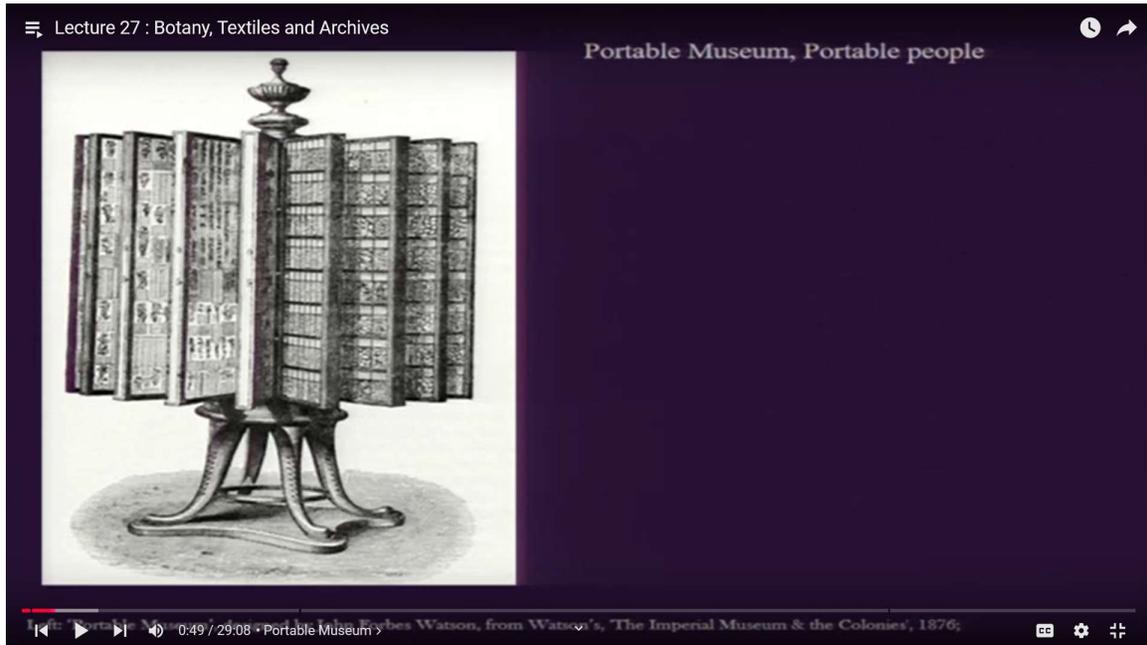


Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices
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Lecture – 27

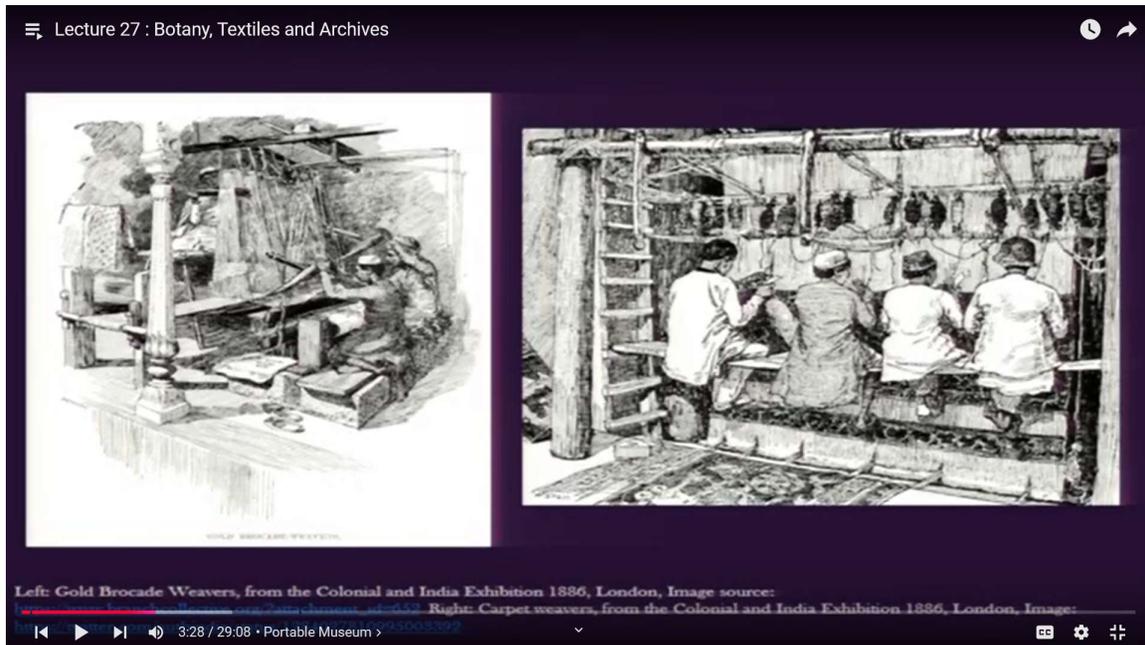
Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in the second instalment of our week on colonial interventions and khadi. And So, in the last lecture we started discussing on this idea of portable museum and then how people were also, made movable. So, it's kind of like, I mean of course people move, but at the same time how we can see during this time for the sake of this exhibitions and some of these projects that artisans were moved from one place to another as part of the display. So, what is this idea



