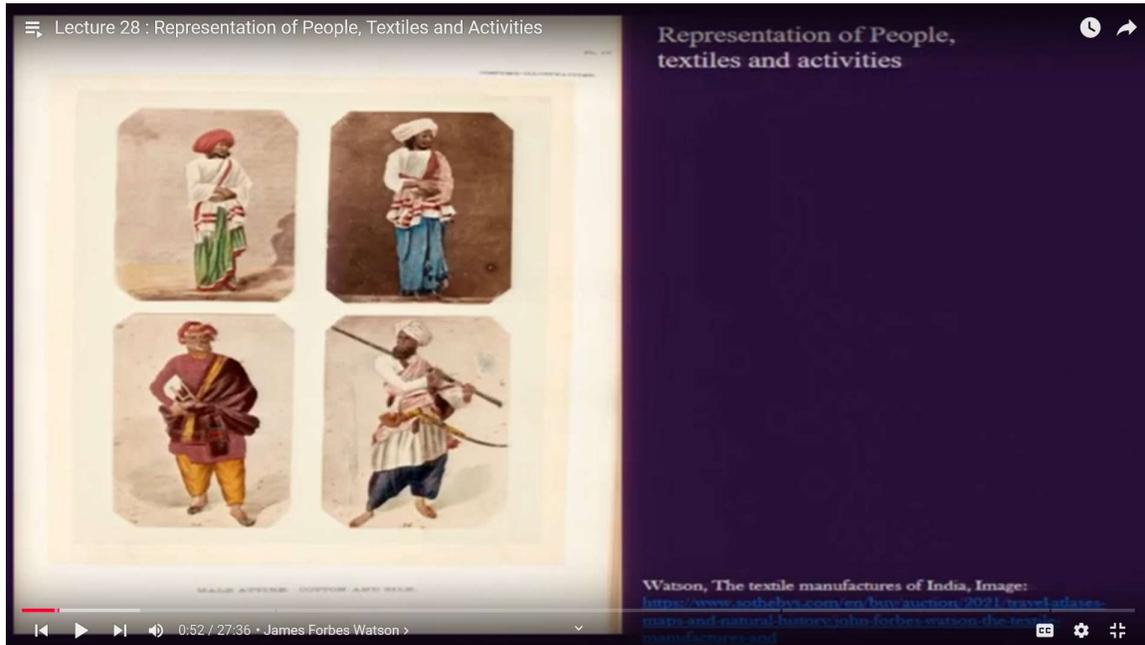


**Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices**  
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**Week – 06**  
**Lecture – 28**

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta, and we are here in the third instalment of our week on the colonial interventions in Khadi and we have been talking about the use of textiles and representation of textiles in the colonial archive and then how textiles also played a very important role not only in terms of trade but also marking identity and then also like I mean how the idea of community was sort of constituted around textiles (the kind of textiles which are used). So, we will continue this discussion today by starting with some of the albums and then the representation of the textiles.

So, in this discussion, we will be looking at the representation of people, textiles and activities, these three kinds of things, and we will see that I mean how these three things



were interconnected in the colonial archive or the way in which we see that I mean there were particular kinds of archives were created or albums or documentations were created and in which we see that this intertwining of the idea of how textile activities (activities can mean like I mean different kind of actions that can be occupation, that can be like day

to day activities and so on). Then, of course, the prime focus stays on people, the people who the British government was ruling over. So, we will start with the discussion of James Forbes Watson's album that we have already started talking about, and this is again like we are going back to the textile manufacturers of India. Here we see that. I mean, there is this section in which there is also a dedicated sort of focus on the costumes used by people in the Indian subcontinent. So, primarily we find that in Watson's album, there are those textile swatches if we remember that, I mean, there are those pages and in which, like I mean, there are those prominent textile swatches at the center of the page, and then there can be a smaller swatch for like examination at the bottom, and then on the top there is this one level in which we see all the details about the textile is written, and that is how we see each and every page is arranged and mostly this scheme is continued across the all the other albums there.

