

The lure of natural dyes in sustainable fashion

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The chemical structure of natural dyes can also lead to variability in colour; this means that the same dye molecule might produce different shades depending on its environment, making it less predictable than synthetic alternatives. Shorder Mohammad Brinto, a designer for Colours of the Char, feels that the weather plays a very important part in the process of sustainable dyes. "In sustainable and natural dyeing, the biggest challenge is nature itself," he shares. As the designers and dyers work in rural regions, the source of water changes from season to season. "Depending on the time of year, we might dye with river water, pond water, rainwater, or water from deep tubewells.

Naturally, each type of water contains different minerals, and those minerals react differently with natural dyes." Brinto further shares how weather conditions can affect the process. If the environment is humid or dry, it can change how the colour turns out. "Because we don't work with computerised, controlled systems, and every step is done by hand, the final result often does not match what we imagined. Whatever the outcome is, every time it brings a new kind of magic." **Craft, care, and the rise of conscious dyeing** In recent years, the movement toward sustainable fashion has led to renewed interest in natural dyes. Many designers and brands are consciously seeking to incorporate these into their collections,

promoting not only beautiful aesthetics but also ethical production practices. According to Komal Kumar Malakar, a master artisan, the processes for dyeing include crushing raw materials in the machine, boiling them to achieve the desired colour and consistency and then making use of fitkari (alum) or iron to ensure that colours do not bleed. The procedure is simple, uses less water, and does not involve the use of chemicals anywhere. The runoffs, too, are recyclable, supporting the ecosystem overall. Komal Malakar particularly

enjoys working with hortoki, a fruit that produces dark shades of grey and works particularly well on silk sarees, pomegranate peels, manjit (madder, producing a Roman shade of red), shikorae (or shillicorai for purple) and indigo. "All our dyes are derived from fruits, plants, roots and barks found in nature, and these are biodegradable. This is particularly why dyers like me enjoy working with natural products over chemical ones." He particularly notes the importance

of ingredients such as indigo, which is one of the oldest colourants. Grown by themselves and used extensively in their designs, indigo holds a special significance in producing rich, deep shades of blue, straight from the lap of nature. **Tradition, design, and the limits of scaling sustainably** Industry professionals reveal a growing trend among artisans and designers who are committed to reviving traditional dye techniques while innovating new applications. "When it comes to balancing sustainable dye with aesthetics, we always choose concepts that stay connected to nature or to our heritage

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