of the portable museum? So, as we can see that after this huge success of this 1851 exhibition project in London (that is the great exhibition 1851), we see that there was a drive towards having systematic catalogues and at the same time like I mean collection of the objects for people to see them, to appreciate them and also, to support the British government for the colonial rule. So, for that thing we see that during this time a number of people came forward who were involved in making the museums, archives and so on. And one of them would be James Forbes Watson and he was documenting a large number of textiles. The textile documentation was not because he was a textile enthusiast

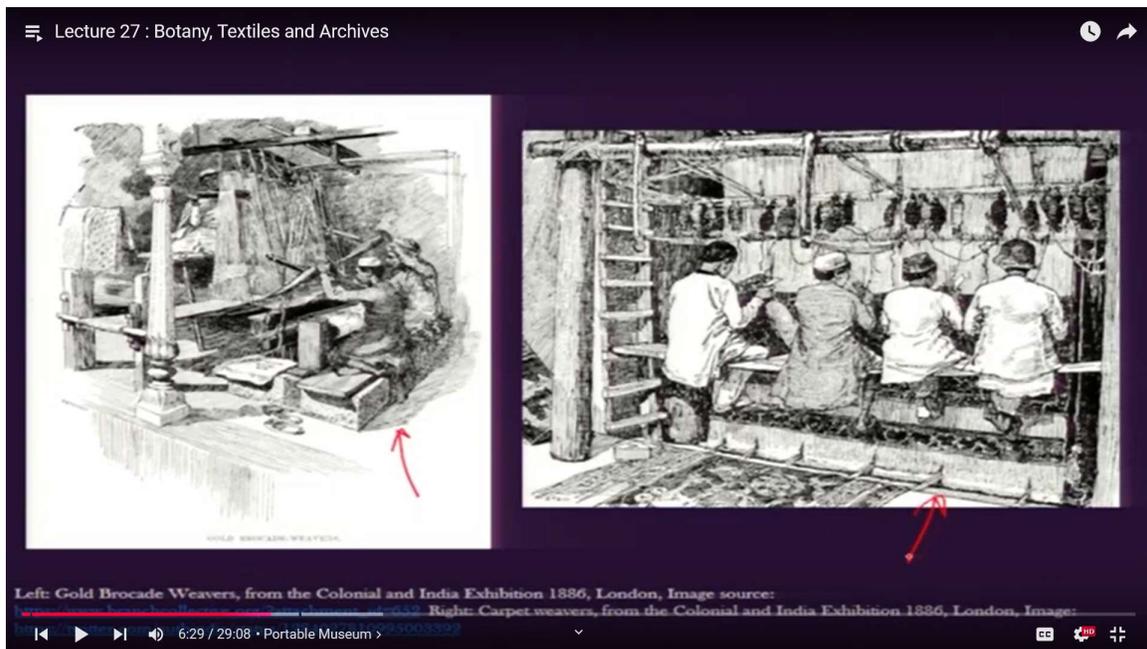
but his focus was more in the commerce around textiles. So, in the 1860s and so on we see that I mean he had accumulated a large variety of textile from the Indian subcontinent and eventually he came up with this display strategy in which we can see this movable or like I mean this portable setup that we have on screen which was used or like I mean which was called as a portable museum. In which we can sort of like the viewers can walk around this area and also, can like I mean sort of move this vertical display screens in which like all the textiles, swatches and other objects are sort of kept, and people can read about them, see the fragments of them and sort of ... enhance the ... experience of visiting these venues. Now this kind of portable museum display was made especially for the people who cannot really come to London. So, this kind of portable display setup can be sent to different places and then how those can be sort of seen by many people who cannot visit London or like I mean those metropolitan centres. So, these kind of strategies we find that they were also, made possible in the 1870s. Even today we see that I mean some of the museums in the Indian subcontinent and other places still have this kind of display setups in which like I mean the viewers can flip through like I mean certain display screens. So, for example the craft museum in Delhi and other places and not surprisingly that a number of these displays are of textiles because it also, started with textiles in the 1870s.

