



## Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk

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To cite this article: Eiluned Mair Edwards (2016) Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk, Textile History, 47:2, 146-170

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2016.1211436>



Published online: 13 Sep 2016.



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# *Ajrakh*: From Caste Dress to Catwalk

EILUNED MAIR EDWARDS 

*Ajrakh is a double-sided, block-printed textile worn as caste dress by cattle herders in the desert regions of Kachchh and Thar in north-west India and Sindh in Pakistan, where it is made by Khatri artisans. Readily identified by its distinctive combination of geometric and floral designs, traditional ajrakh is notably printed on both sides of the cloth and is dyed with indigo and madder. In the past forty years ajrakh has not only been transformed from a rustic block print into a popular fashion fabric, it has also become the signature cloth of the Khatri communities at Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur in Kachchh and is their most successful product. This article analyses the interventions that led to the successful adaptation of ajrakh as a regional product to a modern design milieu. It discusses early government initiatives that resulted in the introduction of artisan-designer collaborations in the 1970s, as well as later design developments that were led by Indian and foreign entrepreneurs. It traces the continuing trajectory of ajrakh from rural western India to the catwalks of New Delhi, Mumbai and beyond. Case studies of three fashion companies illuminate the factors that have influenced the commercial ascent of ajrakh. This textile is also considered in respect of recent initiatives to organise and protect the craft sector by the Government of India and by non-governmental organisations. In a final section, the article appraises the value of ajrakh as both a successful commodity and a cultural asset.*

## INTRODUCTION

This article analyses the commercial ascent of *ajrakh*, a block-printed textile formerly worn by cattle herders in the desert regions of western India and in Sindh, Pakistan, which has become the signature cloth of Khatri artisans in Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur villages in Kachchh district, Gujarat (Fig. 1). First adapted for use as soft furnishings in the mid-1970s, *ajrakh* quickly became popular in urban India. In the new millennium, further design interventions have established regular artisan-designer collaborations and *ajrakh* has been transformed into a popular fashion fabric and accessory. Transitioning from caste dress to catwalk, *ajrakh* now enjoys a well-established niche on both Indian and international fashion markets. The commercial potential of *ajrakh* continues to be explored by a growing number of designers from India and other countries. To illuminate its development as a fashion fabric, case studies of one fashion designer and two retail companies will be discussed: Aneeth Arora of Delhi-based label Péro, Maiwa Handprints based in Vancouver, Canada, and Fabindia, the headquarters of which are in New Delhi. The examples chosen operate in different sectors of the fashion market, but all three have well-established and enduring working relations with Khatri block printers, chiefly in Kachchh, which will be delineated with some reference to other artisans in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Although the commercial success of *ajrakh* (and other block prints) has helped to secure livelihoods



FIG. 1. *Maldhari* (animal herder) wearing *ajrakh* shoulder cloth, Kachchh, Gujarat, 2010. Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

in rural areas, it has simultaneously exposed other issues that ultimately threaten the sustainability of the craft; these problems will be discussed and strategies designed to address them outlined. In a final section, the article analyses the factors that have made *ajrakh* an object valued as ‘cultural heritage’, conserved in museums and private collections, as well as a successful commodity that has enjoyed an upward trajectory over the past forty years.

#### IRRESISTIBLE AJRAKH

Like many block-printed textiles produced in north-west India, notably in Gujarat and Rajasthan (also in Sindh, Pakistan), *ajrakh* features the use of a resist to reserve areas of the cloth from taking up colour when immersed in the dye vat.<sup>1</sup> Historically several forms of resist have been used in this context, including a tied resist for which the region has long been famous; women dressed in diaphanous tie-dyed fabrics are depicted in Jain manuscript paintings from the twelfth century CE onwards,<sup>2</sup> and a tied resist is also used in the production of the acclaimed double *ikat patolu* of Patan, north Gujarat, a textile meticulously documented by Alfred Bühler and Eberhard Fischer in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> The range of printed resist media encompasses *kanka* (Kachchhi), a wax-like resin from the jojoba tree, *dabu* mud resist (Gujarati and Hindi) for which Bagru in Rajasthan is noted (Fig. 2), and a paste made of lime (calcium hydroxide) and gum from the *babul* or acacia tree (*Acacia nilotica indica*). Nowadays, wax printers use paraffin wax, although the use of *dabu* and lime and gum continues. The latter resist is used for contemporary *ajrakh*, although several Khattris interviewed in Kachchh spoke of the use of *kanka* by their grandfathers and earlier forebears



FIG. 2. Female worker printing *dabu* mud resist, Bagru, Rajasthan, 2012.  
Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.



FIG. 3. Abduljabbar M. Khatri printing a resist of lime and gum, Dhamadka, Kachchh, 2013.  
Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

(Fig. 3).<sup>4</sup> There are several different forms and sizes of *ajrakh*, but the most acclaimed is a double-faced textile, printed on both sides of the fabric, dyed using madder and indigo, and known as *minakari*.<sup>5</sup> The depth of colour and the perfect alignment of the printed designs — tested by holding the finished cloth up to the sun, thus revealing any mistakes, requires the utmost skill on the part of the artisan.

The complex geometric and floral patterns associated with *ajrakh*, which form the ‘traditional’ repertoire passed down from father to son, today include between twenty-five and thirty designs, according to Abduljabbar M. Khatri of Dhamadka, one of the leading producers of *ajrakh* in Kachchh.<sup>6</sup> Lotika Varadarajan, who worked with Aduljabbar’s father, Mohammad Siddik, in the 1980s, remarked upon ‘a much larger fount of design which existed in the past’ and situated the roots of the textile in the medieval Indo-Egyptian cloth trade.<sup>7</sup> Her assertion is supported by surviving evidence of the trade in the so-called ‘Fustat fragments’,<sup>8</sup> a large collection of which is held at the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, with smaller caches at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Musée Guimet in Paris, Kelsey Museum at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the Calico Museum at Ahmedabad, India. Reviewing a selection of these cotton fragments at the Ashmolean Museum in 2002 with Ruth Barnes and the acclaimed Kachchhi block printer, Ismail M.

Khatri, we noted the affinity between the medieval textiles and contemporary *ajrakh* (as well as related block prints such as *sirakh* and *malir*) in terms of techniques and designs. Access to these fragments inspired Ismail Khatri to adapt some of the medieval patterns (photographed on his behalf by the author) for contemporary production, and the family workshop at Dhamadka, Kachchh subsequently developed a line of ‘historical’ textiles. Medieval designs have continued to be an important source of ideas for Ismail and his brothers, Abdulrazzak and Abduljabbar M. Khatri, which they have been able to access through books and museum websites. One of their most popular patterns — known in the workshop as ‘Woven Cargoes’, is based on a textile featured on the back cover of John Guy’s book of the same name (Fig. 4). The original printed and painted design spanned the maritime trading network of the Indian Ocean that extended west from the ports of western India to the Arab world, and east to South-east Asia and beyond. It is evident not only in the medieval Indo-Egyptian fragments, but also on textiles of the same period found in Central Sulawesi, preserved whole as heirlooms.<sup>9</sup>

#### ‘AJRAKH PRINTS’ AND COLLABORATION WITH DESIGNERS

Although Abduljabbar M. Khatri at Dhamadka estimates the range of *ajrakh* patterns in regular use to be between twenty-five and thirty designs, he asserts that the repertoire of ‘*ajrakh* prints’ — distinct from *ajrakh* — has expanded far beyond that number in the past ten to fifteen years, largely in response to clients’ demands. According to Abduljabbar M. Khatri, ‘*ajrakh* prints’ are a hybrid form and combine elements of ‘original *ajrakh*’, such as the distinctive border patterns *hanso* (a design derived from Islamic architecture) and *kungri* (a floral design), with designs developed by other people — he interacts with numerous designers each year, as well as drawing upon historical patterns such as ‘Woven Cargoes’ and motifs not specifically related to western India, such as the Kashmiri *boteh*, or paisley.<sup>10</sup> The term ‘*ajrakh* prints’, probably coined by a designer from one of the Khatri’s client companies, has gained traction over the past decade and a half and is widely understood among block printers at Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur (Fig. 5).



