



The Printing Story

sasha
the art of giving



Bardhaman

Bardhaman or Burdwan (also Barddhaman; Bengali: Bôrdhoman), is a city of West Bengal state in eastern India and is also the headquarters of Bardhaman District. Bardhaman has been a district capital since the time of Mughal Empire. Later on it became a district headquarters of British India.

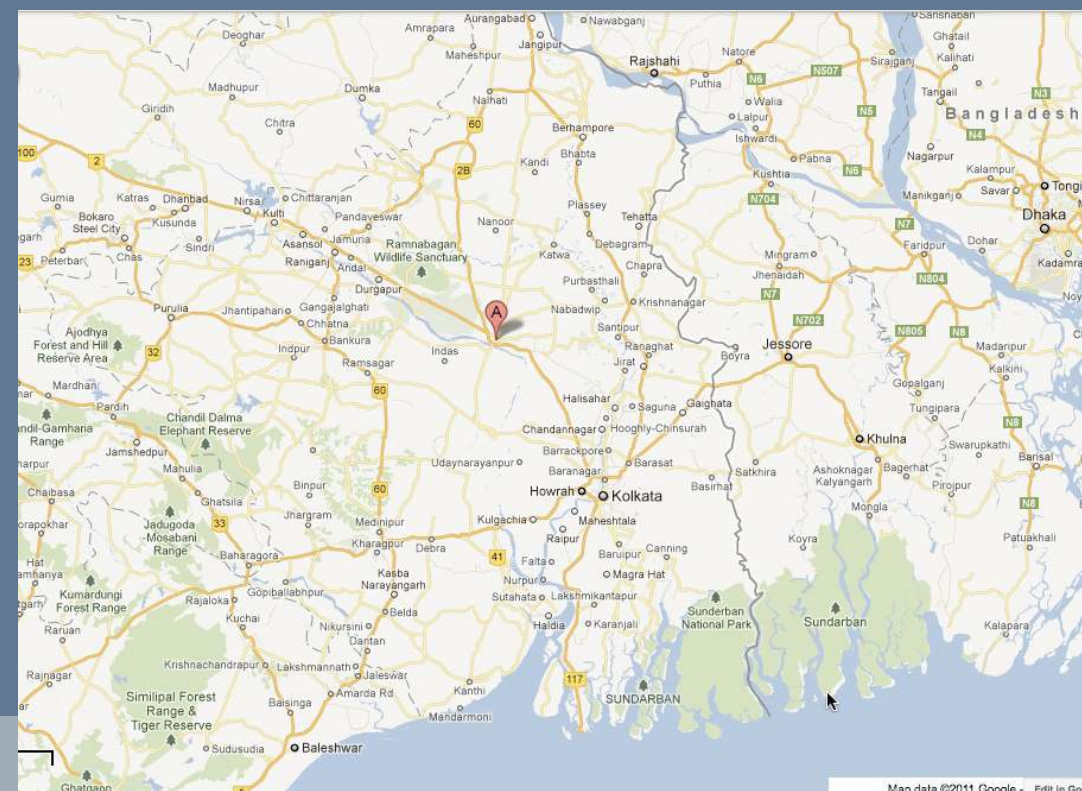
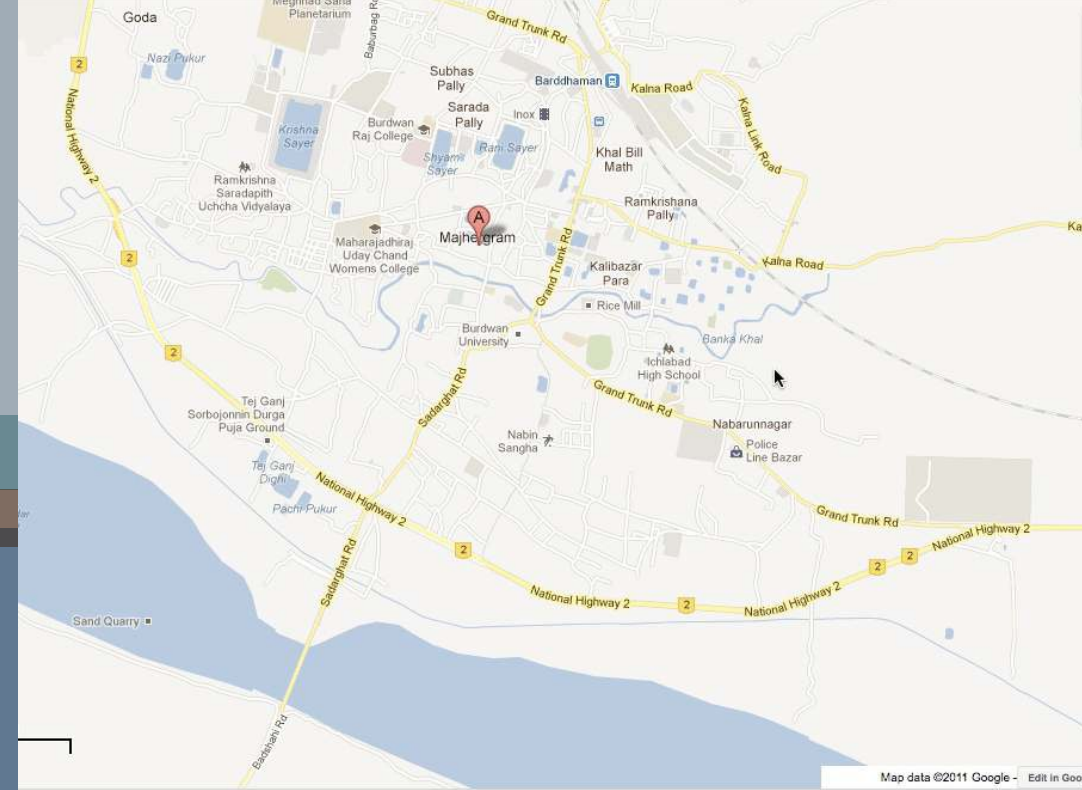
The city owes its historical importance to being the headquarters of the Maharajas of Burdwan, the premier noblemen of lower Bengal. Archeological evidences suggest that this region, forming a major part of Radh Bengal, could be traced even back to 4000 BCE.