Now with these things we see that as I have already mentioned that some of the people were also, made portable and they were definitely not made portable on their own wish



but like I mean the British government they wanted these people to be present at the exhibition venue. Now this idea or like I mean perhaps like I mean one can say that I mean why there was a need for the artisans to sort of be present in the exhibition venue is to sort of give authenticity to the kind of objects which were displayed in England or in part of the Western Europe. So, we see that I mean this one particular exhibition that is called the Colonial and India Exhibition in 1886. Now if we see the transition that in the 1851 exhibition, it was called like the Great Exhibition and in which like all the colonial countries which were under the British rule were sort of like I mean objects from all those countries were displayed and of course, the India section was one of the most prominent ones in that one. But then their interest to sort of like I mean showcase the craftsmanship or like I mean the artisanal objects of the Indian subcontinent that made them eager to sort of dedicate exhibitions which were more sort of focused on India and as I have already mentioned that this kind of India focused exhibition for example this one in 1886 were not really to praise the artisans in India. Of course, like certain kind of appreciation were there for the artisans, but it was the underlying idea one can see is that I mean what kind of wondrous (so called wondrous items) objects were produced in this country

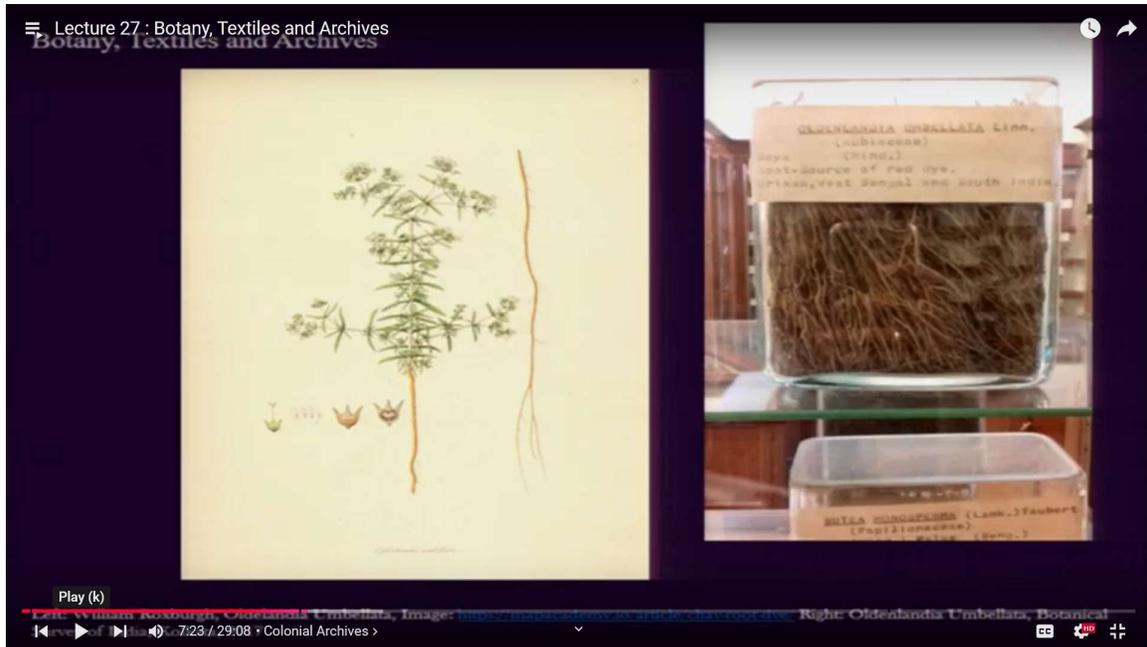
which was now being ruled by the British government. So, this kind of this net sense of hierarchy, that the hierarchy to rule over the land this objects and then eventually on the people is something that was very much ingrained in this kind of exhibition strategies and for that reason these people were also, treated as the objects which were snatched or taken from the land and then transported to the museum collections in Europe. Then of course like I mean these people who were also, sort of brought from the Indian subcontinent and brought to the exhibition venue for people to see them live at work. Of course like I mean the master artisans they came back to India and some of them had also, sort of contributed to making of different kind of other designs and other forms of craftsmanship; but then we can see that I mean what kind of intention was there in for these people to travel to England or other parts of Western Europe for these exhibitions.