FIG. 4. Detail of design known as ‘Woven Cargoes’ derived from medieval trade textile, block printed at Ajrakhpur, Kachchh, 2014. The author’s private collection. Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.



FIG. 5. Range of *ajrakh*-print bedspreads displayed (hanging on rail in background) at the Maiwa store, Granville Island, Vancouver, Canada, 2013.  
With thanks to Charlotte Kwon. Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

The particular driver behind the development of ‘*ajrakh* prints’ for Abduljabbar M. Khatri has been his long-term collaboration with two companies: Maiwa Handprints based in Vancouver, Canada, and Fabindia based in New Delhi, India. They are his largest clients, whose goods sell respectively to the middle classes of North America (Canada and the USA) and urban India as well as to customers in UAE, Mauritius, Singapore, Nepal and Italy. His annual production for Maiwa in 2014 included 1,000 m of ‘running cotton’, 1,000 bed spreads, 3,000 cushion covers and napkins, 200 silk *dupattas* (scarves used to cover the head and upper torso) and 200 silk stoles. Production for Fabindia in the same year included 70,000 m of ‘running yardage’ in cotton, 200 cotton bedspreads, 1,500 *dupattas* (in *gajji* satin silk and cotton/silk) and at least 1,000 stoles (in silk and cotton).<sup>11</sup> Fair trade has been the founding ethos of both companies; they are committed to the support of small-scale craft producers such as the Khatri block printers and their influence on Indian block printing will be discussed in a later section.

Catering for a markedly different clientele, Abduljabbar M. Khatri’s nephew Sufiyan, based in Ajrakhpur, is rapidly establishing a high-value niche in India’s upmarket fashion stratum. He produces *ajrakh* and other block prints for the growing coterie of designers that has emerged from India’s elite design schools, notably the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, and the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), which now has fifteen centres across the subcontinent. Often working in close collaboration with his designer-clients, he does short, specialised production runs of *ajrakh* prints, including engineered prints<sup>12</sup> and *ajrakh* combined with *shibori*,<sup>13</sup> textiles that are regularly seen on the catwalk at Mumbai and Delhi Fashion Weeks.

## ANEETH ARORA: PÉRO

One of Sufiyan Khatri's earliest collaborations was with Aneeth Arora, whose fashion label Péro has garnered international acclaim almost since its inception in 2009. The first Péro catwalk show in Autumn/Winter 2011 featured *ajrakh* printed in Sufiyan Khatri's workshop, and included dresses with engineered *hanso* borders, coats lined with *ajrakh* prints, including 'Woven Cargoes', and scarves of *Chanderi* and *Maheshwari* printed with classic *ajrakh* designs dyed in the original palette of indigo, madder and iron black<sup>14</sup> (Fig. 6). Arora, a graduate of NID and NIFT, first encountered *ajrakh* and other handmade textiles on a study visit to Kachchh; the experience not only made a lasting impression but also enabled her to set up her label. As she recounted in 2011:

You get to stay with the craftspeople so it's not just an 'outward' knowledge of it. You stay with them, you learn about their lives. So it started from there — the connection began there ... After NID when I started my own label, I already knew how I would incorporate these things [*ajrakh*, *bandhani* (tie dye) and embroidery]. It did help to know them [the artisans] through the institution and then approach them.<sup>15</sup>

Péro participates in Indian Fashion Week at New Delhi and Mumbai, and in that sense it is part of the global fashion cycle, but the label is underpinned by Arora's desire to produce sustainable fashion and to work with regional craft producers. Her distinctive, hand-crafted clothes are defined less by prevailing trends and more by an enduring aesthetic that draws



FIG. 6. *Ajrakh*-print dress, Péro Autumn/Winter Collection, 2011. Image courtesy of Aneeth Arora. © Péro.



FIG. 7. Detail of hand-stitched and embellished seams on Péro *kameez* (shirt), 2014. The author's private collection.  
Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

on India's rich heritage of handlooms, block prints, tie-dyes and embroideries; not only are the fabrics made by hand, the hems, seams and other finishing details are hand-stitched, too (Fig. 7). In an interview in 2011, Arora discussed her approach to crafting fashion and how she has worked with *ajrakh* in particular. Aware of the potential impact of her label, she commented: 'I don't want to make it [Péro] so big that we have to dilute craft, so I would like to stick to numbers that I can do and be very loyal to the crafts and the craftspeople ... there's only so much that I would like to expand'.<sup>16</sup>

She went on to discuss the ingenuity required in order to find new ways to use or re-interpret textile traditions for the fashion market, and, although not an adherent of 'fast fashion', she recognised that she must nonetheless create collections that have market appeal, observing: 'All I can do is try and use it [craft] because after all, it's fashion; I think the challenge is offering something new every time'.<sup>17</sup> In terms of *ajrakh*, a swathe of urban consumers in India is already familiar with the textile through the craft fairs organised by the Crafts Council of India and Dilli Haat (an open-air bazaar run by Delhi Tourism), and those same consumers also know it from the Fabindia chain (discussed in a later section), which sells goods made from *ajrakh* prints in a category of fashion often described as 'ethnic chic'. Arora, assessing the overall market for *ajrakh*, observed that:

You know good people here in India are also becoming sensitive to these textiles. I think it's about offering it to them in a better way. They've seen *ajrakh* being sold as yardages in these fairs; if you give it to them in a way that they can wear it and not feel that they are wearing something ordinary then I think they will respond.<sup>18</sup>

The challenge for Arora has been to change the perception of *ajrakh* in India from 'ethnic chic' (and before that from rustic caste dress) to its catwalk incarnation — achieved in large part through her first collection in 2011. Context is all, as she summed it up:

When I use *ajrakh* for Indians, it's *ajrakh*. But when it goes outside India, it's outside that context — people think it's so beautiful; they don't think that it's a traditional technique. In India they look at it like that so it changes how it's seen ... It's not just the use of traditional techniques, it is also *world* clothing.<sup>19</sup>

The recipient of the first *Vogue India* Fashion Fund award in 2012, Arora had the opportunity to design a collection for the Indian fashion chain, Westside (owned by the Tata Group), one of the fund's sponsors. The collaboration allowed her to engage in the nearest thing to high-street fashion in India; Westside, in common with Wills Lifestyle, Pantaloons and Shoppers Stop, is an Indian brand at the vanguard of the subcontinent's emerging fashion chains, to be found in the malls burgeoning in all the major cities. Although initially an urban phenomenon confined to India's largest cities, mass-produced clothes retailed by fashion brands are gradually eroding the highly segmented domestic market supplied by Indian tailors. These provide extremely specialised services; the broad category of 'ladies' tailors', for example, splinters into specialists in sari blouses, 'suits' (*shalwar kamiz* or Punjabi suit), NRI (non-resident Indian) dress, rural caste dress and a host of other categories. Unlike bespoke clothing in the UK and other Western countries, in India it is affordable and allows people to dress in clothes made uniquely for them. Tailors throughout India are gradually losing ground to ready-made clothing, a market in which Westside is flourishing.

