Batik vivid creations in colour

Posted on

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From the svelte mannequin on the catwalk, to the buxom country wench in the village, Batiks are very popular among the Sri Lankans. You will see the vendors, on the pavements clad in Batik Sarongs in various hues, the youth of the city sporting cleverly designed shirts, skirts, ponchos, and the latest trends in fashion in Batik while those older dress in colourful lungis, kurtas and brightly patterned shirts even for evening wear. The vibrant colours of Batik are in tune with the tropical colour around and of tourists who visit Sri Lanka it is rarely that one does not purchase a Batik. Sri Lankan Batiks unlike the Indonesian Batiks are not done on scales of mass production. Every item is an original achieved with painstaking care -a unique creation. Traditional motifs from old ” somanas ” (ancient Sinhalese textile prints) prints of old Sinhalese flags, and Temple paintings are used for today’s Batik designs. Batik is an Indonesian word derived from the word ” titik ” or ” tik ”

meaning ” a little. bit ” or ” a drop “. This refers to the tiny drops ‘Of hot melted wax used on the design to resist the dye. Although it is an ancient South East Asian technique, the tradition is believed to have originated in Java.

The Persians and Egyptians used a similar procedure of painting cloth in ancient times, but it was the Hindus who settled in Indonesia during 1st and 2nd centuries AD. who developed the Art. Batik flourished under the rule of the East Java Kings between the 13th and 16th centuries. The art not only survived the collapse of Hindu rule and the conversion of Indonesia to Islam in the late 16th century but it continues to-day to influence Indonesian theatre, puppetry and the dance. The Javanese batik both sides of the cloth. Their age old philosophy that a person should be the same inside and out -be honest to yourself -has influenced their Batik technique.



Typical Sri Lankan Batik wall hangings. (Left to right) Seated Buddha in meditation, peacock, rural scene.



Selecting a Batik Kaftan from the colorful array 011 display at a showroom.

Batik has also been an ancient art in Sri Lanka. With revival more than a decade ago it is now one of the more popular export items and to-day Sri Lanka is among the world leaders in the design of Batik. Batik galleries and factories line the major highways while every tourist destination and hotel offers batik items for sale. They are available from simple single colour designs to intricate multi–coloured masterpieces. Passing through long avenues of ” Mara ” trees on the North–West coast, Marawile has a booming Batik industry with a stretch of several miles of Batik factories. The largest of many textile craft centres employ as many as 350 girls in the various phases of Batik manufacturing.

Patterns are traced on the cloth with tracing paper and soft lead pencil. Some artists do free hand drawings which are in tum transferred to the cloth. The cloth to be dyed should be preferably of natural fibre such as cotton, linen and pure-silk. The material is washed thoroughly with soda and hot water to remove all dressing and finishing used to stiffen. For the second phase which is waxing, the cloth is pinned to a frame. It has to be taut on the frame to enable working on it with ease. The ‘tjanting’ or ‘canting’ (which is the more modem word) a drawing pen with a head filled with molten wax is used to trace the pattern with wax. An experienced hand should be nimble and sure and should not rest too much once a long curving Batik line is reached. All areas that do not take the first dye is waxed first. The temperature of the wax is kept constant at l7Cf’ F in a double saucepan over a

heater to keep it ready for constant replenishing of the ‘tjanting’. The cloth is pinned on a frame and not laid on a table surface for the waxing, as the cloth should not touch any table surface or the wax will fasten the cloth to it as it cools and crack, causing the dye to run into the cracks and spoil the design. When the first waxing is done and the wax is cooled, the cloth is submerged in a bowl of cold water and then placed in the dye bath. A cold water dye is necessary for Batiks. Salt and soda are added to the solution and the cloth is left in the dye bath for 30 – 60 minutes according to the depth of the colour required. It is usual when dyeing, to begin with the lightest colour when a design needs several colours, and with the next lightest for the second dye and so on, until the darkest dye is reached. When the dyeing has been completed the cloth is removed and pegged out to drip. Then the wax is removed from the cloth by boiling the cloth in a container of water for about five minutes with detergent. The cloth is then rinsed and dried. This is the process for each colour, until the final design is complete. Each separate colour involves a different dyeing process. Some designs may require up to fifteen waxings and take six or more days to complete. A good Batik is always marked by a hair fine crackle, the finer, cleaner, lines the better. Originally one artist created the entire Batik from start to finish. To-day in assembly line type Batik centres young women carry out each step of the process separately. The finished product is still hand made but it passes through many hands on the way to completion. A few traditional artists still prefer to carry out the entire process alone; their creations are often outstanding and acclaimed as works of art. Their’s is a synthesis of the techniques of easel painting and the ancient craft of Batik or wax dyeing cloth.

