Knots To Dye For!

Exploring Two Tie & Dye Textile Traditions

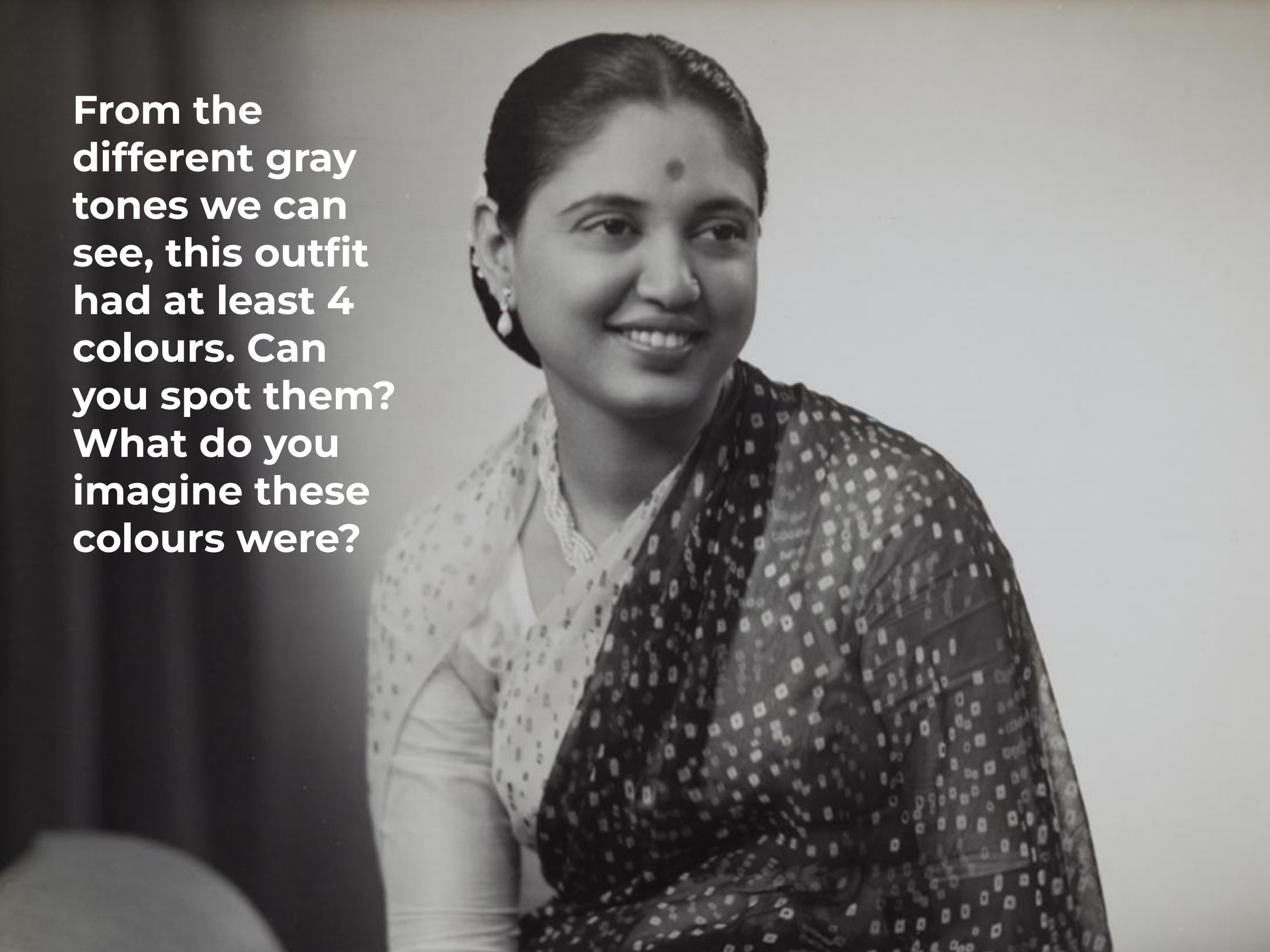
DISCOVER MAP

ENGAGE.
Before we begin our exploration, here is a quick exercise for you.