Westside has also picked up on the established trend in Western fashion markets of designer-retailer collaborations. Debenhams pioneered the idea of designers on the high street in the UK with 'Designers at Debenhams', launched in 1993, which has featured collections by British designers Jasper Conran, Betty Jackson and Henry Holland. Each designer works closely with Debenhams' design managers 'from development of the brand, ticketing, packaging and right through to the finished item being displayed in store'.<sup>20</sup> Comparable to the Debenhams model, the Péro-Westside collaboration produced a premium collection that married craft to high-street fashion; *ajrakh* dyed with natural colours and block printed on fine cotton-silk textiles in Sufiyan Khatri's workshop at Ajrakhpur was incorporated into a range of dresses and tops that were produced in limited numbers and sold in selected stores, notably in Ahmedabad, New Delhi and Mumbai in 2014. Marketed as 'Aneeth Arora for Zuba' (Zuba is an in-house brand) — the range had a higher price point than other clothing ranges sold at Westside; tunics cost between INR1,999 and INR2,499 (approximately £21.50–£26.99 at 2015 exchange rates) and dresses were priced at INR2,999 (£32.40) — the labelling was printed with Islamic patterns, congruent with *ajrakh*'s roots (Fig. 8). The targeted demographic for the collection was the mature, fairly affluent female consumer. As Arora noted:

We decided to do it for a certain age group which is slightly higher than the teenagers, also for a different class of women because it's luxury selling block print at a store like that; it's almost luxury. So it's a very niche range in Westside.<sup>21</sup>

When the range came out, one of her own established clients (who fitted the profile perfectly) bought several of the Zuba pieces, reportedly describing them as 'affordable Péro'.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing inspiration from the Péro Autumn/Winter 2011 *ajrakh* collection, which the Westside design team had selected from her *oeuvre* so far, Arora's range for Zuba introduced her work to a different, more mainstream audience than her own line. In an endeavour to maintain something of the original Péro look as well as her own ethos, she insisted that Westside use block-printed *ajrakh*, not a cheaper, screen-printed version of the textile, which is widely available;<sup>23</sup> she was also adamant about them working with Sufiyan Khatri, commenting that:

If we're talking about commercialising it [*ajrakh*] and giving it to the masses, he [Sufiyan Khatri] should also benefit out of it because he's the one who did it for me in the first place



FIG. 8. 'Aneeth Arora for Zuba', 2014: tunic featuring *ajrakh* dyed with natural colours. The author's private collection. Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

... I told them to keep the numbers small but do block print because if you're saying 'Péro for Westside' then I want you to stick to him please.<sup>24</sup>

The collection has received a positive response in the Indian fashion press, notably on the *Vogue India* website;<sup>25</sup> it is interesting to note, however, that none of the coverage acknowledges the contribution of Sufiyan Khatri, which was so vital to its distinctive look, and much of it erroneously refers to 'embroidery' rather than block printing. Nonetheless, Arora's efforts have placed handmade fabrics such as *ajrakh* on both the catwalk and now on the rails of a major fashion retailer in India, a worthy attempt to sustain a viable market for this historic textile in the age of 'fast fashion', and to enable the rising generation of young artisans to remain in their hereditary occupation.

#### MAIWA HANDPRINTS

Like Aneeth Arora, social entrepreneur Charlotte Kwon, who founded Maiwa Handprints in Vancouver in 1986, is respectful of traditional knowledge and ardent in her admiration of craft. She set out to establish a company that supports small-scale artisanal production, and Maiwa has worked with Abduljabbar M. Khatri and his brothers since the late 1990s. *Ajrakh* prints are a staple of Maiwa's fashion and soft furnishings collections, which reach a clientele that extends from Vancouver to eastern Canada, to Seattle, Washington and New York, and down the Pacific coast to California. The company now comprises of three retail outlets in Vancouver: Maiwa (fashion and soft furnishings) and Maiwa Supply (natural dyes, fabric and yarn supplies, books on textiles and craft cultures — also available online) are in a prime location on Granville Island; Maiwa East (furniture, metalware, statuary and rugs) is situated in an industrial zone a little further from the city centre on Odium Drive.

Maiwa's main suppliers are all family-run workshops based in rural India. Once Kwon has personally ensured that an artisan-supplier can produce goods of sufficient quality and quantity, she commits to working with them long-term and provides regular input in terms of product development, as well as providing opportunities for the artisans to enhance their skills. A major Maiwa initiative for Indian block printers and dyers was a master class held in 2011 with chemist and botanist Michel Garcia, an authority on natural dyes.<sup>26</sup> Interviewed in 2003, Kwon was emphatic about the importance of sustaining the working relationship with Maiwa's suppliers, stating that:

We tell everybody, we will work with you and we will *never* leave. Only if you want it, we will leave. If we can't find a market we will keep a dialogue going until we do. If you get tired of that and just want to say, 'Forget it', we will walk away. It's not happened yet. But we will not get involved with a family, cooperative, or village and then say, OK, this isn't trendy anymore, sales have gone down, because if that is how you work, you shouldn't have walked in in the first place. You do almost more damage by doing that.<sup>27</sup>

In this respect, the relationship with the Khatri block printers and dyers is typical of the company's approach.

Maiwa, conscious of the often negative social, environmental and economic legacy of the global fashion system, is an advocate of the 'slow clothes' movement, and both its fashion line and soft furnishings range feature the use of organic fabrics and natural dyes (Fig. 9).<sup>28</sup> The company also runs a tailoring unit in Bagru, Rajasthan, the organisation of which



FIG. 9. 'Slow clothes' at Maiwa: *ajrakh*-print scarf, 2014.  
Image courtesy of Charlotte Kwon. © Maiwa Handprints.

*Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk*

demonstrates that there are viable alternatives to the stereotype of a South Asian sweatshop seared into people's memories by the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013.<sup>29</sup> Maiwa Studio India is a light and airy workspace; the tailors are paid above the local rate, and are also provided with accommodation and cooking facilities. Mahesh Dosaya, who manages the unit, asserts:

I give my workers very good facilities. I pay INR400–500 a day, I give them tea twice a day, and half an hour for lunch ... I also give them medical [help] and I have rooms for them with gas cooking.<sup>30</sup>

The Maiwa website outlines the company's approach to fashion, stressing that 'slow clothes' are not only an affordable option but also have 'added value' beyond their sartorial merits, representing a social investment and not just an addition to one's wardrobe:

You may think that slow clothes would be prohibitively expensive to make. It is not true. The fact is that mass produced clothes (jeans for example) have production costs of a few dollars per item, yet consumers pay high prices for designer wear. What is missing is an understanding of the real costs of clothing and an appreciation of their value. We know it is possible to make slow clothes because we do it all the time. It is a challenge. It requires us to be clever, and sharp, and smart in a different way than is needed to make things quickly or cheaply. It takes time, patience and faith. But the benefits give us something that the ordinary clothing manufacturer will never have: an intense joy when we succeed; a knowledge that we have kept a skilled artisan fully employed at home with his or her family; and the unsurpassed pride we feel in seeing the finished piece hanging in our shop.<sup>31</sup>

Congruent with this approach, the company offers a free service for alterations and repairs to customers who have purchased Maiwa garments.

Apart from its retail activities, the company engages in an extensive education programme that embraces projects with schools and universities, apart from which students may access the Maiwa archives at Granville Island. There have also been regular collaborations with museums; in 2002, Kwon curated a major textile exhibition at the Vancouver Museum, co-authored the catalogue, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Stories from an Indian Desert*, and ran workshops led by embroiderers from Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, a non-governmental organisation based in Kachchh, one of the company's producer-groups.<sup>32</sup> Another major educational undertaking is the annual Maiwa Textile Symposium, which is held in the autumn and features a month-long programme of exhibitions, lectures and workshops by leading scholars and practitioners from all over the world — brothers Abdulrazzak and Ismail Khatri gave a presentation at the symposium in 2007.<sup>33</sup> Interviewed in July 2013, Shirley Gordon, Maiwa's retail manager, summarised the company's expansive approach, remarking: 'It's a multi-layered retail operation with supporting educational material, films and the symposium. Education is at the base of everything we do; we have a mandate to share knowledge with people'.<sup>34</sup>

Prompted by the devastation of the Gujarat earthquake of 26 January 2001, the company registered a charitable trust, the Maiwa Foundation, in 2001. It raised Can\$35,000, which was used for relief activities, including the purchase of tents, food and medical supplies, as well as the rebuilding of workplaces and the replacement of tools and materials needed to help people return to work. Dhamadka village was only 20 km from the epicentre and was decimated by the earthquake; families were left bereft and without resources for their

work — there were also long-term after-effects, notably to the water supply, which now has a greater concentration of iron, a factor that ‘saddens’ dye colours, making printed designs appear dull. The community at Dhamadka was one of the main beneficiaries of the Maiwa Foundation, which also assisted the Khatri to establish Ajrakhpur, a new village closer to the central amenities of Bhuj, the district capital, and without the immediate water problems of Dhamadka. Beyond disaster relief, the broader aims of the Maiwa Foundation are ‘to support work that develops higher level skills or to sustain existing skills ... [It also] has as its purpose reducing poverty in rural villages by promoting the economic self-sufficiency of the artisans living in such villages’.<sup>35</sup> It enabled Abduljabbar M. Khatri and his brothers to restore their production to its pre-earthquake scale by helping them to set up a crucial washing facility at a site close to Ajrakhpur, creating permanent jobs for several local men.

