

## Challenges Faced by Batik Craftsmen in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract** – This research investigates the practice of batik craftsmanship in Sri Lanka, focusing on its unique attributes, the challenges faced by artisans, and its potential for sustainability. Batik, a traditional textile art form introduced to Sri Lanka in the 19th century, is deeply embedded in the country's cultural heritage and reflects a rich artistic tradition. Despite its significance, the industry confronts numerous socio-economic, environmental, and production-related challenges that hinder its growth and threaten its preservation. This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with five batik craftsmen from diverse districts—Puttalam, Colombo, Kandy, Kurunegala, and Galle. The craftsmen, representing various professional roles such as brand owners, instructors, and artists, provided insights into the practice and issues surrounding batik craftsmanship in Sri Lanka. The findings reveal that batik in Sri Lanka remains an entirely handmade process, showcasing the intricate artistic talents of local craftsmen. The unique motifs, color palettes, and inspirations rooted in cultural and religious traditions contribute to batik's distinctiveness. However, the craft faces significant challenges, including limited market access, high costs of raw materials, and insufficient governmental support. The influx of low-quality, mass-produced alternatives undermines the value of handmade batik, while a lack of societal awareness about the cultural and artistic significance of batik further discourages artisans. Environmental issues such as improper disposal of harmful chemicals, contributing to air, water, and soil pollution, also pose significant concerns. Furthermore, the reliance on traditional production methods and inconsistent transmission of knowledge to younger generations hinder the scalability and sustainability of batik craftsmanship.

To address these challenges, the study highlights the importance of documenting batik practices, increasing societal awareness, and implementing government initiatives to support artisans. Encouraging the use of sustainable practices, such as natural dyes and eco-friendly waste management methods, could mitigate environmental impacts while enhancing the craft's appeal in global markets. Facilitating access to broader markets through digital platforms, fair trade initiatives, and collaborations with designers could provide artisans with economic opportunities and help preserve the industry's heritage. Moreover, systematic knowledge transfer and skill development programs are crucial for sustaining the craft across generations and modernizing production techniques to meet contemporary demands.

This research underscores the cultural and artistic significance of Sri Lankan batik and its potential as a sustainable craft in the global market. Addressing the socio-economic, environmental, and

production-related challenges requires collaborative efforts from artisans, policymakers, and consumers. By integrating innovative solutions with traditional practices, the batik industry can achieve sustainability while preserving its cultural authenticity. The study provides valuable insights for academia, industry professionals, and policymakers to empower batik artisans and safeguard this cherished heritage for future generations.

**Keywords:** Batik, batik craftsmen, case study, challenges



Fig.1 - The dye washing tanks and the disposal area

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