So, these are two images from this exhibition in which we can see that the silk brocade weavers of Varanasi and then like I mean we also, have the carpet weavers here. So, this vertical setup of doing carpet and then of course like I mean you know this draw loom setup in which we see the weavers are sitting here and then like the draw person is there to like sort of I mean live the work. So, this kind of like I means this elaborate setup with loom, people and then the columns and everything all were brought from India and to the exhibition venue the same thing happened for the carpet weavers as well. So, this kind of

elaborate displays were made all around textiles in the 19th century for sort of like I mean as part of this colonial cataloguing at the same time colonial archiving not only of the objects but also, of the people.

Now if we see this the idea of like I mean how this archives they sort of started taking place or like I mean they started shaping up, we see that I mean the roots of making

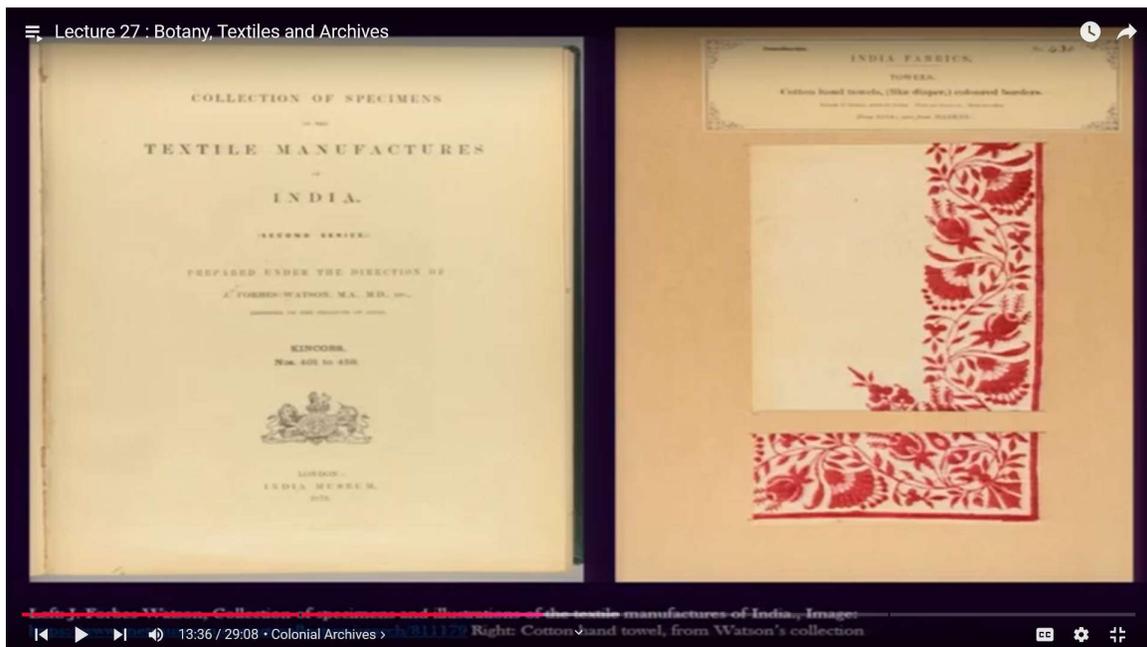


archives were perhaps there in the late 18th century. So, some of the things we can see that how all those things which were collected eventually... So, for example we have an image of this die stuff in the right side of the screen (will come to the description) but all those like I mean either the objects or like the documentation (the records) all of them were when they were accumulated in initially for this great exhibition in 1851 and then like I mean the subsequent documentation and so on from the India office, library and other places. So, then with all those objects there was a need for establishing a museum space. So, that all those objects can be stored in one place in central London and that is how we see the South Kensington Museum that came up in 1857 and a large group of objects which were displayed in the 1851 exhibition they were directed to this South Kensington Museum. Of course, like I mean today, where the Victoria Albert Museum stands in London, that is, the Kensington area (South Kensington), and it was initially called the South Kensington Museum. So, this kind of like I mean history we can see that

