true of wealth, work, and barter. “Primitive wealth is not of an economic but of a social nature”. Malinowski highlighted through his work- Argonauts - that in embedded economies labour is capable of "effective work," because it is "integrated into an organised effort by social forces." v "Barter of goods and services is carried on mostly within a standing partnership or associated with definite social ties or coupled with a mutuality in non-economic matters” vi

Polanyi believed that the functioning of such embedded ecosystems was characterised by the forces of reciprocity, redistribution and householding. Such forces are able to ensure the working of an economic system without the help of written records and elaborate administration only because the organisation of the societies in question meets the requirements of such a solution with the help of patterns such as symmetry and centricity.

Symmetry is the pairing out of individual relations thereby assisting the give-and-take of goods and services in the absence of permanent institutions.vii The institutional pattern of centricity, again, which is present to some extent in all human groups, provides a track for the collection, storage, and redistribution of goods and services.viii It must be noted that these patterns are only sociological arrangements that give rise to no separate institutions, but merely patterns out existing ones. The third force which played a big role in history was the principle of householding, which consists in production for one's own use.ix

In his book, he goes on to discuss the transformation of such embedded systems into disembedded economies at the onset of the 19th century. That is the move from economic relations being embedded in social relations to social relations being embedded in the economic system. It means
the predominance of transactions and social interactions that are not submerged in social relationships but are based on economic self-interest. Adaptation of the barter system was central to this transformation.

Barter, truck, and exchange is a principle of economic behaviour ~ dependent for its effectiveness upon the market pattern. A market is a meeting place for the purpose of barter or buying and selling. Unless such a pattern is present, at least in patches, the propensity to barter will find but insufficient scope: it cannot produce prices. Once prices are produced as a part of the market pattern, social control over the economic process diminishes.

**Figure 1 : The transformation from embeddedness to disembeddedness as proposed by Polyani**

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*Hand block printing*

The art of hand block printing emerged in India almost 450 years ago. It was practised by the Chippa community whose primary occupation was dyeing and printing. This community was originally found in Nagaur in Rajasthan and they gradually migrated to Gujarat also. Chippa (printers), Rangrez (dyers), Dhobis (washermen) and wood block carvers, are the craftsmen who play an important role in the production process of hand block printing.
Spread across the villages of Rajasthan and Gujarat, the textiles from each village have their own individual style, by way of specific motifs, colours and patterns pertaining to their geographical location, availability of resources and their familial ties.\textsuperscript{xii}

In hand block printing, colours and designs are the focal differentiation points, making them the very essence of this craft. These are developed with knowledge amassed over the years as members of the community learnt the techniques from within the family through observation and participation, which was further passed down as traditional knowledge. The prints, cloth types and cloth designs were also a subtle assertion of social status.\textsuperscript{xiii} However, these have transformed with time under the influence of changing dynasties, movement through trade routes and growing demand.

Traditionally, the craft was pursued only within the community and the products were either used for self-use or distributed amongst the members of the community. In other words, the market was embedded in social relations and the distribution of material goods was driven by non-economic motives. There was symmetry in the individual relations within the community as give-and-take of goods was organically facilitated without a permanent institution.

Mahesh Chippa mentioned that goods were produced keeping in mind the receiver and their social status, for example the Fadat design - a minute and extremely intricate design with each motif no more than a centimetre in width - was only created for the Jat community.\textsuperscript{xiv} Another unique exchange that reflects the trait of centricity was observed between the chippas and the royalty. Hand printed cloth was supplied to the royal courts that were checked for authenticity by the palace guards before being stamped with the King’s label. In lieu of this, the chippas were exempted from paying taxes.\textsuperscript{xv} The community also produced goods for their own use which highlights the trait of householding in an embedded society.
Figure 2: Hand block printing process

**Block**: The first step is the creation of the block which is prepared of sheesham by wood carvers and dipped into mustard or linseed oil for days. A single block can be used multiple times until the design imprinted on the

**Cloth**: To prepare the cotton cloth for printing, it is washed, bleached and dried. It is then stretched on tables with layers of cloth to make it softer and the stamping easier.