Abduljabbar M. Khatri and his family have established a regular pattern of trade with Maiwa Handprints over the past two decades, and are now Maiwa’s *ajrakh* specialists. As a practising designer, Kwon works with the Khatri on product development — recent innovations are stoles that are tie-dyed wool on one side and block-printed silk on the other, which have proved popular in Canada and the USA (Fig. 10). The association with Maiwa has also marked a shift in Ismail’s production since the early 2000s from cotton to silk — mainly scarves, stoles and *dupattas*: silk now accounts for thirty-five per cent of his output. Kwon monitors quality control and works hard with the Khatri to maintain consistency whatever the challenges; reflecting on the more haphazard approach of yore, Ismail Khatri commented somewhat wryly that:

in former times things were mostly multi-coloured; in one piece you would see blue, red, yellow, green, all these [colours]. When yellow colour was dyed, there might be many blotches but you couldn’t see them because of the multi-coloured design. Now people want clean fabric without blotches ... Foreigners like clean pieces.<sup>36</sup>



FIG. 10. Detail of double-faced Maiwa Handprints stole: one side is silk, the other wool with block-printed decoration by Sufiyan Khatri and tie-dye by his brother-in-law, Junera Khatri, 2013. Dyed with natural colours. The author’s private collection.  
Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

### *Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk*

Despite the success of the company, Kwon has resisted expanding Maiwa Handprints; in its current form, it allows her to remain personally involved at all levels of activity. She has bucked other commercial conventions, too, in order to support the artisans with whom Maiwa works, as she commented in a blog:

Current business theory is that you should carry minimum inventory. Much to my accountant's dismay, I don't do that. I will order enough hand woven, naturally dyed, block printed cloth to keep a family of artisans in business. If that family thrives, an entire network of other people is also supported — from farmers of natural dye plants, to growers of organic cotton.<sup>37</sup>

Maiwa works with three main clusters of block printers in India: Khatri *ajrakh* printers and dyers in Kachchh district, Gujarat, Chippa printers in Rajasthan who specialise in *dabu* (mud) resist printing as well as the refined *syahi begar* technique,<sup>38</sup> and *kalamkari* printers in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>39</sup> Apart from establishing a successful model of fair trade with these artisans, Maiwa is also helping to sustain a viable market for block-printed goods dyed with natural colours. Through its retail and educational activities, it has raised awareness of sustainable production, offering a convincing alternative to 'fast fashion', as well as supporting and promoting the cultural heritage of India's artisans.

### FABINDIA

Fabindia, Abduljabbar M. Khatri's largest client, espouses a similar ethos to Maiwa Handprints, but it has followed a very different business model; the global reach of its retail sector now extends to 176 cities across six countries and there is also an online store (Fig. 11).<sup>40</sup> Established in 1960 by American John Bissell, the company has been led by his son



FIG. 11. Fabindia home store at Khan Market, New Delhi, 2014. Image courtesy of Fabindia. © Fabindia.

William since 1999, when he became Managing Director. Fabindia has undergone considerable expansion since the late 1990s, notably in the retail sector, not only transforming the scale of the company but also impacting its *modus operandi*. A Harvard Business School study of the company in 2007 revealed the challenges inherent in working with producers in what is routinely described as the ‘unorganised sector’. The report also questioned how Fabindia would transition from its earlier incarnation, when it operated in an ‘informal, instinct-driven environment’ to one of ambitious planned growth focused on global retail expansion, while still nurturing its artisan-producers.<sup>41</sup> The company had initially worked only with weavers, exporting rugs and home furnishings to the USA and Europe; Sir Terence Conran was one of their most important clients, and Fabindia handlooms were a mainstay of Habitat’s modernist aesthetic until 1992.<sup>42</sup> In the 1980s, Fabindia’s product range expanded from home furnishings to include a ready-to-wear clothing line, which exposed the need for a differentiated and more extensive range of fabrics, not least because ‘Fabindia customers sometimes found themselves wearing shirts of the same fabric as their neighbour’s curtains’.<sup>43</sup> Further expansion of the company’s clothing ranges was greatly assisted by the launch of Desert Artisans Handicrafts (DAH) in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, in 1991. Founded by William Bissell, DAH supplied craft products to Fabindia and its Artisan Directors included several prominent block printers whose textiles still feature in the company’s fashion and soft furnishing ranges.<sup>44</sup> In the same year, Finance Minister Manmohan Singh (who later served as India’s Prime Minister, 2004–2014) introduced structural reforms that liberalised the Indian economy, and, as middle-class incomes rose and consumption burgeoned, the popularity of Fabindia’s informal, ‘ethnic chic’ style in which block prints were a key component was in the ascendant. By the mid-1990s, DAH expanded into Gujarat and began working with *ajrakh* — supplied by Abduljabbar M. Khatri and his brothers, Abdulrazzak and Ismail. It became a bestseller, reflecting the prevailing zeitgeist as Radhika Singh notes in her ‘biography’ of Fabindia: ‘block printing with vegetable dyes was becoming a big thing at the time, and DAH located artisan families who were still using the traditional method’.<sup>45</sup>

Regular orders are crucial for any producer, but the increase in the size of orders placed with block printers, engendered by Fabindia’s retail expansion, has exposed a number of critical issues for their artisan-suppliers. Environmental factors, raw materials and a shortage of skilled labour are ongoing concerns for block printers in the main clusters of the craft in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh.<sup>46</sup> While several block printers interviewed in Rajasthan and Gujarat in the period 2011–2014 attributed their relative prosperity to working for Fabindia and felt indebted to the company, which they believe has sustained their craft, they also spoke of the difficulty of fulfilling ever-larger orders, finding the turn-round for Fabindia orders short, usually between two and three months. Bearing in mind that the capacity of a comparatively large workshop like that of Abduljabbar M. Khatri at Dhamadka, which employs twelve full-time printers, is about 8,000 m per month, the company can, in effect, establish a monopoly on a workshop’s production when it places repeat orders for 40,000 m of cloth. In order to complete concurrent orders from other clients, several of the artisan-entrepreneurs interviewed revealed that they out-source work to other, smaller workshops nearby, which can affect quality control. It is worth noting, too, that the active block-printing season is limited to eight or nine months; with the onset of the monsoon, all production stops — in part because the prevailing humidity adversely affects the dyes, and partly because many procedures are carried out in the open. A key production stage, that of ‘heat treating’ textiles in the sun, which not only dries them but also develops the colours, is obviously impossible

during the rainy season. For some printers, Fabindia's price point has become an issue; they cite shrinking profit margins and compromises that sit ill with them. A case in point is the recent experience of Mahesh Dosaya, a fifth-generation block printer and member of the Chipka community in Bagru, Rajasthan, whose workshop specialises in block-printed cottons dyed with natural colours; in order to meet the price point set by Fabindia for a print run of 40,000 m, he was asked to use chemical dyes for the border designs.<sup>47</sup> Presumably, the area of the cloth dyed with natural colours would still be sufficient to permit the company to promote the textiles as 'dyed with natural colours', attracting a premium retail price. The difficulties inherent in large-scale craft production are acknowledged by Fabindia's own staff; interviewed in March 2013, Anuradha Kumra, Fabindia's Creative and Buying Head, described these from the company's perspective as the demand for block prints had risen:

[The] challenge after we up-scaled and what we face at all times is that *nobody* refuses a bigger order. So that indirectly it's led to the standards in the craft going down. The eye with which the master printer guides his printers to produce vis-à-vis a production order which is sitting in his head — he's accepted it, there's a deadline to it but making it happen, they will take shortcuts rather than let go of the opportunity. It's a conflict; it's a conflict.<sup>48</sup>