Check if you have any tie-dye textiles in your house. If you find one, observe it closely. List down three unique things about the piece.

Does your piece look anything like the outfit you see in this image?

If you don’t have one at home, google the words *tie-dye* and make your list from images you find online.



From the different gray tones we can see, this outfit had at least 4 colours. Can you spot them? What do you imagine these colours were?

How many different patterns can you observe in the clothes worn by the women here?

As you might have realised while making your list, tie & dyes are uniquely designed textiles. But what do these words really mean?

- **Tie:** A step where sections are tied using different methods, depending on the final look one is going for.
- **Dye:** Giving the fabric colour using dyes, where the tied up sections do not get coloured.

Sounds pretty simple? Let's look at two tie-dye traditions from India that turn this simple process into an elaborate craft!

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The first is called **Ikat**.

Ikats are found around the world today and nobody is really sure where the artform actually originated.

DID YOU KNOW?
The word ikat comes from the Malay word mengikat, meaning “to tie”.

Here is a detail or close up of an ikat from MAP's collection.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- What are the different colours you see in this textile?
- Does the overall pattern remind you of something you have seen elsewhere?
- Can you see any recognisable forms inside each of the larger repeating rhombus or diamond shapes?

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Although ikats are produced in countries across the globe, in India it has its own special place. Artists in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Odisha make ikats in unique styles and even have local names for it.

THINK.
Can you point out these four states on the map of India? Once you have spotted them, do you see a geographical similarity among all four? How might their geographical positions be connected to the widespread presence of textile traditions?*

*All these states border the Indian Ocean or Arabian Sea. This location coupled with the seasonal monsoon winds facilitated the oldest and one of the largest maritime trades—in textiles such as Ikat—from India.

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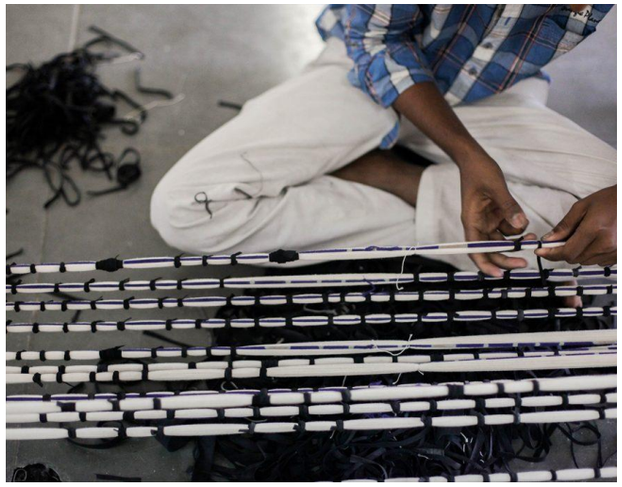
Making an Ikat is a long and laborious process. It involves multiple steps of binding, dyeing and weaving on a loom, and a single piece may take months or even years depending on the complexity of design!

Let’s break it down and try to understand the steps better:



First, the yarn is tied up at specific places as per the design and dyed.

This process is repeated multiple times with bindings at different places and using different dyes.

Finally the yarn is woven into a fabric using a loom.

LEARN MORE.

This process of tie-dye is called **resist dyeing** because the yarn is dyed only in certain parts, while the tied up areas ‘resist’ the dye and hence do not get coloured. Watch the entire process of an Ikat made in Odisha in this video.

