

INDIGENOUS HAUSA INDIGO DYEING IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

S. A. Dutsenwai

Abstract

The article focused on the effect of modern dyeing equipment, materials and methods on indigenous Hausa indigo dyeing. It also briefly looked at its possible origin, practice and problems. Also discussed were the factors that are responsible for its demise. In conclusion it was found that modern dyeing equipment, materials and methods are responsible for the displacement of the indigenous ones. It was also found that modern dyeing equipment, materials and methods are responsible for transforming the indigenous Hausa indigo dyeing to what it is today – a viable modern indigenous Hausa cottage and small scale dyeing industry. Finally recommendation on how the indigenous industry can be assisted financially and technically by all the three levels of governments in Nigeria was made.

Introduction

Textile dyeing according to Dhuinnshleibh (2000), is a process of colouring fibres, yarns or fabrics by using liquid containing colouring matter for imparting a particular hue to a substance. Traditional Hausa indigo dyeing was the only indigenous fibre, yarns, fabric and garment colouring process. It produced only different shades of blue, usually obtained by repeatedly dipping the yarns, fabric or garments into the fermented dye solution in dye pits. A sheen that is highly beautiful is produced from this dyeing process.

Through ancient interregional trading and other activities, exchange of ideas, equipment and materials between the Hausa and other people occurred. As a result, exotic dyeing equipment, materials, techniques and other textile products found their way into Hausa land. The consequence of this development was the displacement of the indigenous Hausa dyeing equipment, materials and techniques. As a result, most of the indigenous Hausa indigo dyeing centres folded up and subsequently replaced by modern ones.

Brief History

The original known dyes for indigenous Hausa dyeing was the local indigenous dyes, which some researchers believed to have oriental origin. Nasir (1984) reports that the indigo dye and the dyeing process were brought into Hausa land by the Berbers and Arabs from North Africa through the Trans-Sahara trade routes. The name of the indigo plant in Hausa is 'baba' (named probably after the people who were believed to have brought it into Hausa land), that is the Berbers, from North Africa, who according to Trimingham (1962) were attending Western Sudan markets long before the advent of Islam and the Europeans.

Similarly, Heathcote (1976) links the origin of indigenous Hausa indigo dyeing process to the orient. He believes that Hausa indigenous indigo dyeing process was imported into Hausa land from the orient. The report of existence of surplus indigo plant in the oriental countries particularly India, China, Java and Japan by Ponting (1980), accorded some credence to Heathcote (1976) and Nasir (1984), reports on the oriental origin of the Hausa indigenous indigo Europe with large quantity of indigo dyes for decades, Dhuinnshleibh (2000) also believes that development in worldwide shipping and trading network was responsible for transporting dyestuffs from all parts of the world to Europe.

In a country view, Towry-Coker and Towry-Coker (1978) believe that the indigo-dyed hand woven strips and garments found in Egyptian tombs during the period of the Pharaohs was an indication that the indigo plant was present in Africa, even though it might not have been specifically cultivated for dyeing at that time. They concluded that this evidence refuted the usual contention that the indigo plant was introduced to West Africa in the seventeenth century from India.

The successful production of a synthetic indigo dye by a German company "Bayer" in 1897, weakened the position of the natural indigo. According to Ponting (1980), the new synthetic indigo was highly standardized, purer and produced better dyeing results than the natural indigo, as a result it pushed the natural indigo out of the world market. Perkin's accidental discovery of the first synthetic dyes in 1856, led to the successful manufacture of various types of synthetic dyestuff which according to Steele (2002), largely replaced the natural dyes world-wide.