**Dye**: The dye is prepared using either natural extracts or pigment. ‘Dabu printing’ or mud resistant technique (famous in Bagru) still uses natural dyes while Sanganer prints mostly use pigments or chemicals. The natural

**Hand block printing**: The mud resistant technique uses mud. The wooden blocks are dipped using a fine mud solution and stamped onto the cloth. Post this, the cloth is dried in the sun. Once it dries, it is dipped in the dyed/coloured water to colour the areas without mud. Additionally, a muddy shade is left on the areas that were printed with the mud. Also, the process involves repeated cycles of dyeing to bring out different shades of colour (the common ones being indigo, red, black, beige).

Similarly, for Sanganeri prints using pigment, the wooden blocks are dipped into colours. The range of colours here is greater as they are artificially created. First, an outline is created and then the inner portions of the design are coloured.

**Drying, sorting and stitching**: The cloth is then dried to avoid bleeding of the colours, checked for errors and is ready to be stitched.

Figure 3.1xvi Different designs on the wooden blocks from the Anokhi Museum of Hand
Figure 3.2 Clockwise: Preparation of the dye; stamping the cloth with the block after dipping it into the dye; craftsmen stamping the cloth on their work table; drying and curling of the printed cloth.

Figure 3.3 Mud Resistant Printing (clockwise): Natural extracts used in dye preparation including pomegranate, harad etc; Imprinting the designs with mud; Dipping the cloth in Indigo for colouring; Drying the dyed cloth; Dried cloth with mud prints, The final cloth after washing, drying and finishing.
In India, the craft grew in prominence with royal patronage allowing Jaipur to become a hotspot in Rajasthan due to the establishment of kingdoms, increasing trade and production. The king, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II of Jaipur, an admirer of art and craft, invited artisans and gave land to them on the outskirts of the city to establish their units in towns such as Sanganer, Jahota, Amer and Bagru. Sanganer and Bagru emerged as two prominent settlements of hand block printing near Jaipur. Sanganer was founded by Kachchhwaha Rajput Prince Sangaji in the early 16th century and was thriving by the 17th century partially due to its strategic location along major trade routes.

According to oral accounts, the artisan families of Jaipur began to shift their work to locations where space and running water were freely available, yet still within easy reach of the capital. Sanganer provided a perfect place for this with the added benefit of specialist dyers and cloth bleachers residing in the town. Such artisans formed a large, supportive community with block printing at the core of their culture. Bagru on the other hand is situated about 30 km from Jaipur, the chhippa community of the village has been involved in the craft for 350 years. It is believed that the community migrated to the village to settle near the Sanjaria river.

Figure 4: Map of Jaipur District with Bagru, Sanganer, Amber (or Amer) marked.
The availability of water in these two villages plays a significant role in the design and colour of the fabric. In Sanganer, water is available in abundance and hence washing and printing is easily carried out for crafting fabrics using lighter shades of colour. However, the use of Sanganer water in printing produces a darker shade of colour on the fabric. On the other hand, the scarcity of water in the Bagru village and the reddish tinge the water leaves on the fabric results in the Bagru hand block cloth having bold designs in darker shades of colour. xxiv

The designs also varied significantly. The Sanganer Hand block designs are very detailed. They have intricaced floral patterns pressed upon a white or off white background. Flowers like rose, marigold, lotus, lotus buds, sunflower and lilies are some noted motifs. Printing techniques called ‘Calico Printing’ and ‘Do rookhi’ are the two most preferred and practised art forms applied in Sanganer block printing. The Calico style involves printing the outline first, followed by filling of the colour, and the same is repeated diagonally too.xxv

In Do rookhi, printing is done on both sides of the fabric. Bagru hand block prints are majorly geometrical patterns etched on an indigo background or on other darker shades. In the Bagru style, there are two patterns of design that are prominent: the Seyali-bagru print, a fabric that has a theme of black-creme colour and the other is the Dabru print that hides the print from the dye by using a special resist technique. Hand block printing, though ancient, is truly an environmentally friendly craft that showcases nature at its best.xxvi
3. Methodology

The craft’s journey has been ethnographically observed to understand how the community and stakeholders accord importance to the traditional knowledge system and social networks. Different methods of ethnocentric observation were employed to understand how hand block printing evolved adapting to various dynamics of market and technology upgrade.