#### CHALLENGES TO BLOCK PRINTERS' LIVELIHOODS

Whatever the block printers' issues are with retailers, these are overshadowed by acute environmental factors, the most urgent being water shortages. A supply of running water is essential for removing excess dye and finishing cloth — the reason why historically all Indian block-printing clusters developed next to rivers; Dhamadka, for example, was served by the River Suran until the late 1980s, when the flow ceased due to the construction of a dam upstream in Tapper village. Water shortages, the result of recurrent drought in Gujarat and Rajasthan (perversely, parts of Rajasthan also suffer periodic flooding) and an erratic canal system in Andhra Pradesh have resulted in many printers sinking bore wells and introducing a 'ghat system': powered by a generator, pumped water cascades into a series of descending concrete tanks in which the *dhobis* (washermen) wash and calender cloth (Fig. 12). Traditional production methods are undoubtedly profligate with water, and, cognisant of this, the Khatri at Ajrakhpur in Kachchh have investigated how to use water more efficiently and plan to construct a central Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) based on carbonisation and filtration technology. The village established in May 2001 represents the endeavours of the Khatri community of Kachchh to create a model of best craft practice and to rise from the devastation wrought by the Gujarat earthquake. The development of Ajrakhpur has been afflicted by bureaucratic delays and the failure to materialise of promised financial support from government and other agencies over the past fourteen years. As a consequence, the Khatri have raised 2.5 million rupees themselves and are now working with a national agency (discussed in a later section) to achieve their goal. They had hoped the project would be completed by the end of 2014 but at the time of writing (2015), construction of the foundations has only just started.<sup>49</sup>

Securing an adequate supply of raw materials is also a challenge; natural dyes on which much of the cachet of *ajrakh* rests are a case in point. For Abduljabbar M. Khatri, Fabindia's *ajrakh* specialist, it is impossible to fulfil orders using only natural indigo and madder. Like



FIG. 12. *Ghat* system, Dhamadka, 2010: water is pumped from the aquifer and cascades down a series of concrete tanks, creating a flow of water, essential for washing and calendering cloth.

Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

many other printers and dyers working with traditional methods, Abduljabbar M. Khatri uses synthetic forms of madder (alizarin) and indigo ('German indigo'), both of which are manufactured by Rockstone Industries in Udaipur; chemically identical to the natural dye-stuffs but far cheaper, they are easy to use, reliable and available in large quantities.<sup>50</sup> These synthetic dyes are used by printers to serve the increased demand for 'natural dyes' and solve the problem of shortages and erratic production, notably of indigo. Once widely cultivated on a vast commercial scale in India, indigo (*L. Indigofera tinctoria*) is now confined to a few areas, the chief centre at present being Tindivanam, Tamil Nadu. Many indigo farmers have opted out of producing dye cakes, which involves a protracted, labour-intensive fermentation process, in favour of selling dried indigo leaves to companies such as Godrej, which use them in the manufacture of natural hair dyes, marketed as 'black henna', a product popular throughout South Asia.<sup>51</sup> There is an ongoing shortage of good quality indigo dye, which is sold by weight in cakes of approximately 150 g (known historically as 'flats' or 'rounds', depending on the shape), and complaints about its adulteration resound through centuries of trade; East India Company records of 1638, for example, note that: 'Two bales of flat indigo were found to contain nothing but black earth'.<sup>52</sup> Nearly four centuries later at Ajrakhpur in 2006, Ismail Khatri complained that indigo received from a farmer in Tamil Nadu had been bulked up with sand.<sup>53</sup> At the time of writing the cost of natural indigo is prohibitive — at 2,000 rupees a kilogram, it is reserved by Abduljabbar M. Khatri and other dyers for special orders, one-off pieces or short production runs.

Another problem that dogs the craft is labour. Hereditary artisans such as the Khatri and the Chhipa block printers who dominate the craft in Rajasthan are invested in a sense of

their legacy. This is especially the case with those entrepreneurs like Abduljabbar M. Khatri who run a large craft business, and for whom that legacy is both valued and valuable — it is part of a complex narrative that encompasses heritage, culture and commerce, and bur-nishes the appeal of the product as well as the reputation of the craftsman. But for the hired help — journeymen printers and washermen without access to the ‘cultural capital’ of their employers, the craft is just another form of wage labour; they work long hours in a physi-cally demanding job for low pay.<sup>54</sup> Although some artisan-entrepreneurs like Abduljabbar M. Khatri supplement their workers’ wages with interest-free loans for engagements and weddings, as well as paying medical bills and providing a communal feast upon successful completion of a large order, discontent over pay and conditions has seen some workers try other forms of labour.<sup>55</sup> Industrial development in Kachchh over the past decade or so, part of the regeneration of the district after the earthquake in 2001, has seen a movement of hired labour from craft to factory jobs, which offer higher rates of pay. A similar pattern of workers’ migration from craft to construction was evident in Andhra Pradesh where I carried out fieldwork in 2013 among *kalamkari* printers. In Machilipatnam, the resulting shortage of male printers had created employment opportunities for women, several of whom had joined a government-funded training scheme and had subsequently found part-time jobs in local printing workshops.<sup>56</sup> There is a female presence in Rajasthani workshops, too; in Kachchh, despite labour shortages, the craft remains a resolutely male preserve.

Apart from regionally specific labour problems, craft production throughout rural India has been badly affected by the introduction of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) by the Government of India in 2005, which was revised and renamed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) in 2009. The scheme, which aims at ‘enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas’<sup>57</sup> and guarantees adults one hundred days of unskilled manual work a year, presently paid at a rate of 125 rupees a day (approximately £1.30), has acted as a major disincentive for workers in rural craft industries. Although based on a misconception, the idea of being paid to do nothing has taken root — the MNREGA scheme pays whether or not there is work available, and in Rajasthan the impact on the workforce of printers was lamented by several workshop owners interviewed in the period 2012–2014, who did not know from day to day how many of their printers would show up to work on orders.<sup>58</sup> Thus far the scheme has not affected block printing in Kachchh as directly, although artisan-entrepreneurs in the district are sceptical of its merits, aware of its impact in neighbouring Rajasthan; as Arti Sandhu notes:

The eminent [sic] danger of losing trained craftspeople as a result of government policy, named after a key figure in Indian history who was instrumental in mobilising craft as a symbol of natural pride through the *swadeshi* movement, is sadly ironic.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the aggregation of problems outlined above, Abduljabbar M. Khatri and his brothers have managed to meet the demand for *ajrakh* so far, sustaining their craft as well as their livelihood and that of their workers. But the Khatri is aware of the fragility of the situa-tion; not only do environmental challenges threaten block printing, the current popularity of *ajrakh* also brings threats from the screen-printing industry centred on Jaipur, which reproduces traditional block prints for a fraction of the cost; cheap, ersatz versions of Indian block prints and embroideries manufactured in east Asia are also in circulation, undermining further the market for handmade products. Like many Kachchhi block printers, Abduljabbar

M. Khatri also heeds the cautionary tale of what happened to Rajasthani block printers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the traditional block-printed *buti* (small floral or bud) and *jaal* (all-over diaper) patterns of Jaipur, Bagru and Sanganer were propelled to the global stage as an essential part of the ‘hippy chic’ aesthetic. Overwhelmed by the size of orders and innocent of the vicissitudes of fashion, many workshop owners invested their new-found wealth in the expansion of their businesses, only for the market to disappear as rapidly as it had arisen as the global fashion cycle moved on to the next ‘big thing’.<sup>60</sup> The period marked the rise of screen-printing units in Jaipur and environs; a far faster means of producing repeat patterns, screen printing enabled producers to meet the deadlines and volumes of fabric demanded by the fashion industry.