All images courtesy Vritti Designs Youtube Channel
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3S3c0una_c

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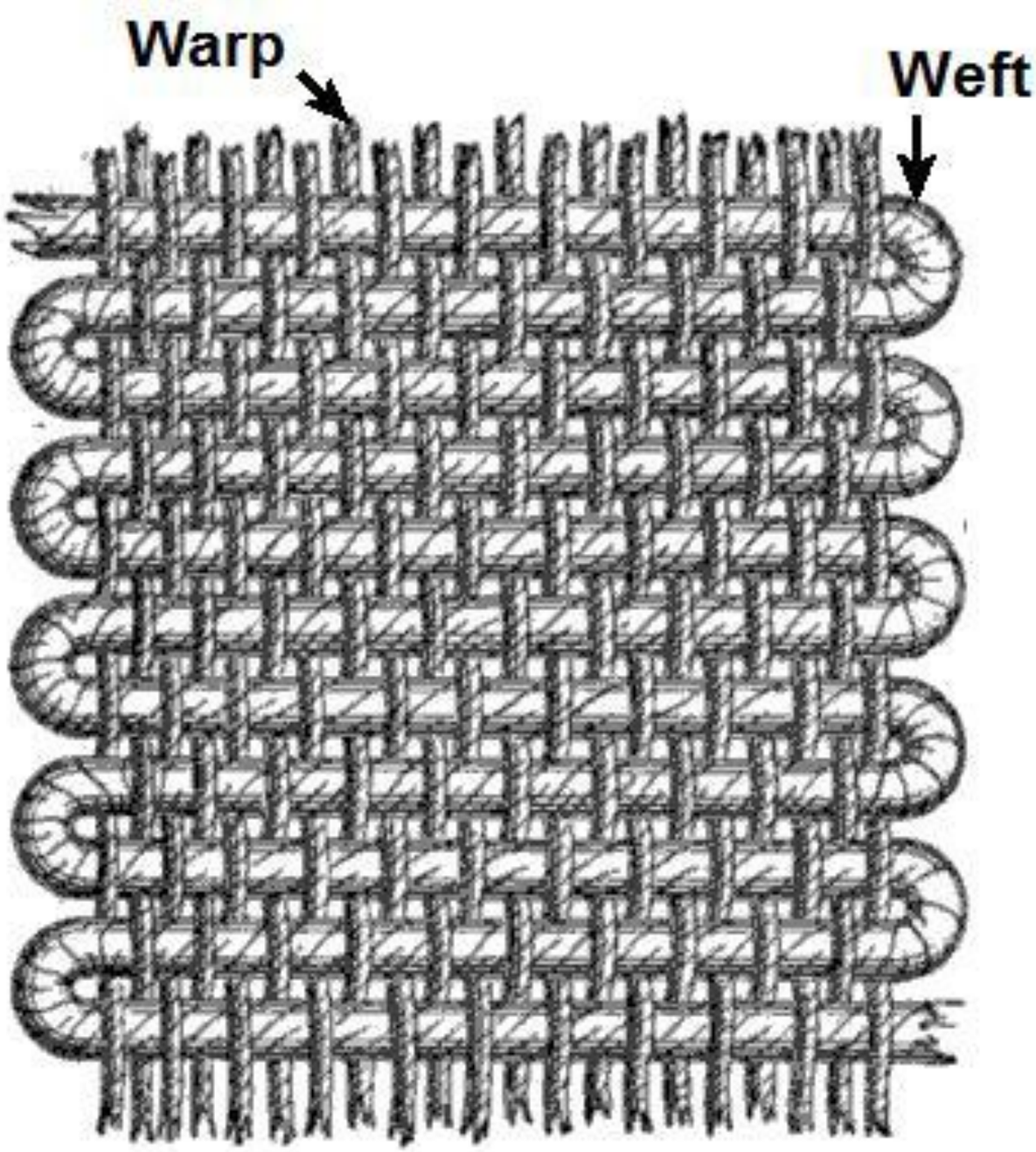

Image: Uploaded by Alfred Barlow on Wikimedia Commons, distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

When one makes an Ikat, one has to pay close attention to two things - the **warp** and the **weft**.

These are simply terms used for the yarn and the way it is woven. Here is an illustration explaining how the warp and weft yarns are bound together.

REFLECT.
Have you seen this interlocking system in something other than fabric? Which do you think would be the stronger part of the structure: the warp or the weft and why?