Bardhaman Raj was founded in 1657 by Sangam Rai, of the Kapoor Khatri family of Kotli in Lahore, Punjab, whose descendants served in turn the Mughal Emperors and the British government. Subsequent rulers struggled their best to make this region culturally, economically and ecologically healthier. There are several famous colleges, and Bardhaman became a centre for the arts, classical music and poetry.

Burdwan has a multicultural heritage. The deuls (temples of rekha type) found here are reminiscent of Bengali Hindu architecture. The old temples bear signs of Hinduism, mostly belonging to the Sakta and Vaishnava followers.

Burdwan witnessed, experienced and survived numerous violent conflicts, mainly due to Mughal, Pashtun and Maratha invaders.

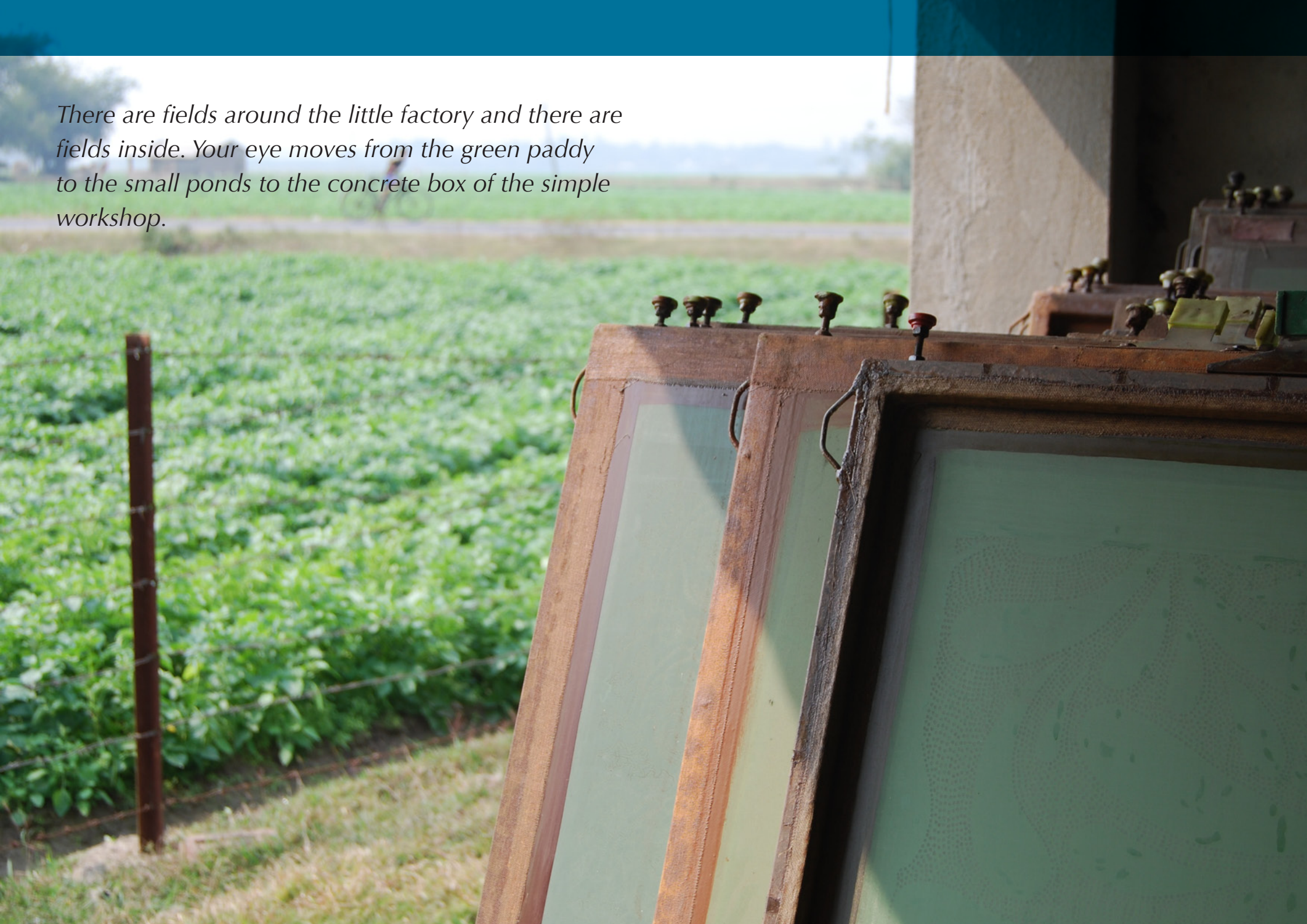
Sitabhog and Mihidana are two famous sweets of Burdwan, introduced first in honour of the Raj family. Shaktigarh's Langcha is another local speciality.





The Story

There are fields around the little factory and there are fields inside. Your eye moves from the green paddy to the small ponds to the concrete box of the simple workshop.