a. *Naturalistic observation and undisguised participant observation*: Within the areas of Bagru, Sanganer, Amer and Jaipur, various manufacturing and printing units of different types were identified to understand the transition of the craft ethnographically. These included hand block printing units using organic dyes (Oijas Unit of Handblock printing, Teetanwala handblock printing), hand block printing units using pigment (Oijas Unit of Handblock printing, Indus Art and Emporium), manufacturing and wholesale units (Riddhi Siddhi textiles and Mansarovar Textiles) and Screen-Printing Units (various freelance and independent units in Sanganer). These locations ranged from small units catering to local needs to large units dealing in exports. The team interacted with the printers from both within and outside the *chippa* community, first and second-generation entrepreneurs, families of the printers and
experts in the field of hand block printing. Most of the interactions took place during the hours of work at the workplace.

b. **Case Study:** The deeper understanding of the craft required deeper engagement with the craft and its production process. A full-day workshop at Ojjas Hand Block printing centre allowed first-hand experience with the craft along with detailed insights on the craft’s journey from Ms Raj Kunwar who heads the Ojjas Unit. The team was absorbed into the process of hand block printing using natural dyes (mud resistant or “Dabu” printing) and pigment. From the preparation of the dyes to the sorting of the final cloth, the team participated in each process. We interacted with different people involved in different stages that allowed us to use participant observation methods to collect information and anecdotes that help us trace the transition of the craft.

c. **Archival Research:** The Anokhi Museum of hand printing in Amer was a storehouse of information that offered visual and textual aid to collate the history of the craft. The library of the Department of Archaeology and Museums offered a rich source of information on crafts and textiles of Rajasthan. It helped in building a background on the deep relationship of the region with different forms of textile crafts. The other studies were sourced from the web that allowed to build conceptual clarity on the theories of embeddedness, disembeddedness and globalisation.

In addition to the above aspects that remained the focus of our research approach during the field visits in Jaipur, Sanganer, Bagru and Amer, this research paper includes a literature review of the past observations drawn across different craft clusters. These will allow us to understand where hand block printing lies when viewed through a broader lens of the new economic sociology.

4. **Literature Review**
Polanyi’s arguments in The Great Transformation have allowed several scholars to build onto the new economic sociology in different contexts. Hess overterritorialises the concept of social embeddedness to conclude that spatial proximity plays a crucial role in facilitating social interactions.\textsuperscript{xviii} In this manner, handicrafts have also emerged in the literature to be territorially embedded in their true forms. Gough et al. establish that the what, where and when behind the production of handicrafts are situated in rural constraints and possibilities – a characteristic that also drives the uniqueness of hand block printing. \textsuperscript{xxix}

Many sociologists have focused on the aspects of specialisation of labour and globalisation of handcrafted commodities and the effects that these processes have had on transformations of social relations into exchanges driven by self-interest. Division of labour in crafts or craft specialisation as defined by Costin is – “... [a] differentiated, regularised, permanent, and perhaps institutionalised production system in which producers depend on extra-household exchange relationships ....”\textsuperscript{xxx} The extra-household exchange can be interpreted as the introduction of several parties such as marketplaces, global production houses and even middlemen in the wholesale and retail supply chains commonly found in present-day economies. These players undertake specific roles in the production, eliminating the traditional case wherein a single household came together to produce the craft.

Specifically for hand block printing, a clear division has been made between the innovation of design and tradition of printing as exclusive categories of designers and printers have emerged. The paper, Working Through Tradition: Experiential Learning and Formal Training as Markers of Class and Caste in North Indian Block Printing explores this from the perspective of caste and class dynamics in Indian society. \textsuperscript{xxxi}

Krener adds to the characteristics of craft specialisation with standardisation. With the example of pottery and the use of standardised vessel forms, surface treatment and decoration this process has led to more “professionalism”.\textsuperscript{xxii} The author notes that this is economically motivated and does not allow for mistakes in the items. These instances allowed us to draw clear parallels between different crafts across regions.
Lastly, globalisation introduces handicrafts to mechanisation and mass production often leading to the withdrawal of rural households from its production. Very few forms of arts and crafts are able to maintain their authenticity in these circumstances, and as Wherry argues, have become differentiated. Moreover, decreased value of labour in the face of modernisation has deprived rural communities of livelihood opportunities by outsourcing this work to cheaper alternatives, whether that be of a machine or a migrant labourer.

As documented by several of these authors, such negative effects of globalisation remains a concern for many craft clusters including brassware in Malaysia embroidered textiles of Thailand and Vietnam and wood carvings of South Africa.

