



Catch them young

The Fine Arts students of Stella Maris College learnt the art of natural dyeing at a five-day workshop sponsored by Kaivalam

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“It was fascinating to learn how colours can be derived from fruits, leaves and flowers and how to use them in natural dyes,” say Meera and Paritha, postgraduate students of textile and graphics at Stella Maris College.

The process of learning how to use natural dyes was taught by the Kaivalam trust at a five-day workshop that concluded last weekend.

“We learnt everything from scratch – from processing the fabric, preparing the dye and applying it, to tying it in a certain way to get the desired pattern. Even fabrics tied randomly turned out to look unique,” says Meera. “The process involves tying the fabric and keeping it aside for at least two days. When the knot is removed you’d be surprised at the pattern that emerges.” The workshop has enabled students to process fabric on their own.

Mul, Kota or bleached cotton fabric is used for natural dyeing. Preprocessing of the fabric involves destarching and scoring. Then, it is soaked in a solution made of soap nut and boiled. The fabric is then medium-dried, and when still damp, taken to the dye bath. At the workshop, blouse materials, stoles and dupattas were made by the students.

Mahalingam Vadivel, who retired in 2015, as assistant director, Weavers Service Centre, Bengaluru, was the resource person for this workshop. He has been actively involved in natural dyeing for the past 38 years, and since his retirement, is on a mission to popularise natural dyeing techniques.

“Natural dyeing is eco-friendly and environment-friendly, and most importantly, human-friendly,” he says. In Tamil Nadu, the most commonly used natural dye materials are indigo (avuri leaves or *Indigofera tinctoria*), pomegranate rind, kadukkai poo (*Myrobalan*), manjistha or Indian Madder, chaval



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kodi (*Oldenlandia umbellata*) and surulipattai or Ratan Jot, to derive the various colours. When jaggery and iron are mixed in water and allowed to ferment in a clay pot for 21 days, it turns black, and this dye can be used to get black colour.

This is the first-ever natural dye workshop that Kaivalam has conducted. The aim is to conduct workshops in schools and colleges to create awareness among the student community regarding vanishing indigenous crafts and artisans, says Gayathri Srikanth of Kaivalam Trust.

“Awareness on natural dyes among the younger generation goes a long way in saving our environment. Sustainable fashion being the buzz word today, these students can generate a sustainable income using natural dyes,” says Srikanth.



Save Nature
Students display their work at the workshop • SR RAGHUNATHAN