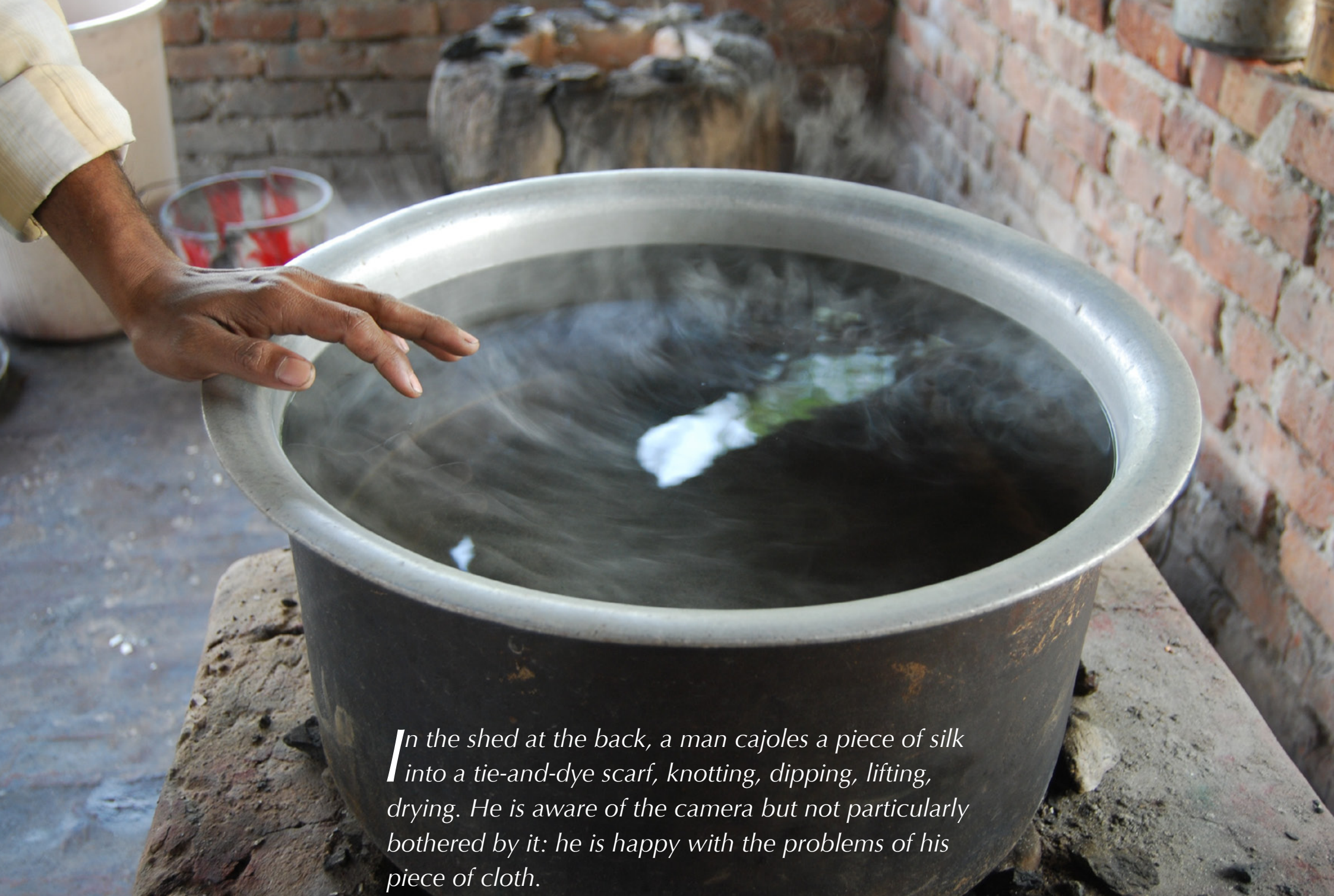


In the building, your eye moves over the deliciously unmarked white of the cloth stretched on the tables about to be marked.