The several accounts available from the case studies undertaken in different craft communities provide a holistic understanding of the impact of globalisation, modernisation and urbanisation on craft production. Amidst this, hand block printing has been a rather niche exploration. This has increased the dependence of our research work on oral accounts by older artisans and other experts in the industry. Apart from the craft cluster being studied, this paper remains novel in its investigation of the initial dynamics behind the journey from embeddedness to disembeddedness of hand block printing.

5. Observations

The Jaipur Hathwada emerged very soon right after the barter system. The Hathwada was one of the first popular physical markets that took place within the hand block printing communities. It was a weekly set up on the terrace of Lord ChaturBhuj in Jaipur where chippa families from nearby villages would travel with their stock in order to sell it in exchange of money. Many elder printers define the Hathwada to be the initial stimulus of competition within the community.
It is important to note that hand block printed textiles commodified in the beginning of the barter exchange itself as a value of exchange was assigned to them along with their value of use.\textsuperscript{xxxix} However, the introduction of a physical market (the Hathwada) and money played a big role in strengthening market forces and players that led to a complete disembeddedness. The continuous disembedding of the craft implied a separation of time and space: the craft was lifted out of a long-lasting temporal-spatial context.

This implied that consumers were no longer interested in the constructed experience of authenticity and traditionalism that one usually seeks in artisanal products.\textsuperscript{xl} Hand block prints were only commodities that were desired for their appeal even if that could be acquired through displaced methods of production. There were spill over effects observed in the aspects of labour and design as the craft began to adjust to the growing demand and fashion trends dictated by the market.

Market dynamics multiplied the number of people engaging with the craft in both its production and consumption. While it popularised hand block printing, it also negatively affected the craft through processes such as commercialisation. This was largely responded with an involvement of screen printing that threatens hand block printing today.

\textit{Impact on Designs}

Traditional designs were the first to get transformed. Initially, artisans picked up designs from their surroundings or holy texts which were special to their community and in a manner marked their identity. With the increase in demand and diversity in clientele, the designs got contemporised and mixed up. In the early 17th century, the Indo-European cultural exchanges of this period affected
the fashion trends within India; the craftsmen re-fitted styles and designs to suit their diverse clientele.

The popular European motif of the ‘cabbage rose’ got merged with the Indian design. By the late 18th century roses appeared in Sanganeri textiles as loose, asymmetrical flowers with a sculptural shape more reminiscent of European florals than the lineated regimented roses of earlier periods. The revival of hand block printing in the 20th century borrowed from the 18th-century designs. By the early 1970s, western dress reflected the popular eastern ethos of the hippie culture. The traditional hand block prints were repackaged as the latest rage.

Figure 6: Influence of Bohemian Fashion in Hand Block Printed Textiles

This repackaging resulted in growing popularity and made the craft reach top fashion magazines and ramp walks. The fresh, new perspective to traditional designs symbolised the craft as ‘Indian’ culture in the international market. This encouraged the designers and manufacturers to develop
mutually beneficial relationships within the printing community which allowed them to continue with the craft and adapt the products to the growing trends. However, the domain of designing and meeting the changing market demands remained exclusive to the designing houses/ manufacturers. The colour, prints and designs are decided by the designers, who further provide instructions for printers to follow.

The loss of traditional designs was amongst the first repercussions of the introduction of the craft into a commercial space. The oral accounts of pioneers in the field suggest, “We have lost 30-40% of the original designs and they are irrecoverable. This is the main loss as these designs were reflective of our traditions and roots.” The printers and designers alike are concerned about the uniqueness of even the new designs. Since the designs are easily replicable, the designs get copied by different producers in the market. Many famous printers in Bagru reported concerns regarding the easy replicability of the designs, “We do not display our designs in the store very easily. The other printers might copy it and reproduce it using screen printing and sell it at cheaper rates; there will be nothing unique for us to offer to the clients.”