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As you saw, the warp and weft are yarns that are interlaced to form a fabric.

The lengthwise threads are called warp, and the other threads, which lie horizontally or width wise, are called weft.

EXPLORE.
Still unsure? Learn with your hands and try out the technique yourself using a homemade cardboard loom in our **DIY Guide Extra!**

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The complex making process we just saw leads to equally complex textiles. This one, for example, is a type of Ikat from Gujarat, called **Patola.**

LOOK CLOSELY.
Patola pieces are known for their intricate designs including animals and birds. Which creatures do you see in this one?

Wish you could zoom into it? Go to the next page for a detail or close up.

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In Gujarat, patola textiles are a mark of social status and luxury.

Local legend has it that some 900 years ago, a very rich Gujarati king called Kumarapala hired 700 patola craftsmen to work for him so he could get a new piece to wear everyday!

DID YOU KNOW?
Patolas are reversible – which means that they look the same on either side or inside out!

Do you know of any textiles that are considered a sign of luxury, respect, status, adoration or anything else?

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The making of a patola requires one to be really good at math! One needs to remember and work with an intricate grid pattern that can only be learnt by years of practice.

LEARN MORE.
Do you see the grid in this piece? Discover more about the tradition here.

Why do you think some boxes in the grid of this piece are left blank?

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Here is a detail from another patola piece.

LOOK CLOSELY. It has many animals and human figures with a range of props. Can you guess what scene is being represented?

How many types of animals and birds can you find? Can you spot more than ten kinds?

If you could give this piece a title, what would you call it?

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Here is the complete textile.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- Do you see some things being repeated? Which bits look like they are mirror images of each other?
- How many colours do you see used?
- Does the piece give you any clues about the personality, occupation and/or hobbies of the owner?

What do you think was the use of this textile?

Was it a garment to wear, a floor rug, wall hanging or something else?

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The patola is such an important tradition for the people of Gujarat that one can spot it everywhere!

Here, for example, is a detail from an ancient building in Patan (a small town of Gujarat).

Look carefully at the designs you see here. Now, go back and look at the patola textiles again. Do you see any similarities?

What kind of building do you think would have such designs on its walls and why?

Image: Jagadip Singh “Rani Ki Vav (Queen's Step Well), Patan, Gujarat, India”. Flickr. 14 August, 2014.

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Patola was a big export to markets in Indonesia in the 19th century. Many of them were ‘imitation’ fabrics made with printing, and only some were woven.

What does that really mean?

Original Patola = Dye the yarn using your math skills and the grid. When weaving, the patterns appear in the fabric, as if by magic!

Imitation Patola = Weave a regular fabric, print it **after weaving** with designs that copy the original.

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This is a patola piece made for trading. Do you think it is woven or printed? How do you know?*

EXPLORE.
Have you come across ‘imitation’ fabrics before, where prints try to replicate weaves or stitches?

Look around your house, ask a guardian or next time when you go shopping, pay attention!

*Do you notice smudges in this piece and sections where the lines break? This is a hint that tells you it is printed and not woven.

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CREATE.

Let’s make an art piece inspired by the patola designs of symmetry and patterns. For this, you will need **craft paper**, **some poster colours,** a **paintbrush** and a **marker or sketch pen (optional)**.

First fold your paper in half and open it back up. Put a few blobs of paint on one half of the paper, along the line of the fold. Keep the paint thick — the more paint, the better the result at the end!

Fold the paper and gently press where the paint was dropped. Open up and reveal symmetrical shapes! Now use your imagination (and a dark colour or marker) to outline a pattern and decorate, like in a patola.

Bonus: Try doing this on a bigger paper and experiment with shapes and placements. Can you create a repetitive symmetrical pattern all over the page? Don’t forget to send us your creations at education@map-india.org.