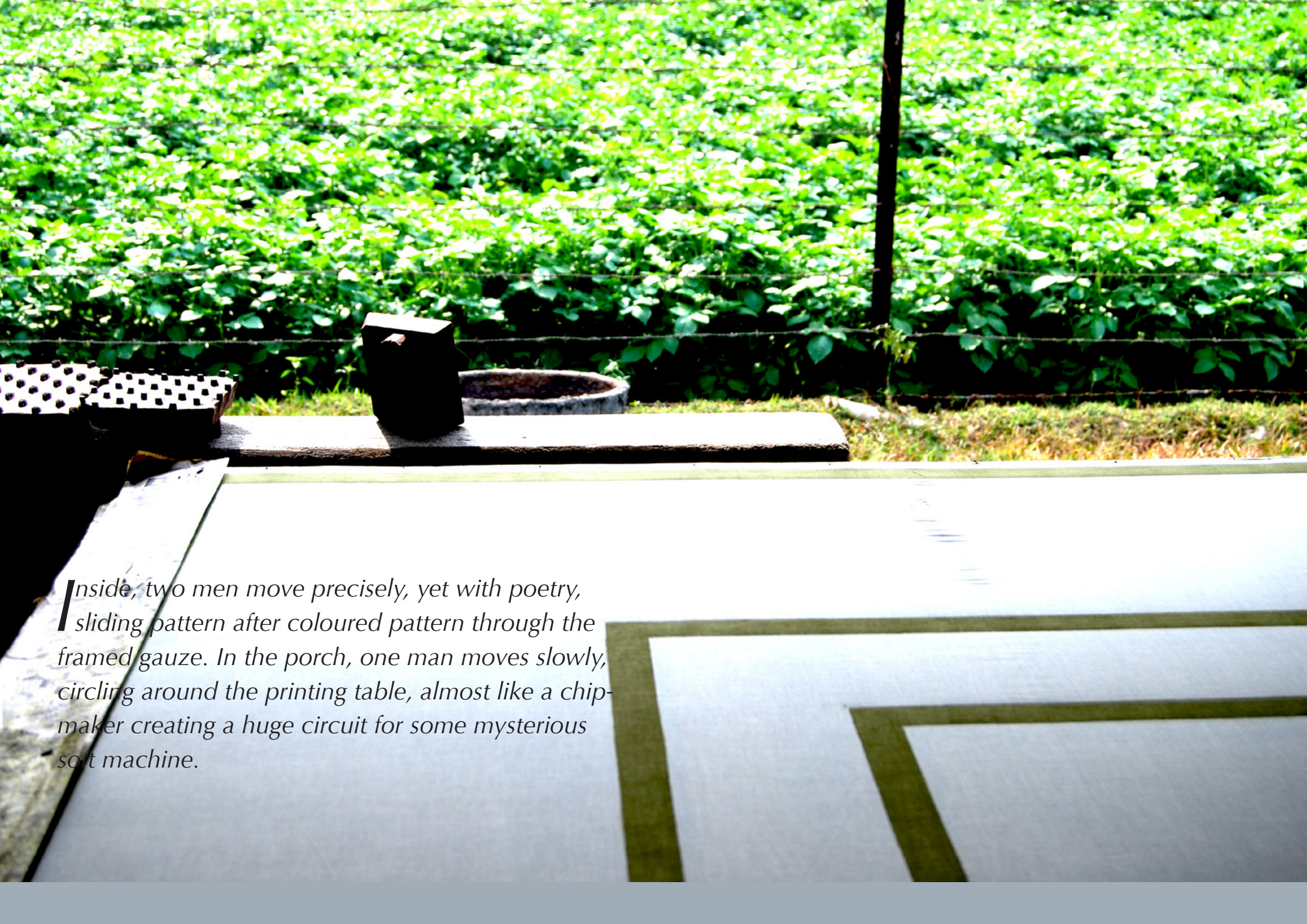
Outside, just behind the main shed, are trays of spent colour. These are ready to be washed out but they still wink brilliant chroma in the mild sunlight.



In the shed at the back, a man cajoles a piece of silk into a tie-and-dye scarf, knotting, dipping, lifting, drying. He is aware of the camera but not particularly bothered by it: he is happy with the problems of his piece of cloth.



The field of cloth is stretched and pinned on the block-printing table in the porch outside.

A photograph showing a printing table in an outdoor setting. The table is covered with a white sheet of paper and has a dark, rectangular object and a small, circular container on it. In the background, there is a dense field of green plants, possibly a field of rice, viewed through a wire mesh fence. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

*Inside, two men move precisely, yet with poetry,
sliding pattern after coloured pattern through the
framed gauze. In the porch, one man moves slowly,
circling around the printing table, almost like a chip-
maker creating a huge circuit for some mysterious
soft machine.*

It's not only a large bed-sheet, we know, and he covers every inch of it with the very simple means of dipping a patterned block into colour and pressing down, again and again.





But the movement is humanly exact, and exactly human, in a way a machine can never replicate.