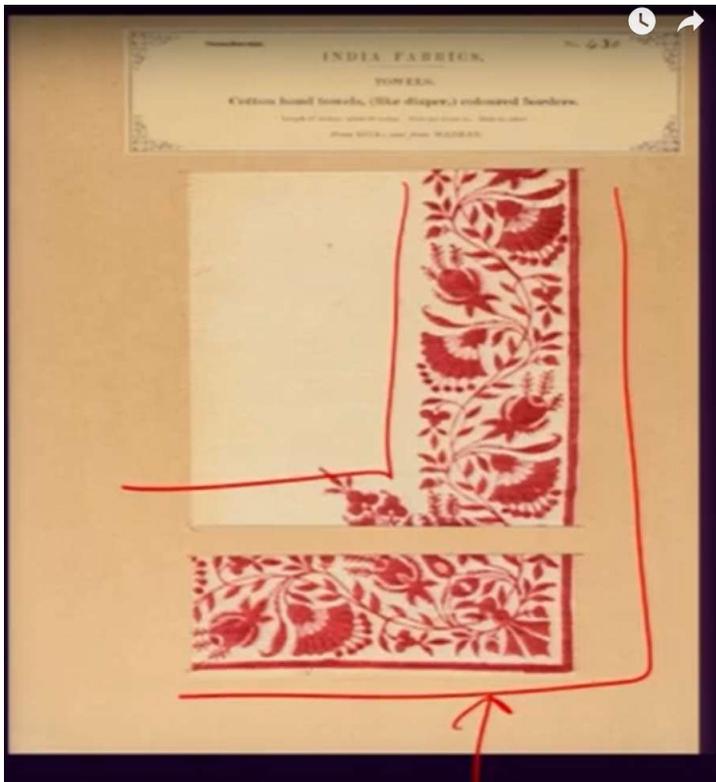
what this archiving, this process of making the archive and then also, this documentation cataloging and everything were responsible for. So, making of these museums and also, making people to sort of like I mean be part of them and also, like I mean understanding hierarchy and so many different things. In all these things as I have mentioned multiple times that textile played a very important role. So, if we see that some of the early documentations and perhaps like I mean we can see in the field of botany and of course like documentation of people and so on, in this ones we see that there were plants and different kind of vegetal motifs and everything were sort of like I mean drawn and catalogued. So, for example some of the early documentation would be by William Roxburgh in the late 18th century and early 19th century. So, for example in the left side of the screen we have an image of that came from William Roxburgh's documentation of the plant in the coast of Coromandel and that was first published in 1795 and William Roxburgh was also, responsible for sort of setting up the Botanical Garden which is across the river from the city of Calcutta which was the colonial capital and during that time. So, what we see that I mean this the documentation of the plants and eventually like I mean this minute drawings were then engraved on metal plate, they were printed on paper, then they were made into books and folios and then they were hand colored. So, in this image as you can see that I mean the lines were engraved (metal engraved) and then like hand coloring was done on the top of them for making them lifelike and the entire process was actually a collaborative one in which a number of unknown Indian artisans contributed to. But, unfortunately or which was also, a very strategic move in which we see that I mean the Indian artisans were never named but the printers and then of course William Roxburgh who compiled all the information and made them into like these books they were recognized. So, this kind of like I mean documentation we see in the field of botany that started taking place in the late 18th century. But then when we go through William Roxburgh's project we also, see that what kind of plants he was interested in and a number of plants we can see even in in Roxburgh's this this folio in the plants of the coast of Coromandel his documentation starts with this famed Chaya Root which is this dye yielding plant which was thought to be responsible or largely responsible for making the brilliant red of the Coromandel textiles. So one can see that I mean what kind of plants he was also interested in that there were different kind of plants

but the plants which were used in dyeing or different kind of medicinal purposes or some kind of activity which had economic value. So, those were given priority and for that reason we find that the Chaya Root which was used for yielding red dye was prioritized in his documentation. Now this is in the right side of the screen we have like I mean this dried Chaya Roots which comes from the collection of the Botanical Survey of India in Calcutta and similar kind of like I mean this bunch of Chaya Roots were also, sent to the Victoria Albert Museum (I mean that time it would be the South Kensington Museum) with like I mean the proper documentation. I'd also, like to sort of draw attention to this kind of levels and in which we see like I mean how the scientific name like *Oldenlandia umbellata* and all those ones which would be like I mean written there and then what species or what family of the plants Chaya Root come from all those things will be indicated and then like the geographical location from which this kind of plants are sort of found are also, noted in the last sentence here and then it is also, noted that I mean what kind of purpose it serve, like I mean the root source for red dye. So, all these different documentation we find them to be there when this Chaya Roots were collected and this is just one example among many for in which like I mean the same kind of documentation strategy was applied to. This is how like this extensive catalogs and the archives were produced.

