Shibori

A Brief Definition

With ***shibori*** the dyer works in concert with the materials, not in an effort to overcome their limitations, but to allow them full expression. An element of the unexpected is always present. All the variables attendant upon shaping the cloth and all the influences that control the events in the dye vat or pot serve to remove some of the *shibori* process from human control. An analogy is that of a potter firing a wood-burning kiln. All the technical conditions have been met, but what happens in the kiln may be a miracle or a disaster. Chance and accident also give life to the *shibori* process, and this contributes to its special magic and strongest appeal

Shibori is a Japanese term. Shibori comes from the verb root “shiboru” - to wring squeeze or press, and would be used to describe wringing out the washing or a floor cloth.
The emphasis is upon the action performed on the cloth.

Tie-dye is the popular name for shibori in the Western world. However this term does not fully describe the great diversity of techniques which have been developed or the degree of skill and knowledge required to execute them.

Shibori is the act of compressing a fabric to create a resist. Cloth records the shape and pressure that was applied to it as a pattern/texture. It is a mechanical/structural resist.
Shibori is used as a resist when dyeing in order to create pattern. Shibori is used in combination with heat setting on polyester in order to create a permanent texture.

In *shibori* there *is* a right way to do things, but, at the same time, there hardly exists a wrong way. The traditional way gives contemporary artists a framework not only to explore shaping methods but also to modify the materials and tools.

Taking a 2D piece of fabric and manipulating it into 3D form through various combinations of the following:-

- stitching and gathering
- binding
- clamping
- capping (covering with a waterproof material)
- folding
- crumpling
- plaiting
- knotting
- pinching
- twisting

Many cultures have their own shaped resist techniques with their own specific terms. Shibori has become recognised as the umbrella term for all such shaped resist techniques.

Dyes

There are different types of dyes for different applications.

Acid Dyes were developed for dyeing wool, and have an affinity with other protein fibres, like silk. The colours are more intense and brilliant than direct dyes, but in other respects they are similar. They have moderate light fastness and poor to fair wet fastness. Steaming is required to fix the colour.

Fibre Reactive Dyes, as their name suggests react with the fibre. (They were developed for cellulose fibres.) At some point in the process an alkali is added to cause the dyes to react with the fibre. Their fullest intensity is achieved with cotton, but they perform well on silk. They possess a greater degree of light and wet fastness than acid or direct dyestuffs. They are often labeled as a “cold water dye”, being applied in two parts.

You can determine for yourself whether a dye is reactive - if the instructions call for the use of washing soda as a “fixative” you know it belongs to this group.

They require special handling: the solution cannot be stored for any length of time. Once the dyestuff is mixed with water it will gradually lose its potency, and it will not fix on the fabric despite the fact that the solution will still have its full brilliance on application.

Apply these dyes a shade darker than you actually desire because a small portion of the dye will sit on the fibre and not react with it.

Direct dyestuffs can be “fixed” by steam or “cold-fixed” Cold-fixing of the colour will involve the addition of an alkali preparation with a pH value high enough to cause a reaction between dyestuff and fabric. Steam-fixing involves the addition of a weak alkali, such as sodium bicarbonate to the dyestuff solution just before applying the “paint” to the fabric. During steaming the heat breaks down the sodium bicarbonate to form a more alkaline compound which triggers the chemical reaction between dyestuff and fibre.

Keep in mind that silk, being a protein fibre, is damaged by alkali solutions, which means that colouring of the fabric with these agents may well occur at the expense of the handle of the fabric and its longevity.

Vegetable Dyestuffs: Until the development of synthetic dyestuffs in the 19th Century all dyestuffs came from natural sources.

The extraction of dyestuffs from natural materials requires a lot of work, often just in finding the source material, let alone its preparation.

Their application often requires the use of mordants, ie chemicals with which the fabric is treated so that it will accept the colour as required. A different mordant used with the same dyestuff can result in a different colour. Many mordants used in vegetable dyeing are hazardous, and should be used with extreme care, by experienced dyers only.

A Word of Warning: All dyestuffs, whether natural or synthetic, are active chemicals and should be treated as such. Treat them with the same degree of care and common sense you would use when handling any chemical (household or other).

* Wear rubber gloves, or use a barrier cream, to prevent possible absorption of the dyestuffs and accompanying chemical agents through the skin.

* After working with dyestuffs scrub your hands and nails with soap and water. Do not use bleach to remove colour from your skin, as this will break down its natural defenses.

* If working with powdered dyestuffs place dampened paper around the work area, as this will tend to trap any spillage.

* Powdered dyestuffs can be hazardous if inhaled, so work in a draught-free environment and replace caps on containers immediately after use.

* Once utensils have been used for handling dyestuffs they should be reserved for that use only.

* Work in a well-ventilated area to avoid the possibility of inhaling any vapours.

* Do not smoke, drink, or eat while working with dyestuffs.

* Dispose of concentrated dyestuffs thoughtfully, and in accordance with local regulations.