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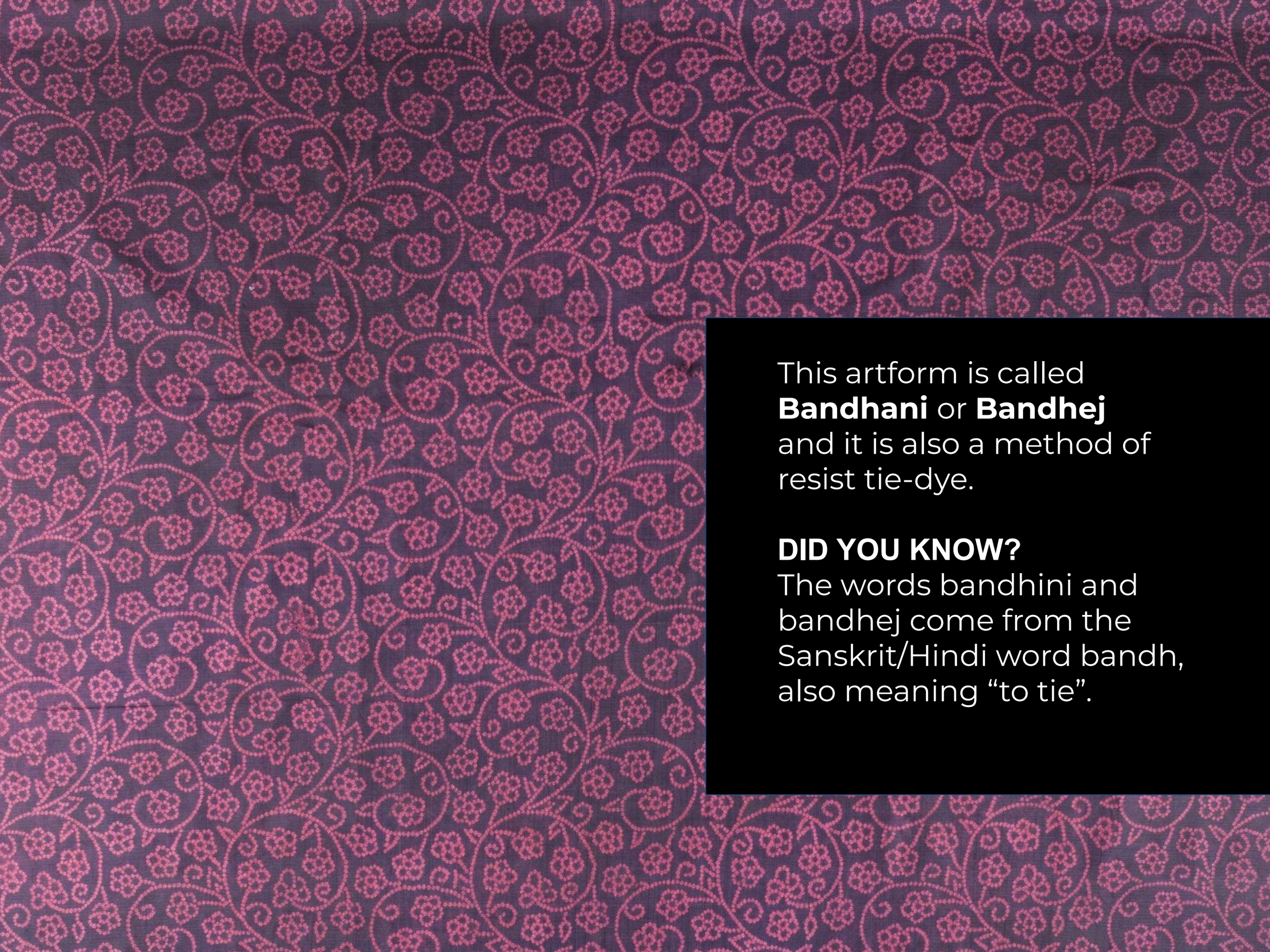
Patola was **a kind of Ikat**, but what we will explore next is another tie-dye method. It does not involve dipping the yarn in dye before weaving but requires one to have crafty and nimble hands! Can you guess what this technique is?