So, if this is like one way of doing the documentation and as I have mentioned that I



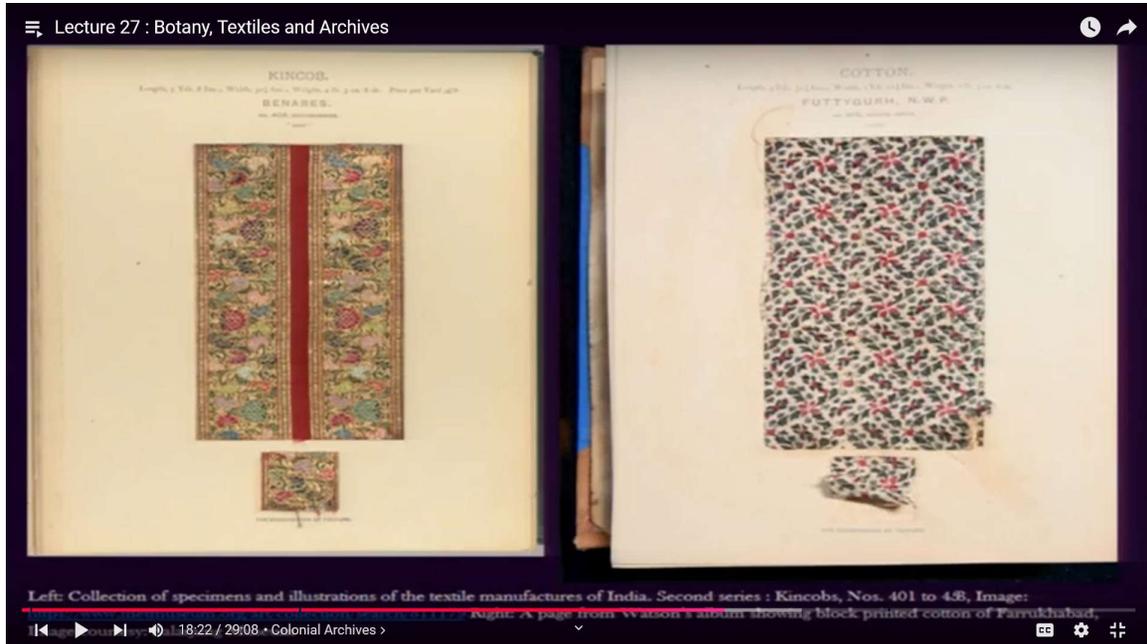
mean even though like Roxborough's documentation was primarily focused in botany but the role of textile was undeniable and that's because of its relevance in dyeing and of course like I mean how the textiles were economically beneficial for the British. Perhaps that is also one of the reason in which we see that extensive documentation or how this dye stuff works was also, something that was of interest to the British. Eventually like understanding the chemical configuration of the Chaya Root that led to the making of this synthetic dye that is Alizarin in the 19th century. So, with those things we see that Roxborough's collection there was also, the different other kind of documentation and cataloging that took place in the 19th century and one of them of course we have already started talking about it would be James Forbes Watson. Watson was someone who was there in 1860s 1870s in India (parts of Southern India mostly) and was very much interested in keeping the trade records. So, in his this extensive catalogs (which are known as the Collection of Specimens: Textile Manufacturers of India) we also, see that I mean he didn't just stop at the specimens which were collected from the textile manufacturers but also, have collected images or like I mean made the images of the people who wear those textiles. So, it's the textile as specimen and then like I mean how



these textiles are actually used by people; so, collecting both this kind of information. Now what he did in his albums was actually collecting textile swatches and he pasted them on his album. So, for example the one we see in the right side of the screen in which we see there is this cotton hand towel (a fragment of a cotton hand towel) and one can imagine that this is just the border of it and that is the reason there is this continuation of the motif which runs in the vertical border and

then how that also, sort of continues in the horizontal way as well. So, this is something we see and then of course like I mean the corner designed something we have already studied in the shawls and different other textiles. So, this is something we can see that what was happening in Forbes Watson's documentation that he was actually collecting textile swatches and then like I mean pasting them on the paper almost like pasting the dried botanical specimens and then we also, see on the top of the page there is this similar kind of leveling which was going on in the other specimens. So, for example if we compare it with like I mean this botanical specimen and here they also, followed similar kind of leveling which was very carefully done and then pasted on the top of this each of these folios and here we see that I mean of course that from where it is collected it is from India and he also, had like I mean certain specimens from Central Asia and so on. So, this is a collected from India and then we also, see that I mean it is prominently written that I mean it's a cotton hand towel with like I mean the colored borders which means like I mean it is block printed and of course with red dye and then this is something which was perhaps like I mean collected from Madras. So, either it is made in Madras or like I mean somewhere in the Coromandel region and as we already know that how this Chaya Roots were something which were largely used in the Coromandel region. So one can imagine that I mean making of this kind of course cotton hand towels and then being printed with red is something that would be there in the Coromandel region as well. So, this is the kind of documentation we find that he was in terms of like I mean documenting he was aware that not all the textiles he wanted to sort of make part of this archives can be collected as a whole and that's the reason he was collecting fragments of them cutting them up in small small swatches and then pasting them on these catalogs and that is how the catalogs ended up in the museums. Whereas like a number of those textiles and the cultures which he was studying they definitely could not be contained within the archives.