If there is electricity, these guys will listen to the radio as they work; if the power goes – as it often does – they will work in available light, with the surrounding silence and the sounds of their own rhythms the only accompaniment.





Ultimately, they will stop for the day, hopefully with the fields inside and outside in some deep balance.



The Printing Process



Block Printing

Block printing is an ancient craft in India, where wooden blocks are carved with intricate patterns and these are dipped in colour and repeatedly pressed on fabric.

The wood block is carefully prepared as a relief matrix, which means the areas to show 'white' are cut away with a knife, chisel, or sandpaper leaving the motif to show in 'black' at the original surface level. The block is cut along the grain of the wood. The printer inks the block and brings it into firm and even contact with the cloth to achieve a continuous print. For colour printing, multiple blocks are used, each for one colour, although overprinting two colours may produce further colours on the print.

First the Fabric is de-gummed (where all the starch is removed) and scoured and washed. This is to ensure that the dyes are taken in properly and evenly.



The colours are prepared. The dye-water is raised to a high temperature and then the wet fabric is dipped into it, the crafts person checking frequently to make sure the desired colour is matched Dyed fabric is then put in the fixing solution, before it is washed



After drying, the fabric is stretched very carefully and precisely on the printing table and secured with pins.






The blocks – basically wooden reliefs with designs – are dipped in a colour bath and pressed hard on the fabric. This is repeated again and again till a seamless pattern is formed. If the design has more than one colour, the second block is dipped in a different bath and aligned precisely into the pattern that has been already printed. Great skill and accuracy is required to produce a pattern that seamlessly flows, without the block being visible.





The fabric is then steamed in boiling water or in a steamer to fix the colour

The last stage is when the printed fabric is dried in the sun, again to fix the colour. This makes the block printing process dependent on sunny weather and on rainy days, the prints do not turn out well.



Screen printing is a printing technique that uses a woven mesh to support an ink-blocking stencil. The design is transferred to a stretched nylon or polyester fabric using photo-reactive inks. This forms an opaque and transparent area. A roller or squeegee is moved across the screen stencil, forcing or pumping ink past the threads of the woven mesh in the open areas.

Dyed or plain cloth is fixed on the screen table which has a paraffin wax coating. This allows the cloth to stick absolutely flat, which is crucial for the process.

Screen Printing



A screen – a frame of a very thin filament with the designs printed on it – is aligned on the fabric.

Colour is loaded at one end of the screen and pushed through with quick strokes of a squeegee. Two craftsmen working unison to makes sure the colour is printed evenly across the fabric.



The printed fabric is steamed and dried. It is then ironed and sent off for delivery.





Brindaban Prints

Brindaban Prints is a rural-based modern dyeing & printing unit working regularly with Sasha for over 12 years now. Originally started by a master craftsman, Brindaban Ghosh, a skilled printer, who also was a teacher at the Sreerampore Textile College nearby. He started working from a small unit at his home producing printed home textiles and accessories for Sasha's clientele. Initially it was only hand block printing that he would work on, with two tables and a few other artisans.

Then as demand grew, he was joined by a few more artisans and he installed four more tables and couple of screens for screen-printing as well. But a number of artisans joined Brindaban Ghosh to learn from him and because of his good-natured way of working.

It was a tragic time for the family and unit of Brindaban Ghosh when he

passed away suddenly. His sons Dhritiman and Ritiman Ghosh were too young to run the unit on their own. Young Dhritiman left school to run the printing unit with the help of his mother to sustain the family. Due to the goodwill generated by his father, most artisans came back to work. Sasha continued to support the small unit through marketing as well as providing moral support to Dhritiman during this period.

Four years ago Sasha decided to help him scale up his activities and move towards creating a small but modern dyeing-printing unit. With intensified marketing drive and matching production efforts, the business turnover more than doubled in two years.

Presently about ten skilled artisans, sampling staff, colour master and trainees work here. The unit specialises in hand printing of various fabrics and its core competency lies in dyeing, block & screen print works. The printing is done on cotton, linen, silk and any kind of fabrics and the dyeing process includes acid dyeing, direct dyeing, pigment dyeing etc.



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