#### SUSTAINING BLOCK PRINTING: AIACA, ‘TEXCRAFT PARKS’ AND THE G. I. ACT (2003)

Contemplating the manifold issues confronting Indian block printers raises the question — will the craft survive? It is clear that the scale of these problems is beyond individual artisans to resolve and requires the development of effective policies at government level. A response to the looming crisis has come from the retail sector; William Bissell, Managing Director of Fabindia, who has condemned the Government of India for its ‘criminally inept management’,<sup>61</sup> co-founded the All India Artisans’ and Craftworkers’ Welfare Association (AIACA) with Laila Tyabji, Chairperson of Dastkar (an NGO working in the craft sector). Registered in 2004, AIACA is a membership-based apex body that:

represents craft workers at national level, serving to help them articulate their needs and advocate for favourable policies in the sector. This body would start by bringing together private businesses, non-profit organisations and co-operatives working in the craft sector since all of them were affected by the lack of effective policies for the sector.<sup>62</sup>

The organisation has implemented a range of initiatives including: policy advocacy and research, the introduction of Craftmark, a certification system for handmade goods, and the Enterprise Support Programme (ESP). In terms of advocacy and research, AIACA has commissioned a number of studies, published on the AIACA website, including: *Access to Credit for Craftworkers*, *Handloom Co-operative Reform*, *Yarn Supply* and *Baseline study on Environment, Occupational Health and Safety Issues in the Craft Sector*. In conjunction with these studies, the Association has organised national-level workshops and consultations to enable engagement between stakeholders like the Government of India, private business and NGOs.<sup>63</sup>

In terms of initiatives that focus on block printing specifically, AIACA is a stakeholder in the Jaipur Integrated Textile Park (JITP) at Bagru, Rajasthan — commonly known as the ‘Texcraft Park’ — which was officially inaugurated on 24 July 2013. The Park is a joint venture between the Jaipur Bloc (a cluster of local companies that support the sustainable production of handmade craft textiles), the SUSTEX project, which is funded by the European Commission’s SWITCH Asia Project, and the Government of India’s ‘Scheme for Integrated Textile Parks’.<sup>64</sup> The project has prompted a good deal of comment among hereditary Chippa block printers in Bagru village; while they complain that it is a colony of rich exporters, some acknowledge that their inability to work in concert mitigated against their involvement. As one printer put it:

### *Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk*

This was originally for artisans and block printing but there was no agreement in our community so we lost this chance. But now it is for rich people — all the units are exporters — and there's screen printing even rotary printing coming here.<sup>65</sup>

Also under the aegis of the India-wide SUSTEX scheme, the development project at Ajrakhpur, mentioned above, is now a collaboration between AIACA, the Khatri community of Kachchh (the recently formed Ajrakh Block Printing Association — ABPA) and Khamir (a local NGO).

In an initiative intended to support Indian craft producers (as well as other forms of production, including agricultural and industrial goods), the Government of India passed legislation designed to protect their 'intangible cultural heritage'. First introduced in 1999, the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection), or 'G. I. Act', which was revised in 2003, is one of six Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) instigated by the World Trade Organisation, of which India is a signatory. According to the 2003 Act:

Goods are defined as that aspect of industrial property which refer to the geographical indication referring to a country or to a place situated therein as being the country or place of origin of that product. Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the fact of its origin in that defined geographical locality, region or country.<sup>66</sup>

The TRIPs, originally developed to protect regional food products such as French champagne, Stilton cheese and India's Alphonso mangoes, are now being applied to the handicrafts sector; enacted through the G. I. Act in India, artisans' associations are required to register their particular regional craft — individuals may not apply. The application and supporting evidence — all in English (which has proved problematic for many artisans who speak vernacular languages only) — is submitted for consideration to the Registrar of Geographical Indications at Chennai, under the office of the Controller General of Patents and Designs. A number of regional styles of block prints are now fully registered and have 'G. I. status', which must be renewed after ten years. These include: Machilipatnam *kalamkari*, Bagh prints of Madhya Pradesh, Sangneri Hand Block Printing and Bagru Hand Block Print. The Khatri, or rather the ABPA, are preparing an application for registration of 'the *ajrakh* of Kachchh' (distinct from the *ajrakh* of Barmer or Sindh, Pakistan), which they propose to submit in 2016. The advantages of G. I. status are unclear to many artisans and other observers; AIACA reports 'a dearth of research from the Indian perspective on potential benefits from G. I. protection ... There is a near complete absence of effective post-G. I. mechanism in India'.<sup>67</sup> Offering a more positive appraisal of the G. I. Act, Brij Ballabh Udaiwal, President of the Calico Printers' Co-operative Society Sangner, asserted in an interview in 2013 that it will promote both the block-printing industry and the Sangner brand, expediting better sales and increased remuneration for members of his association. He stated that:

This is a tool to protect this industry ... a brand to promote [it] ... In Sangner right now ... most people do not understand the value of G. I. — later on is when they'll feel it ... *Kota doria* [sari of silk and cotton woven at Kota] was the first G. I. holder in Rajasthan ... At that time there were only 200 weavers, wages were 120 rupees a day; nowadays there are 1200 weavers and wages are 500–600 rupees.

But, like AIACA, Brij Ballabh also identifies a lack of follow-up post-G. I. status: ‘You must show them what the benefit is ... so a special platform for G. I. holders — that will help — [to show] what is the difference between a G. I. holder and a non-holder’.<sup>68</sup> Until the Khatri *ajrakh* printers of Kachchh complete the registration process, however, the possible benefits of the G. I. Act for their ‘brand’ remain in the realm of speculation.

#### AJRAKH AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Even without the potential advantages of G. I. status, *ajrakh* of the traditional block prints produced in Kachchh has enjoyed a unique upward trajectory. From its origins in the desert regions of Kachchh, Thar and Sindh, it has been refined and re-fashioned for the catwalks of New Delhi and Mumbai, and has established a presence at Indian fashion retailers Fabindia and Westside, in addition to which it has found an enduring niche in the global fashion system, retailed by Maiwa Handprints and other adherents of the ‘slow clothes’ movement especially. The success of *ajrakh* makes manifest the entwined legacy of kinship and hereditary occupation that is an aspect of the caste system; many of the Khatri *ajrakh* printers in Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur are closely related, descended from a common forefather, Jindha Jiva, who founded Dhamadka during the reign of Rao Bharmal I of Kachchh (r. 1586–1631) — they belong to the same (Dhadha) clan.

The domination of the craft by a single extended family, that of the late Mohammad Siddik of Dhamadka, is noteworthy; recognised for his contribution to craft and the revival of natural dyes in India, Mohammad Siddik’s legacy is sustained by his sons, Abduljabbar, Ismail and Abdulrazzak, and twelve grandsons: this article draws on their collective biography. Since the mid-1970s, they have become the ‘go to’ family for *ajrakh*, regularly invited by the Crafts Council of India and other cultural agencies, including UNESCO and the Santa Fé International Folk Art Alliance in New Mexico, USA, to take part in exhibitions and demonstrations in India and abroad. Gujaratis are famously entrepreneurial and the dynastic aspect of Indian business has been well documented — the prominence of Abduljabbar M. Khatri and his brothers has parallels in other spheres of commerce.<sup>69</sup> They have used their ‘celebrity’ to secure support for the wider Khatri community, notably with the development of Ajrakhpur that Ismail has led since 2001, alongside leading G. I. registration. In Kachchh, traditions are nurtured but respect for heritage is matched by pragmatism, adaptability and business acumen — characteristics that have led the younger generation of Khatri especially to embrace new opportunities and to seek support for their craft through design and business training offered by local NGOs such as Khamir and Kala Raksha, as well as collaborations with designers and entrepreneurs.

In common with other successful craft products, *ajrakh* is not simply a commodity, valued as an economic asset; it is a cultural asset as well. An article of clothing worn as caste dress by *maldharis* (animal herders), *ajrakh* retains symbolic value as an expression of hereditary occupation and regional culture; a *maldhari* interviewed in Kachchh in 2011 summed up its importance: ‘I can leave my country but I can’t leave my *ajrakh* [dress]’.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, *ajrakh* is preserved for posterity in private and public collections, and has transmuted from utility to museum object, sacralised and protected from human hands (Fig. 13).