**Impact on Labour**

Both domestic and global demand for hand block printed textiles was at a peak during the 1970s and 80s and the supply scaled up accordingly. This led to the reorganisation of the labour community or the printers – chippas moved out and migrant workers from other castes moved in. Young men from nearby farming villages came to Bagru in response to newspaper advertisements and learned the basics of printing in a matter of days.
Many even travelled from other parts of the country, predominantly Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and were trained to be printers. The ones who were not originally associated with the craft could not identify with its meaning and essence. For them, it was only a means to an end, which was profit. Practising *chippas* have expressed discomfort towards this – “*I’m not comfortable how other caste people have taken up our printing. These other caste people are not sensitive to our printing tradition and to our community...*” xlviii

Printers who did not belong to the chippa were not expected to participate in the design and ideation. The demand for printing services grew and in this environment, smaller printing units emerged that provided these services. These centres became printing sources for the manufacturers who in turn sold to their clients. These manufacturers can be seen as middlemen that link the printers to the customers. The emergence of this new player widened the wedge between the printers and the consumers. Very soon, designers and printers emerged as two mutually exclusive verticals under hand block printing. In the past, this shift from artisans as creators to artisans as job workers has been flagged as an occupational displacement. xlix

We can also draw parallels to the commodification of labour which Polanyi characterises for a disembedded economy. Polanyi believed that in a market economy, labour must be somehow brought to the markets. In his analysis of the creation of the market for labour, he follows Marx in arguing that it was done forcibly when the original sources of livelihood were replaced by capitalist enterprise. In short, by depriving individuals of traditional means of livelihood, the market system transformed them into wage-seekers and economisers.¹
Furthermore, the wave of globalisation over the demand for hand block printed textiles attracted many designers to this form of craft even in modern society. Many designers from Rajasthan are middle to upper class women who have been formally trained in designs from specialised universities or design schools. They invest in marketing, branding, relationship building which enables them to reach a larger consumer base (both domestically and internationally) and sell the products at higher prices. However, in this process, the printer’s identity is lost.

*Introduction of Screen Printing*

Interestingly, despite the distance between the printing community and the process of the craft, the authenticity of printing by hand has remained a unique selling point in this trade. In a personal interview, Ms Raj Kunwar, owner of Ojjas Printing Unit recounts multiple times, “The hand block printed cloth goes through a hundred hands. This is what makes it unique.”

Sanganeri craftsmen were introduced into the international arena back in the 18th century itself. The chippa and rangrez communities of Sanganer united to create delicately patterned and coloured muslin material for a broad based clientele. Ever since then, both domestic and international demand for hand block printed textiles has been on a rise.

Towards the end of the 19th century, mechanisation accompanied by the introduction of chemical dyestuffs resulted in competition from less labour intensive processes emerging in the west. At the same time, a ‘technological laissez faire’ policy was also introduced in India and soon became a
part of the craft production in light of the booming demand. The ability to create chemically
coloured, machine woven and roller printed fabrics significantly reduced production costs.¹⁵

Screen printing requires much less workforce and time. It also offers a greater variety of colours
and combinations and as a result, produces a greater quantity of cloth in much less time. This
completely overthrew the conventional procedure as businesses found a method of increasing their
profits. Screen printing borrowed the designs from the hand block printing tradition and recreated
them using machines and chemical dyes.

The introduction of screen printing is central to the commercialisation of hand block printing as it
dismantled every bit of the original process. The carved blocks were replaced by large screens
where the designs were created by machines and not hands. Hand stamping was replaced by screen
printing and natural colours were replaced by chemical dyes.

While mechanisation was necessary in order to stabilise the supply in a demand heavy market, the
nation failed to anchor the proportion of screen prints to hand block prints. A quantitative cap was
implemented at 500 million metres p.a. production which saw an annual increase. With
phenomenal growth rates every year, the mechanised sector last registered a total production of
2400 million metres in 1980. Since then, there have been no records to gauge the size of this
industry. Simultaneously, hand printing has only shrunk, losing an estimated more than 2.5 lakh
jobs to mechanisation. ¹⁵³
Many manufacturers today continue to sell screen printed textiles under the name of hand block printed due to the lack of certificates and authentic labelling in this industry. This practice has discouraged many firms to continue with traditional practices. Manufacturers respond to market dynamics very quickly in order to maintain steady profits. For example, many manufacturers print ‘Anokhi’ designs as they are more in demand. To counter the copyright issues, they tweak colours and designs slightly which make them aesthetically similar to what Anokhi offers. A manufacturing unit that we spoke to in Jaipur claimed – “We cater to the demands. We are dealing in hand block printing because there is a heavy demand. If the clients want something else, we will switch to that.”

6. The Way Forward

The hand block printing industry has few barriers to entry allowing for many institutions and entrepreneurs to launch into it. These formal enterprises can help break the harsh channels of market forces. The GoI has long ignored these artists who are left unrecognised and to fend for themselves in meagre wages.