Batik items of clothing are usually made out of cotton, lawn, muslin and pure-silk. Heavier fabrics are used for wall hangings and household linen. Leather is a new addition to the many number of materials that are used to do Batik printing to produce attractively and originally designed shoes, bags, coats and skirts. The patterns used in Batik printing are varied, definite in form, free or continuous giving an overall patterned effect. Flowers, geometric patterns and traditional motifs such as Hansa (swan) Monara (peacock) and elephants are popular subjects for the designs. Clothing such as skirts, blouses, dresses, sarongs as well as utility items such as bags, parasols and household linen and decorative items such as wall hangings and banners are available for sale.

Batik is popular with the tourist hotels as decor in their lobbies and guestrooms. They complement the traditional touch in the decor. One city hotel the Oberoi has three giant 72 foot Batik hangings hung from the ceiling in their lobby. Yet another

the Bentota Beach Hotel has the ceiling of its lobby covered with a decorated Batik cloth patterned in traditional motifs – similar to the ceiling of ancient temples.

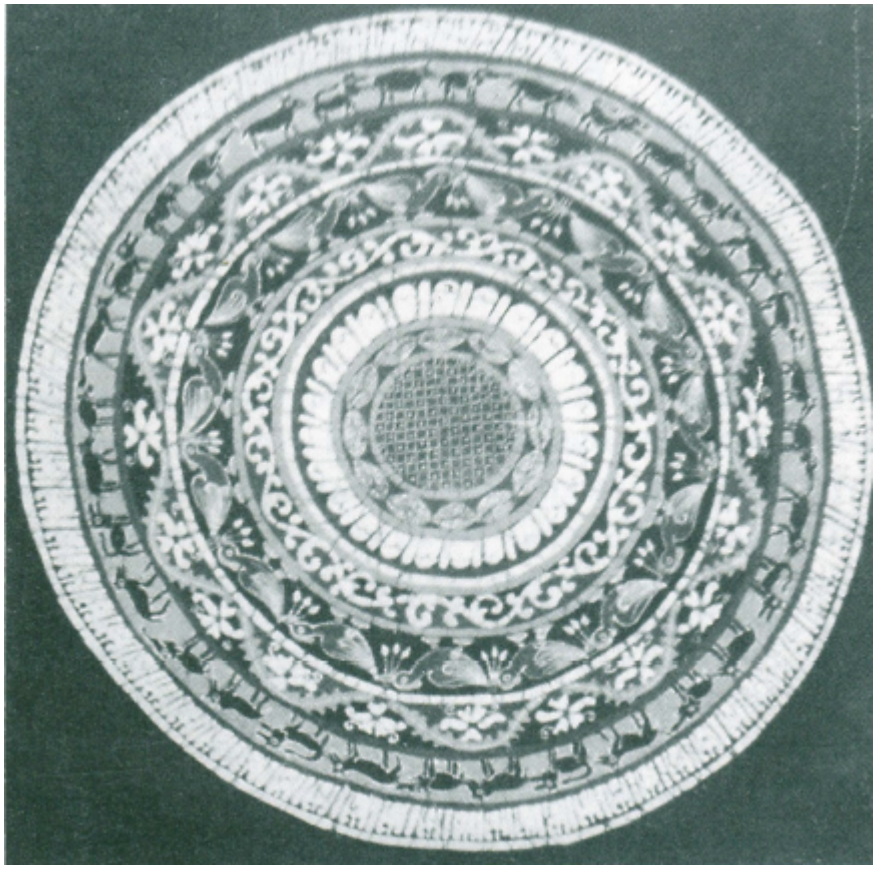
Several of Sri Lankan Batik manufacturers export their Batik products to fashion houses in the West.



A Batik artist draws the finer lines of a wall hanging.



Showroom in a large Batik Shop.



Typical Sri Lankan Brass tray done in Batik. Photo Suresh de Silva