Considering these overlapping spheres of value accounts for the prominence of craft in policy-making since Indian independence in 1947, which led Paul Greenough to describe India as ‘a craft nation — a global cultural reserve where vital traditions of folk arts and



FIG. 13. Dr Ruth Barnes receiving a piece of *ajrakh* from Ismail M. Khatri, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, 2002. Dried in the dust at Dhamadka, it was handled with white gloves in the context of the Museum.

Photograph © Eiluned Edwards.

crafts, music, and dance are maintained'.<sup>71</sup> Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru (in office 1947–1964), as the Government of India sought to establish the newly independent state on the world stage, craft was deemed important in shaping a uniquely Indian national identity — it would generate both rural employment and export earnings, at the same time earning prestige abroad as a unique aspect of Indian heritage. This reflects, perhaps, the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, who envisioned independent India with a village-based economy in which craft was central. In the contemporary context, *ajrakh* has an important role in the rural economy and is a visual and material expression of a culture that has been shaped by a long history of international exchange — through trade and conquest; it embodies aspects of an ancient civilisation and an ambitious modern state.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Field research among block printers in Gujarat and Rajasthan in 2011 was supported by a Large Research Grant from the Pasold Research Fund; subsequent research carried out in the UK, India, Nepal, Thailand and Canada (2012–2014) was funded by a Leverhulme Research Fellowship. These two research projects built on foundations laid between 2000 and 2007, work that was supported by the Society for South Asian Studies (on the process of *ajrakh* in Kachchh, 2000–2001), and the Nehru Trust and the British Academy (on the use of natural dyes in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, 2005–2007). I am immensely grateful to all these organisations for demonstrating their belief that the work undertaken was significant and warranted financial support. I would also like to thank Nottingham Trent University, where I work, for granting me a sabbatical to coincide with the Leverhulme Fellowship. This combined support enabled me to carry out the research that is drawn upon for this article — it has also been published in a book, *Block Printed Textiles of India: Imprints of Culture* (2016). In addition to these institutions, special thanks are due to Abduljabbar M. Khatri, his extended family and his workers in Kachchh, as well as to the block printers and dyers I have been privileged to work with in other parts of India. I would also like to thank Charu Sharma, Anuradha Kumra and Prableen Sabhaney at Fabindia, and Charlotte Kwon and her team at Maiwa Handprints; all were extremely generous with their time and expertise. Abduljabbar M. Khatri of Sidr Craft, Bhuj, warrants a special mention for his unstinting help with interviews with *maldharis* in Banni, Kachchh — now something of an annual ritual. Thanks are also due to Aneeth Arora who has made time to talk to me every time I visit Delhi. The ascendant trajectory of her label, Péro, is pleasing to behold and much deserved.

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<sup>2</sup> V. Murphy and R. Crill, *Tie-dyed Textiles of India: Tradition and Trade* (London and Ahmedabad: V&A Museum in association with Mapin Publishing, 1991), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> A. Bühler and E. Fischer, *The Patola of Gujarat* (New York: The Rock Foundation and the Museum of Ethnography, Basle, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Personal communication, Ismail M. Khatri, block printer, Dhamadka, 9 September 1997, interview.

<sup>5</sup> The term *minakari* is interpreted by Khatri as meaning ‘double work’, and refers to the four additional stages of resist printing and dyeing that produce deeper tones of red and blue on the textile. The actual derivation of the term is from Persian and refers to enamelling, usually applied to gold and silver jewellery; the technique was introduced to India during the earlier part of the Mughal period (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries). The depth of colour in *minakari ajrakh* was particularly valued by Muslim herders in Kachchh, and Thar used *ajrakh* for dress, wearing it as a turban (*safal/pagdi*), shoulder cloth (*gaandhi*) and hip-wrap (*lungbi*).

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication, Abduljabbar M. Khatri, block printer, Dhamadka, 21 October 2012, interview.

<sup>7</sup> L. Varadarajan, *Ajrakh and Related Techniques* (Ahmedabad: New Order Book Company, 1983), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> More correctly described as Indo-Egyptian resist- and mordant-dyed fragments of block-printed cotton, the ‘Fustat textiles’ are the subject of ongoing discussion. Although many were retrieved from a midden at Fustat, the former capital of Egypt (641–969 CE), it seems likely that the fragments were actually found at several sites; their retrieval lacked the rigorous recording of formal excavations, consequently the precise provenance is unknown. See R. Barnes, *Indian Block-Printed Textiles in Egypt*, 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 26–29.

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of these heirloom textiles, see Barnes, *Indian Block-Printed Textiles in Egypt*, 1, pp. 110–18; J. Guy, *Woven Cargoes: Indian Textiles in the East* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp. 39–54.

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication, Abduljabbar M. Khatri, block printer, Dhamadka, 21 October 2012, interview.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication, Abduljabbar M. Khatri, block printer, 4 March 2015, telephone.

<sup>12</sup> An ‘engineered’ or ‘placed print’ is designed to fit a specific area of a garment, such as a collar or yoke, or the border of a skirt.

<sup>13</sup> *Shibori* is a Japanese term for shaped resist-dyeing that includes a variety of techniques such as stitched resist, tied resist (tie-dye) and clamp resist. The term has gained currency in India since 1997 when the World Shibori Network held its annual conference at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

<sup>14</sup> *Chanderi* and *Maheshwari* are fine fabrics that combine cotton and silk. Both were originally types of saris, but design interventions in the past two decades have adapted production for yardage as well as shorter lengths for scarves and stoles. The popularity of these fashionable fabrics, which combine the luxury and sheen of silk with the robustness of cotton, has given a boost to handloom weaving in the towns of Chanderi and Maheshwar, both in Madhya Pradesh.

<sup>15</sup> Personal communication, Aneeth Arora, fashion designer and founder of the Péro label, 6 September 2011, interview.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> ‘Designers at Debenhams’ (Online). Available from: [int.debenhams.com/info/meet-the-designers](http://int.debenhams.com/info/meet-the-designers) [Accessed: 17 March 2015].

<sup>21</sup> Personal communication, Aneeth Arora, fashion designer and founder of the Péro label, 7 December 2013, interview.

## *Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk*

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 16 December 2014.

<sup>23</sup> For discussion of screen-printed and of polyester *ajrakh*, see E. M. Edwards, 'Cloth and community: the local trade in resist-dyed and block-printed textiles in Kachchh District, Gujarat', *Textile History*, xxxviii, no. 2 (2007), pp. 189–90.

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication, Aneeth Arora, fashion designer and founder of the Péro label, 7 December 2013, interview.

<sup>25</sup> For a review with images of the 'Aneeth Arora for Zuba' collection, see How to Wear Aneeth Arora's Westside Collection, *Vogue India* (Online, 30 July 2014). Available from: <http://www.vogue.in/content/vogue-gives-pero-aneeth-arora-westside-collection> [Accessed: 17 March 2015].

<sup>26</sup> Michel Garcia founded the Association Couleur Garance in 1998 to encourage research into natural dyes and to promote their use. In 2002 he founded the Botanical Garden of Dye Plants at Château de Lauris, in Provence, France. The garden is designed to be a horticultural resource for botanists, chemists, natural dye researchers and artisans.

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication, Charllotte Kwon, social entrepreneur and owner of Maiwa Handprints, 8 January 2003, interview.

<sup>28</sup> 'Slow clothes' refers to a global movement that has emerged to counter the waste inherent in the production, use and disposal of 'fast fashion'. Adherents advocate the development of sustainable fashion — challenging manufacturers and consumers to take into account the social and environmental issues that result from the fashion cycle. See S. Black, *The Sustainable Fashion Handbook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Rana Plaza was an eight-storey commercial building just outside Dhaka, Bangladesh that housed five clothing factories, producing ready-made garments for several well-known clothing chains in the UK, Europe and the USA. Over 1,100 people died when it collapsed in April 2013, and many more were left permanently disabled. A majority of the people in the building were garment workers, and the disaster prompted some soul-searching among fashion retailers. In the UK, the Department for International Development has committed £4.8 million in support of a three-year improvement programme in Bangladesh led by the International Labour Organisation. See Case Study: The Rana Plaza Disaster (Online, 10 April 2014). Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/the-rana-plaza-disaster> [Accessed: 17 March 2015].