“We made a very big mistake. When we recognised our crafts and craftsmen we did not give them dignity. We should have certified them as gurus and given them disciplines to train” ~ Raj Kanwar Ji, owner of Ojjas

Additionally, the modern education system is very exclusive of arts and crafts. They are pushed aside as ‘extracurriculars’ with no developed curriculum. Training programmes run by the government too are not tailored to the needs of the industry since they take an entrepreneurial approach that does not equip students with enough skill to practice the craft.
Another issue that plagues the industry is the lack of standardised labels and tags to mark authentic products. It is difficult to identify hand block prints amidst screen printed textiles. In this pretext, it becomes even more important to certify authentic products. A recent episode of fashion designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee using the Sanganeri (screen) print in his collection – Wanderlust – under collaboration with the global organisation H&M is one of the biggest scandals recently.

An open letter sent to him on behalf of the artisan sector lays out the sheer potential that Indian craftsmen possess only to be time and again robbed of the opportunity to showcase their own skills and designs. It states – “…to adopt technology for greater efficiencies while taking a rights based approach to protect artisan rights and bring back ownership and prosperity to them. It is this vision we hope you will export to the world.”

7. Conclusion

Traditional craft practices have neither remained static nor confined to a particular region or a community, but have gone way beyond the conventional modes of production. This has been the norm with markets forming the everyday of individuals. Traditionally, craft items were produced in small numbers and the production and distribution was governed by social relations. The elements of reciprocity, householding and redistribution were embedded as societies produced crafts only as objects with value of use. However, with time, as artisans started exploring outside the internal domain, a value of exchange was assigned and commodification soon followed. So has also been the case with hand block printing in the Jaipur cluster that has disintegrated the craft’s identity. Its motivation is no longer driven by the rich heritage but by the demand driven market available both domestically and internationally.
Rapid globalisation further compromised the tradition and the knowledge system attached to the training in the craft. The rampant polarity in the designs to substituting the printer from an artist to a labour have all been consequences of continued disembeddedness. In this fragmented production, the industry requires policy attention and hand holding. Lastly, the introduction and standardisation of a label as proof of the authenticity of the craft, while difficult, will serve the dual purpose of spreading consumer awareness and providing identity to the craftsmen.

Notes

ii Teetanwala, “Made By Hand.”
iii Vats, *Indian Handicrafts and Globalisation*, 40-43
iv Thurnwald, *Economics*, xii.
ix Ibid, 49.
in Ibid, 53.
x Ibid, 56.
xi Printed on Label, *Anokhi Museum of Hand Block Printing*
xii “Craft Hand Block Printing”, 1
xiii Mathur, “Socio-economic Status of Chhipa”, 29
xiv Chippa, “Made by Hand”
xv Printed on Label, *Anokhi Museum of Hand Block Printing*
xvi Pictures taken from the Anokhi Museum of Hand Block Printing
xvii Photo Credits to Jignesh Mistry
xviii Photo Credits to Jignesh Mistry
xx Ibid., 43.
xi Batham, Bagru, 18.

xii Ibid, 280.

xiii Taken from Maps of India.

xiv “Craft Hand Block Printing”, 3.

xv Skidmore, Sanganer

xvi Raj Kanwar, Personal Interview, August 2021.

xvii The Indian Ethnic, Fabricolore


xxiii Rigg, “More than Soil”.


xxvii Teetanwala, “Made by Hand : Jaipur Hand Block Printing Part 1”.

xxviii Ibid.

xxix Marx, “Capital”, 126.

x Scrase, “Marginalized Worker to Impoverished Entrepreneur”, 22.

xi Skidmore, Sanganer.

xii Printed on Label, Anokhi Museum of Hand Block Printing.

xiii Anokhi Museum of Hand Block Printing


xv Kanwar, “Made by Hand: Jaipur Hand Block Printing Part 4”.

xvi Masarover, Personal Interview, August 2021.

xvii Mathur, “Socio-economic Status of Chhipa”.


Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

DeNicola, “Working Through Tradition”,

Jain et al., “Indiscriminate Mechanisation”, 459

Ibid, 462.

Anokhi is a brand that deals in hand block printed apparel and accessories. It has been a prominent leader in the field known for its role in reviving art and artists in the late 20th century.

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