

More on Natural Colourants for use in Sustainable Textiles



Technical definition

A mineral or non-toxic and biodegradable substance produced by a living organism that is solubilizable (dye) or dispersible (pigment) in a permitted carrier (obtained from sustainable sources and completely biodegradable - except inorganic substances - and non-toxic at the interacting concentrations to humans, animals, plants and aquatic life) and which is coloured or becomes coloured after being acted upon by enzymes, or oxidized by oxygen, or both, and can be applied to fibre/yarn/fabric directly, or with the aid of aluminium and/or iron mordants, or deposited within the substrate by fermentative/electrolytic reduction followed by oxidation with oxygen to yield a coloured fibre/yarn/fabric with an acceptable degree of fastness.

Natural dyes and Ayurveda

Natural dyes and Ayurveda are closely linked. The traditional Chipa block printers of Rajasthan have a saying – jisme rang hai usme dawai hai (what contains colour also contains medicine). Doctors deliver nicotine, clonidine, opioids, isosorbide nitrate, etcetera, through skin patches. Some say that natural dyes that leach out from the fabric onto the skin can be absorbed through it and can help heal.

Manjistha (Rubia Cordifolia) is listed as one of the best blood-purifying herbs. Studies have shown that it regulates blood pressure and blood vessel constriction, and helps prevent formation of blood clots. The herb supports the natural functions of the lymphatic system, allowing optimal nutrition to reach the cells and helping to remove wastes from the body.

Manjistha is also used to treat raised uric acid levels, arthritis associated with gout, glandular swellings, recurring skin infections and other skin diseases such as pigmentation anomalies and leucoderma. The herb works very well both internally and externally to promote skin glow and lustre. It also helps remove pimples, freckles and other discolorations, and promotes the healing of skin tissues damaged by injury or infection.

Myrobalan (Terminalia chebula or harda): Part of the mordant complex, myrobalan is used for all colours except indigo. Along with alum it gives anti-microbial properties to the fabric and prevents body odour. Myrobalan (an ingredient of triphala) is very important to Ayurveda and traditional medicine. The medicine Buddha in Tibetan depictions is shown holding this plant in his right hand. Siddha practitioners recommend that it should be ingested every evening for long life. It controls acidity, heartburn, flatulence, ulcers, diarrhoea/dysentery, constipation, stomach bleeding, mouth ulcers, skin blemishes and hair loss. Some say that in dyed fabric the myrobalan tannin binds various air-borne pollutants, preventing them from reaching and being absorbed by the skin.

We encourage further research in this field!

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