Now what other things we can see that I mean in some of the other albums we also, see that I mean he made this there was not really one uniform way of like I mean doing this albums. Of course we have this individual folios and in the center stage we have the

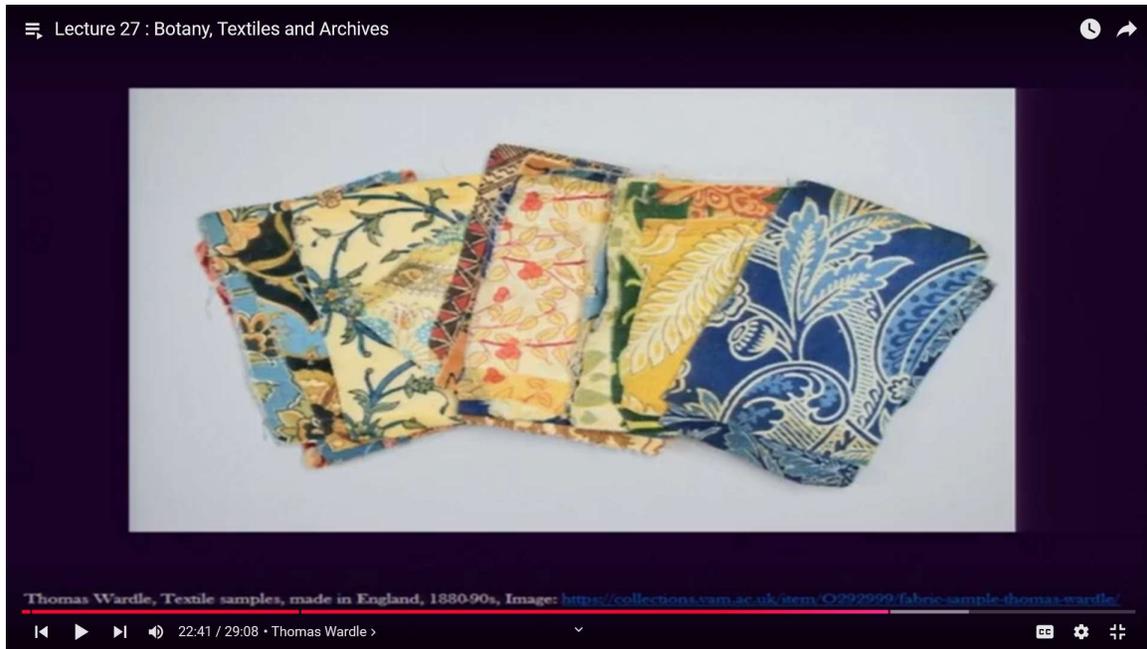


textile swatches which are prominently presented there but then like in some cases we also, have the smaller swatches and of course for like I mean the examination of the texture as it is written there is there presented and then like I mean there is no level that is pasted on the top of it, but it was kind of like how no level was pasted on the top of it but then it was printed on this individual folio pages that what kind of textile we are looking at. So, there are those very expensive and at the same time like I mean highly prized and complicated brocades like Kimkhab and like I mean this weft brocades and that we see from Varnasi and other places. So, this is a Kimkhab from Banares and in which we can see like I mean a number of colors are used for executing this floral motifs on this textile. Then this became part of, like, I mean, this extensive catalogues which they have created during this time.

Now the other aspect of this kind of cataloguing was to sort of, like, I mean, give us an idea about different kinds of textile-making practices that took place in the Indian subcontinent. So, for example, the making of the block printed textiles in the Coromandel region, on the coast of Gujarat and so on those were well known and of course like I