Indigenous Dyeing Materials

Prior to the introduction and subsequent acceptance of synthetic indigo, other imported dyes, chemicals and dyed fabrics, the Hausa traditional dyers were renowned for their skill in indigo dyeing. The techniques, equipment and dyeing materials were indigenous and simple. Indigo dyeing among Hausa people was highly a specialist occupation usually for men. Hausa cities, towns and villages had many deep circular dye – pits usually grouped in clusters, but sometimes arranged in rows with a dyer having a minimum of two or more pits for dyeing and rinsing of the dyed yarns, fabrics or garments. Dahiru (1982), Highet (1984) and Heathcote (1976), reported how the indigenous dyers owned several dye pits, practiced dyeing and produced fine dyed yarns, fabrics and garments.

In their separate studies of Hausa indigenous dyeing, Dahiru (1992) and Nasir (1984) observed that the dyeing techniques, equipment and materials, are similar in Hausa land with some slight differences in the names of certain equipments, materials or techniques. For example, Nasir (1984) study of traditional dyeing in Kano showed no significant difference from Dahiru (1992) study of traditional indigo dyeing in Zaria city. For instance, the name of an indigenous dyeing area in Zaria is 'Karofi' instead of 'Marina' as it is popularly known in Kano or Katsina. This does not mean that Zaria people do not call it 'marina' or Kano people do not call it 'karofi.' The two names are the same, it is only that the name 'karofi' is used more in Zaria, while 'marina' is used more in Kano or Katsina.

Indigenous materials and equipment involved in carrying out indigenous dyeing processes as presented by many researchers, which include Dahiru (1992), Nasir (1984), Adetoro (1980), Heathcote (1976), and Eicher (1976) include dye-pits, indigo, wood ash, sediment from the dye-pit (dead remains of used indigo known as 'katsi' in Hausa), long stick, pail, wood, yellow powder from locust bean pod, dry cow dung and guinea corn husk. Although the process of preparing the dye solution slightly varies from one Hausa community to another as Heathcote (1976) observed, the equipment and ingredients are basically the same. Before the advent of foreign fabrics and yarns, indigenous hand spun yarns, hand woven fabrics, and indigenous ready-made garments were the items being dyed.

Dhinnshleibh (2000) stresses that the eighteenth and nineteenth century colonization and the industrial revolution, ensured large scale production and continuous supply of foreign dyestuffs. Advances in science and technology made the production of good dyes (natural and synthetic) chemicals and variety of fabrics increasingly possible and easier. As a result, variety of dyes, chemicals, fabrics, dyeing equipment and materials spread rapidly to different parts of the world, reducing or completely abandoning the use of the indigenous ones.

Modern dyeing equipment, materials and dyeing techniques influenced and encouraged commercial dyeing and the use of dyed indigenous Hausa men's garments and other article of clothing. Colour fastness has always been a serious problem of the traditional dyers, that was why they used to over-load the yarn, Fabric or garment with dyes. The result of the overloading of the dyes was always the rubbing off the access dyes on the skin of the wearer, or on any white or light coloured clothes that are worn together with the dyed ones at the same time.

Towry – Coker and Towry – Coker (1978) observed that the process of the indigenous dyeing depends on the number of dippings in order to obtain the desired shade of colours. Highet (1984) also confirmed that the required shade of blue is determined by the number of dippings and the lengths of time the cloth stays in the dye pits containing the dye solution.

The many number of dippings and the longer period of time the garments or fabrics stay in the dye are all part of the attempt by dyers to satisfy their customers and maintain their indigenous dyers) good commercial dyeing reputation. The higher the number of dippings and number of hours the item of clothing being dyed stays in the dye solution, the better the dye penetration and levelness of the dyeing. Nkeonye (1987) reports similar process in modern commercial dyeing where, he observed that the achievement of commercially acceptable dyeing requires not only that the dyeing be level, but that there must also be good dye penetration.

Involvement in Indigenous Indigo Dyeing

Traditional dyeing process is difficult and time consuming, in addition to the involvement of large number of equipment and materials. The involvement in the traditional dyeing process includes:

1. The process of constructing the dye pits
2. The production of the indigo cakes
3. The preparation (mixture) of the indigo solution for dyeing
4. The actual dyeing process

Each of these process consumes plenty of time and materials for example, Dahiru (1992) and Nasir (1984) confirmed the use of the following tools and materials in the four stages listed above.