This image has a clue. Do you see any fabric that is familiar? Have you seen it anywhere before?

If not, do not worry. Go to the next page to know more about this tradition!



This artform is called **Bandhani** or **Bandhej** and it is also a method of resist tie-dye.

DID YOU KNOW?
The words bandhini and bandhej come from the Sanskrit/Hindi word bandh, also meaning “to tie”.

If you touched it, how do you imagine this textile would feel?

Bandhani is found primarily in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, where the word is used to locally describe the process.

Can you go back to the page with the map of India and mark these states as well?

LOOK CLOSELY.

- What does this pattern look like or remind you of?
- Can you see any similarities with the clothes worn by three girls in the photograph?
- Can you recreate this flower print, using a vegetable?

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Here is another Bandhani saree from the MAP collection.

LOOK CLOSELY.
Notice the white dots on this saree. How do you think the dots are made? Make a list of all the shapes they make, that you recognise.

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REFLECT.
How long do you think it would take to create a textile like this? How easy or difficult do you think it would be to learn to create such distinct patterns and shapes in the cloth without any painting or drawing – just by pinching and tying the fabric?

LEARN MORE.
The Bandhani technique involves tying thousands of tiny knots on the fabric, and dyeing it. Watch the process here.

If you wrote a short story around the characters you see here, what would it be about?

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At first glance, the dots in the bandhanis may look random but when you dig deeper, they tell you stories of inspiration, history and tradition.

Do you see the dots on the blue saree of a woman in this painting? This is a saree type from Tamil Nadu where the three dots cluster is supposed to represent stars!

Can you spot other motifs in the garments that may have been inspired from things in real life?

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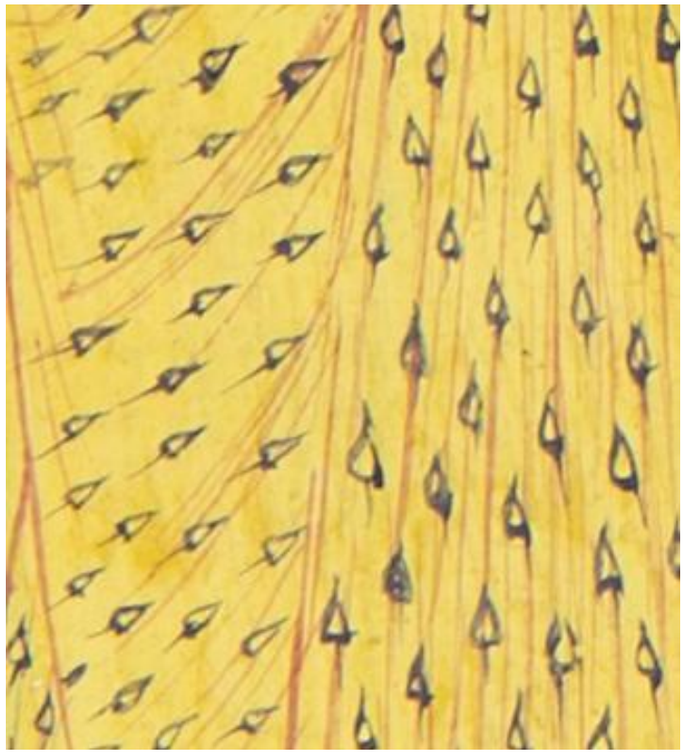
GAME TIME!

Here are some details from the last image, along with two options each that we've suggested for a real life equivalent that may have inspired it.
Can you pick the one that *you* think it is closer to?
Is there a third option that you might like to add for any of them?