<sup>30</sup> Personal communication, Mahesh Dosaya, Chippa block printer and workshop owner, also manager of Maiwa Studio India, Bagru, Rajasthan, 7 November 2012, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Slow clothes (Online). Available from: [http://www.maiwa.com/main/slow\\_clothes.html](http://www.maiwa.com/main/slow_clothes.html) [Accessed: 9 March 2015].

<sup>32</sup> Maiwa and Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Stories from an Indian Desert* (Vancouver: Maiwa Handprints, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Maiwa Textile Symposium (Online). Available from: <http://www.maiwa.com/home/workshops> [Accessed: 9 March 2015]. Podcasts of Abdulrazzak and Ismail Khatri's presentation in 2007, 'Masters of the Art. The Khatri Block Printers of Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur', are available from: [www.maiwa.com/documentaries/podcasts.html](http://www.maiwa.com/documentaries/podcasts.html) [Accessed: 18 March 2015].

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication, Shirley Gordon, Maiwa retail manager, 24 July 2013, interview.

<sup>35</sup> The Maiwa Foundation (Online). Available from: <http://www.maiwa.com/foundation/index.html> [Accessed: 11 March 2015].

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication, Ismail M. Khatri, block printer, Dhamadka, 5 January 2001, interview.

<sup>37</sup> Maiwa: A Quiet Manifesto blog post (Online). Available from: [maiwhandprints.blogspot.co.uk](http://maiwhandprints.blogspot.co.uk) [Accessed: 13 March 2015].

<sup>38</sup> *Syahi begar* is a printing and dyeing technique that uses iron (*syahi*) and alum (*begar*) mordants to produce black (from iron) and red (from alizarin or madder plus alum) designs on a white ground. It is particularly associated with the Jaipur area of Rajasthan, notably Sanganer.

<sup>39</sup> *Kalamkari* is a Hindi term derived from the Persian *kalam* (also spelt *qalam*), 'pen', and *kar*, 'work', the literal translation means 'pen work'. A *kalamkari* is a drawn and painted textile used in Hindu worship. It is usually cotton, although contemporary artists also use silk that has been drawn and painted by hand. In Machilipatnam and environs, the term is also applied to block-printed textiles featuring Persian-influenced floral designs.

<sup>40</sup> Fabindia: Celebrate India, Stores (Online). Available from: <http://www.fabindia.com/intl/stores> [Accessed: 8 June 2014].

<sup>41</sup> M. Khaire and P. P. K. Kothandaraman, 'Fabindia Overseas Pvt. Ltd.', Harvard Business School Report 9-807-113 (2010, first published 2007), p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> The relationship between Fabindia and Habitat, which had started in the mid-1960s, came to an end when Habitat was bought out by Ikea in 1992.

<sup>43</sup> Khaire and Kothandaraman, 'Fabindia Overseas', p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication, Yasin Shahabuddin Chippa, block printer and former DAH Artisan Director, 13 November 2012, interview.

<sup>45</sup> R. Singh, *The Fabric of Our Lives: The Story of Fabindia* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2010), p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of the circumstances at block-printing centres throughout India (and Nepal), see E. M. Edwards, *Block Printed Textiles of India: Imprints of Culture* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Personal communication, Mahesh Dosaya, block printer, 28 November 2014, interview.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication, Anuradha Kumra, Fabindia Creative and Buying Head, 13 March 2013, interview.

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication, Ismail M. Khatri, block printer, project leader for Ajrakhpur, 1 December 2014, interview.

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the history and range of dyestuffs used by Indian block printers, see Edwards, *Block Printed Textiles of India*.

<sup>51</sup> The role of indigo in hair products in India is discussed in E. M. Edwards, 'Hair, devotion and trade in India', in G. Biddle-Perry and S. Cheang eds, *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), pp. 149–66.

<sup>52</sup> W. Foster, *The English Factories in India, 1637–1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 58.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication, Ismail M. Khatri, block printer, 30 November 2006, interview.

<sup>54</sup> The concept of 'cultural capital' was framed by Pierre Bourdieu in 1986; although it is applied more usually to the sociology of education or corporations, it is apt in this context. It refers to forms of knowledge, skills and education that advantages a person and gives them a higher status in society. The status or 'cultural capital' of the Khatri rests on the hereditary craft skills that have enabled them to succeed in a competitive global system of production and retailing. See P. Bourdieu, 'The forms of capital', in J. G. Richardson ed., *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986), pp. 241–58.

<sup>55</sup> Having visited Abduljabbar M. Khatri's workshop regularly since 1991, I know many of his workers well; he has a loyal team of about twelve printers and is now employing sons alongside their fathers. Two printers who left the workshop in 2013 to take up jobs in nearby factories returned after a few months, dismayed by factory working conditions and inflexible hours. There is a far higher turnover of *dhobis*; although washermen perform an essential part of the textile process, their work is deemed to be 'unskilled' and they are paid far less than printers. In Dhamadka, for example, a *dhobi* currently receives a hundred rupees a day whereas the printers make at least twice that amount, depending on their skill and the complexity of the printing they undertake. Personal communication, Abduljabbar M. Khatri, block printer and workshop owner, and Bansilal Maharaj, hired printer, 14 December 2014, interview.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication, V. V. Krishna Rao, *kalamkari* printer and owner of Sekhar Kalamkari Works, Nizampet, Machilipatnam, Andhra Pradesh, 20 November 2013, interview.

<sup>57</sup> MNREGA (Online). Available from: <http://www.nregaindia.in/netrega> [Accessed: 24 August 2013].

<sup>58</sup> Personal communication, Mahesh Dosaya, block printer, 7 November 2012, interview.

<sup>59</sup> A. Sandhu, *Indian Fashion: Tradition, Innovation, Style* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 150.

<sup>60</sup> Sonia Ashmore captures the Rajasthani block prints' 'moment' in the hippy counter-culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but situates it and the influence of Indian textile design more broadly in an enduring cultural encounter between India and the UK that dates back to the seventeenth century and the European craze for Indian chintz. S. Ashmore, 'Hippies, bohemians and chintz', in C. Breward, P. Crang and R. Crill eds, *British Asian Style* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), pp. 106–21.

<sup>61</sup> W. N. Bissell, *Making India Work* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2009), p. xvi.

## *Ajrakh: From Caste Dress to Catwalk*

<sup>62</sup> AIACA mission statement (Online). Available from: [www.aiacaonline.org/aboutus-history](http://www.aiacaonline.org/aboutus-history) [Accessed: 7 August 2014].

<sup>63</sup> AIACA (Online). Available from: [www.aiacaonline.org](http://www.aiacaonline.org) [Accessed: 7 August 2014].

<sup>64</sup> More information on Jaipur Integrated Textile Park can be found at Jaipur Bloc (Online). Available from: <http://www.jaipurbloc.com> [Accessed: 7 August 2014].

<sup>65</sup> Personal communication, Mahesh Dosaya, block printer, Bagru, 29 November 2013, interview.

<sup>66</sup> G. I. Act (Online, 2003). Available from: [www.ipindia.nic.in/giriindia](http://www.ipindia.nic.in/giriindia) [Accessed: 19 March 2015].

<sup>67</sup> AIACA, *Policy Brief No. 2. Geographical Indications of India: Socio-Economic and Development Issues* (New Delhi: AIACA, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Personal communication, Brij Ballabh Udaiwal, Chipra block printer and President of the Calico Printers' Co-operative Society Sanganer, 24 February 2013, interview.

<sup>69</sup> D. R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times: 1860–1939* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 198.

<sup>70</sup> Personal communication, Jalal Cher, *maldhari* (animal herder), Daddhar village, Kachchh, 24 August 2011, interview.

<sup>71</sup> P. Greenough, 'Nation, economy and tradition displayed', in C. Breckenridge ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 241.

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