

TEMPLE BLESSINGS

Salvaging waste from a centuries-old ritual



“The temple bell stops – but the sound keeps coming out of the flowers.” – Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) as translated by Robert Bly. In Hindu temples across India, devotees offer gifts of flower garlands to invoke the blessings of deities. Every day, wilted blossoms are replaced with fresh garlands, pleasing the gods with their fragrance and colour. The previous day’s blessed offerings, or nirmalya, are carefully gathered and disposed of in water, as is Hindu ritual.

The Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai, one of the country’s most visited, sees approximately 4.8 million worshippers a month. Bearing gifts of flowers and coconuts, they call on Ganesha, god of wisdom, knowledge, and new beginnings. Stalls line the temple complex displaying sweets and flowers. Each of the vendors sells over 20 kilograms of flowers a day, meaning that over 500 kilograms of flowers are discarded by the temple daily to make room for the next day’s offerings.

In response to this Adiv, a natural dye workshop in Mumbai, has partnered with the Siddhivinayak Temple to receive its discarded nirmalya. Marigolds, roses, hibiscus and coconut husks are collected, sorted, and used to dye cloth. Onion skins and pomegranate husks donated by local food vendors are also used. Only ingredients that are ayurvedic, pharmaceutical or food grade are used for dyeing and everything is composted at the end of the dyeing process.

Dyeing is an elemental exercise. Just a few items are required: water, petals, fabric, mordant and, when needed, a steamer. Each piece of cloth is prepared one at a time, often by two people working swiftly

and seamlessly in unison. To create various textures, the petals, husks and skins are used whole or pulverized, wet or dry. For Adiv’s “idli technique” – named after a similar looking and popular Indian food – the fabric is layered with petals and neatly folded onto itself forming a small packet, like a parcel. Each packet is then steamed for 30 to 40 minutes before it is unfolded, shaken free of petals, rinsed, and hung to dry.

Occasionally, a petal or two will evade inspection and remain stuck to the fabric – a welcome sign of work done by human hands. The process produces a monoprint, where the petal’s shapes are transferred directly onto fabric leaving an imprint of permanent colour. Depending on weather and humidity, the same flower yields surprising dye variations of colour and lushness.

The fashion label dosa began collaborating with Adiv in December of 2014. The organisation, founded in 2006 by Rupa Trivedi, is a business and social venture in Mumbai dedicated to natural hand dyeing. Adiv empowers its young, self-taught artisans through steady employment and creative freedom. Each came to the centre with zero dyeing experience, learning new techniques through trial and error. Two Saturdays a month are dedicated to experimentation. Workers keep a daily journal of processes to ensure that results can be duplicated. What began as two pots in a kitchen has grown to foster a small group of young men and women into skilled, steady income earners. As Adiv expands, new jobs and new opportunities continue to be created. ●●●
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