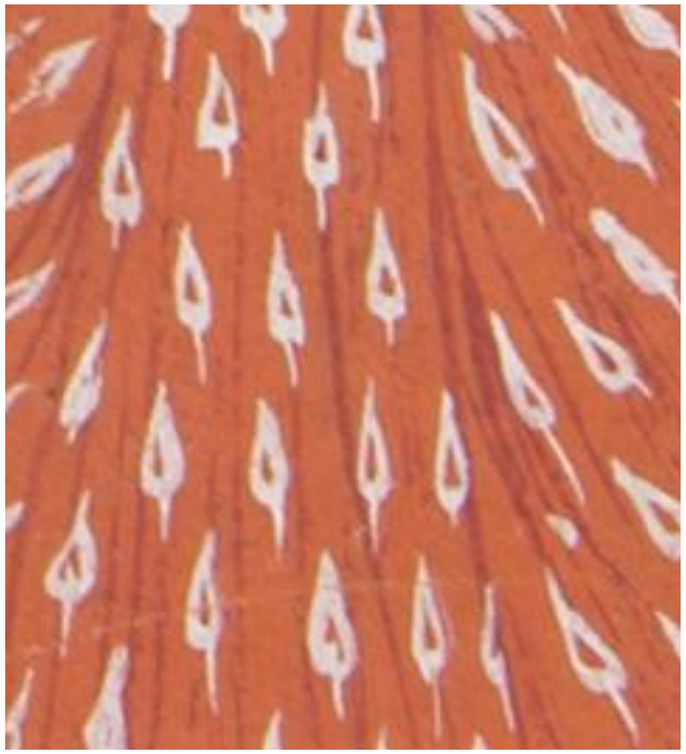
1. Footprints of a creature

2. Cluster of stars



1. Leaves

2. Spears



1. Flames from a lamp

2. Chillies on a plate

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Tie-dye fabrics are used for a variety of purposes: from outfits and headgears to more utilitarian reasons around the house .

Here is a coat from our collection. Can you look closely and guess if the technique is that of Ikat or Bandhani?

Do you have any tie-dye in your house that's not used as garments? What is it used for?

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Even today, across the world, tie-dye continues to be a very popular textile technique.

Although the two kinds we've examined have complex processes, there are some simpler ways to make tie-dye fabrics as well. So how about trying your own hand at it, and making a tie-dye tee shirt yourself at home?

Check out our **DIY Guide Extra** to know the steps.

Image: Catapult Creative "Candarini Tie Dye". Flickr. 22 May, 2009.

Portrait of a couple, Early 20th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Hand-tinted photographic print
H. 35 cm, W. 27.5 cm
PHY.02390

Portrait of Maharani Sri Videh Kaurji Sahiba, Undated
Unknown Maker(s)
Digital file
DC.00024

Group of ladies, 20th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Albumen print
PHY.07195

Harijan girls from Kutch, 1979
Jyoti Bhatt
Silver gelatin print
H. 35.6 cm, W. 24.3 cm
PHY.00515

Krishna being adorned, 19th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 29.5 cm, W. 21.5 cm
PTG.01016

Bandhani Sari, 1860
Unknown Maker(s)
Tie-resist dyed silk
L. 541 x W. 120 cm
TXT.00144

Robe, late 19th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Single or Warp Ikat, woven
L. 320 cm x W. 96 cm
TXT.00615

A bandhej saree, c. 1940
Unknown Maker(s)
Tie-dyed silk
L. 450, W. 105 cm
TXT.00004

Ceremonial textile (and detail), late 17th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Double ikat, woven silk
L. 320 cm x W. 96 cm
TXT.00863

Ceremonial banner or cloth (and detail), 19th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Dyed and woven
L. 432 cm x W. 134 cm
TXT.00879

Patola Ceremonial Textile (and detail),19th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Double ikat, woven silk
L. 380 cm x W. 92 cm
TXT.00860

Detail of a patola wedding sari, c. 1840
Unknown Maker(s)
Woven double tie-dyed silk
L. 500 cm, W. 110 cm
TXT.00025

Patola (and detail), 20th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Woven, double Ikat silk with metal gilt
L. 518 x W. 117 cm
TXT.00025

Patola (and detail), late 19th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Woven, double Ikat silk
L. 324 X W. 134 cm
TXT.00580

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