- a. Some of the equipment and materials involved in the process of constructing the dye pit are
 1. Digger and hoe
 2. Pail
 3. Sediments from existing dye pits
 4. Dry cow dung
 5. Animal hairs from tanneries
 6. New leaves of thorn shrubs
 7. Guinea corn husk
 8. Empty locust beans pods
 9. Small thatch cover

- b. Production of the indigo cakes
Some of the equipment and materials involve in the production of the indigo cake are
 1. Machet
 2. Sickle
 3. Indigo leaves
 4. Large pots

5. Fairly long stick

The minimum average time taken for the production of the indigo cakes as given by Nasir (1984) is about three days, excluding drying period.

c. Preparation (mixing) of the indigo solution for dyeing. Some of the equipment and materials involve in the preparation or mixing of the indigo dye solution are:

1. Indigo cake
2. Water
3. Sediment from existing dye pits
4. Wood ash
5. Empty locust beans pods
6. Yellow powder from locust beans pods
7. Long Paul.

The average time taken to mix the indigo solution is seven days

d. The actual dyeing

The amount of time consumed during the actual indigenous Hausa indigo dyeing usually depends on the shade and levelness of colour needed. These are determine by the length of time of the item being dyed stayed in the solution and the number of dipping made.

The amount of involvement in the indigenous process as shown above are enormously and tedious. In comparison with the indigenous dyeing processes above, the modern dyeing processes are superior, especially in terms of working flexibility, speed of production, increased productivity, variety, quality and so forth.

For example modern dyeing equipment- such as plastic, iron or aluminum containers (which can easily be bought) are fast replacing the traditional dye pits (where they are still existing). Assorted modern dyes and chemicals, (including synthetic indigo), highly standardized, varied, purer with high colour fastness, have also replace the indigenous ones. Other additional advantages include the availability of safety equipment such as rainboots, protective hand gloves and mask.

The modern dyeing processes equipment and materials made the traditional dyeing and dyes to diminish both in popularity and practice. However, modern dyed fabrics lack the usual aroma and sheen of the indigenous Hausa dyed fabrics produced by the traditional calendaring process. Nasir (1984), Dahiru (1992) and Heathcote (1976) discussed similar processes and agreed that modern dyes, chemicals and other dyeing equipment and materials as agents of influence are responsible for the demise of indigenous indigo dyeing profession today.

Recommendations

Entrepreneurially, this small scale industry can be further encouraged by developing it to boost the Nigerian economy, through technical and financial support from all level of governments in Nigeria and the private sector.

There is also the need to sensitize the owners and managers of the indigenous small scale industries by organizing workshops on production, marketing and management techniques, for the benefit of both the industry and the Nigerian society.

Conclusion

Availability of these modern dyeing equipment, materials and techniques as well as ease of processing and speed of work, led to the demise of the indigenous ones and opened up many job

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opportunities for young Hausa men. Many of them who have taken up modern dyeing profession, are ignorant of the indigenous Hausa indigo dyeing process completely.

The number of modern small scale dyeing industries found in Hausa cities and towns today is high. Some of them combined dyeing with traditional calendaring. Most of the workers are young secondary and tertiary school leavers, who confirmed, that the simplicity, ease of work and training programmes offered by some governmental and no-governmental organizations made them to take up modern dyeing as a profession.

Some of these small scale dyeing industries are fairly big and organized, with many employees. Hanyoyi Ta Alberi, and Mabuga Dyeing Centre in Zaria, Kaduna State are good example of such small dyeing industries. The dyers only carry out plain dyeing, that is single colour dyeing, only in rare occasions that you come across pattern or multicoloured dyeing.

These contemporary indigenous Hausa small scale dyeing industries play an important role in the social, industrial and economic development of Nigeria. One of their contributions is the provision of productive employment to many Nigerians.

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