mean the early modern trade documents at the same time like some of the surviving early modern textiles and so on they have attested the presence of this kind of textiles from these region Forbes Watson's documentation also, sort of like I mean makes clear that there were other centers of block printing as well. So, for example here I just wanted to bring up one example and that is from Fatehgarh in UP which is not that far from Kanpur. It is around 130-140 kilometer from Kanpur and this was also, a prominent center for making block printed fabrics, where wooden blocks were created and then like I mean block printing were done on the bank of the river Ganges. Of course, like I mean Fatehgarh and Farrukhabad these two places which are side by side and were also on the trade route. Since the river Ganges was very much active in terms of like I mean for commute for trade and other relations, we see that places like Farrukhabad and Fatehgarh were very much well connected to the trader communities. So, this is something we see that I mean what kind of like I mean this block printed cottons were produced in Fatehgarh and Farrukhabad the places which are much more sort of understudied in the history of Indian block printing and of course like I mean dying and so on. So, when like in Watson's documentation it came up in the 19th century and today we see that I mean there are some block printers or like wood block makers in Farrukhabad. So, we can imagine like I mean certain parts of the practices which were there in the 19th century and if we compare them with today, we can see that I mean what are the aspects of the practice which are there and which were perhaps like I mean transformed or lost over time. So, this kind of documentation of these textiles are also, very important not just for the colonial documentation in the 19th century, but even for the researchers today to understand what kind of like I mean practices have prevailed in certain regions, what existed, and then like I mean what's made through time, what sustained and what did not So, all these different aspects of the practice, documentation, cataloging and so on all those things come together when we consider these aspects of cataloging and documentation.

The other thing we also, see and that would be perhaps like I mean from the some of the other catalogers or like I mean perhaps the other people who were very much invested in documentations. One of them would be Thomas Wardle, and Thomas Wardle was



someone who was a textile enthusiast. So, unlike Forbes Watson who was primarily interested in the trade documents and that's the reason even though he had the textile swatches and those samples and he made this minute documentation of all those textile samples he could find, but his primary interest was in the cost and then like I mean the other economic aspects of these textiles and not really in the visual aspects of the textile or the material, the sensory aspects of the textile. Now, Thomas Wardle was a contemporary of Forbes Watson but his interest was very different. So, he wanted to study this different kind of textile making that prevailed in South Asia and then he was someone who wanted to implement this knowledge in his own textile making. So, he was someone who was also, an industrialist and he was a dyer. So, he wanted to sort of implement the knowledge of studying these textiles in South Asia to make his own organization or like I mean the platform through which he produced his own textiles in the late 19th century in England. So, these are some of the textile samples we find which were made by Thomas Wardle in the 1880s and 1890s. So, all these samples were made in England, but then we can clearly see that with, like, I mean, the kind of the continuous

floral motifs and then the colour scheme and then, of course, in the flow of things. So, how all those different aspects are very much studied from the textiles in South Asia in the Indian subcontinent and then they were also, sort of like I mean experimented with when Thomas Wardle carried out these experiments in England in the late 19th century. So, this kind of exercises that also, tell us that the documentation, cataloging even though a lot of those practices were very much centered around the colonial administration and their workings, but then there were also, people who had different kind of intentions and that's the reasons their interventions were different. So, for example, if we see like Forbes Watson's documentation that sort of led us to sort of like understanding the different kind of textiles in the 19th century and then their impact and of course, like I mean the economy around them, then we see that I mean in Thomas Wardle's documentation what happened was of course he did extensive documentation on the dyeing techniques. Those large albums with the samples of dyed fabrics in cotton, in silk, in wool and so on from various parts of the Indian subcontinent were made by Thomas Wardle like I mean around 15 of those albums are there in the Botanical Survey of India office in Calcutta and then like I mean the rest of the albums are there in England. So, this kind of extensive documentation were done by Thomas Wardle. But he was not primarily interested in sort of like I mean the economy and then like I mean also, about like I mean all the details about the value like the economic value and they like the trade relations and everything around cloth but he was also, a maker he was also, an industrialist and he was also, someone who was very much interested in recreating these textiles in his own workshop or studio. So, that was the driving force for him to collect the textiles and sort of make them as part of his life. So, we can see that even within like this colonial scheme of documentation and cataloging and so on, there were many different kind of stakeholders and then they contributed to the documentation of these textiles in many different ways. With that what we also, see that I mean Thomas Wardle was someone who was known to people like William Morris who was prime figure in the art and craft movement in in England in the late 19th century. So, some of the ethos that they had for example, in terms of understanding the way of production which is not primarily industrial, not really a mass-produced object that they were aiming for but they were sort of like I mean interested in the other forms of production which was much more laborious, time

consuming, but at the same time like I mean in which the maker comes in direct contact with the materials, the techniques and so on were something that they were interested in. For those reasons what we see there is that how William Morris's engagement in the art and craft movement, Thomas Wardle's engagement in documentation and then eventually recreating textiles or making his own textiles all those things sort of intersected. So, the colonial documentation of the textiles in the Indian subcontinent that also, made possible of dissemination of the knowledge about Indian textiles to parts of Western Europe. We'll continue this discussion not only in terms of the dissemination of the knowledge but also, representation of the indigenous people in this colonial archives and how then textile plays an important role there as well, in the subsequent lectures. Thank you