So, in terms of the album or, like I mean the section on costume what we see is that this kind of pages in which there are those again this in this rectangular pages four images or more than one image usually we find them to be there and then the way in which like I mean the images are arranged one can see that these are all images of full size (not full size like I mean these are images of human beings and we can see them from head to toe) and the reason for that is actually to sort of understand that what kind of costumes people wear in the Indian subcontinent. By that I do not mean that they just had this innocent curiosity in terms of understanding that how these costumes are used by people but it is also about like what kind of material is there and then what does the material say to us (to the readers to the viewers and the catalogers). Then in the kind of material, in the kind of execution of this kind of costumes and everything else they also come back to the idea of this community identity something we find that to be there very much ingrained in a lot of documentation projects that the colonial government had undertaken. We can we can start talking about that from the anthropological documentations that started from the late 18th century and 19th century we see that a lot of this kind of documentations took place. So what happens in terms of this anthropological documentation? I mean it is a kind of way to understand the features of people and by features it can start with like I mean the facial features, the color of the body, of course the racial distinction remained a very

important part of this kind of documentation. It was a deliberate or perhaps like I mean it's not just deliberate but also it was kind of a strong trust we can find that the documentators (or like I mean the catalogers) were interested in to show the racial difference between the Western Europeans and the South Asians. That remained as a way for which they could always claim their superiority on the people they were ruling upon. Then apart from the color of the body we also find that particular kind of facial features, bodily features and then like hairstyle, beard and everything else those things were taken in account and those could also tell the catalogers about like I mean what kind of people they are looking at. So if we think about the botanical documentations or like the zoological documentations it was very similar to the way in which we also find the human beings were also documented by looking at the external features so again we are going back to this idea about reading visually so that's what the catalogers were doing predominantly that reading this figures visually try to understand what all kind of visual specificities this figures or like the people they have. Why I say figures instead of like I mean calling them people all the time is because that is how they were treated it's almost like those samples in a lab and then they can be studied minutely and then like their features can be added to the archive that they were creating. In this case we find that I mean alongside the bodily features the other thing that comes up very importantly is the depiction of textiles. In this page of this album what we find that there are two people in the upper half of this image and then these two people they seem to be in a very similar posture and their turban style and the way they're wrapping their lower part of the body with a lungi or a dhoti kind of attire is also very similar. Then they're wearing a Jama on the upper part of the body and then they have a shoulder cloth with a fairly big shoulder cloth that's kind of like I mean covers one of their shoulders and then it also sort of like I mean wraps around their waist. So this is how we find it and then the kind of distinction in color a lot of time the colors which were used there and the lot of time like I mean the way of wearing a turban and then also the kind of patterns and everything else would be used in this kind of costumes would also mean a lot about like what kind of people we are looking at, from which community they belong to and everything else. So seeing textiles in this case is also sort of like I mean seeing the visible marks of a community in for the catalogers. So we can see that I mean how textiles were understood in the colonial

archives as a very important aspect of understanding the people. Then in the lower part of the image we see that I mean there are two figures and one person has dyed their beard in perhaps in henna and that's the reason we see this kind of like I mean this brownish tone in the beard and then like I mean the both these people they seem to be from warrior clan and so that's the reason they are carrying either stick or dagger and sword and everything else. So that there we find that the kind of dressing is also different however this person in the left seems to be definitely from higher strata compared to like I mean the other people that we see in the same album. Because this person definitely is wearing expensive silk with like I mean perhaps very borders and that's the reason we have like I mean the golden borders in this shoulder cloth that we see. I mean in all these cases we do see that I mean there is a lower garment except for this man we see all of them they're sort of like I mean wrapping an untailed fabric around their loins. But here what we see that I mean this man is the only person who's perhaps wearing a pajama or trousers. So apart from that what we see that all of them they're wearing a jama and then this shoulder cloth, turban and of course a lower garment. In this case what we see that I mean this old man is someone who's distinctive from the other three people because the other three people seem to be wearing cotton, whereas this man in the left lower left is wearing silk. If we think about the kind of like I mean depiction of people from the court and people who belong to the commoners realm would be depicted in very different manner if we think about the way in which like miniature paintings and other visual representations before the colonial era would represent them. So in terms of that we can see if we remember the miniature paintings and so on there we see the clear distinction and also like the hierarchy between the people who belong to the court and then the commoners. But in this case what we see that I mean all these people are almost like I mean treated at least on the surface equally and that's the reason we find that it's a new scheme of documentation in which we find that different people from different social strata are sort of put together in one page. Now when I say that I mean this kind of like I mean this this seemingly equality or like a neutral way of like showing people is something that is there but we should not mistake that as actually equality or if these people all of them were treated equally that's again the answer would be no. In this case if we see that I mean why these people are sort of represented in the same page is not because of like I mean there is

a there is a conscious drive towards showing them on the equal plane, but all of them perhaps like there are certain kind of visual features physical features or like I mean in terms of like their community identity and all those things are somewhere or other connected and that is the reason the catalogers had made the decisions to sort of like I mean put them in one group. So this is how like I mean people were usually sort of divided into groups and catalogued in the archives.

Now if we think about the cataloging of people and professions and of course like I mean textiles we can go back to like I mean the late 18th century and there we find that I mean



certain kind of like documentation was there underway and one of the very well-known folio in which we see this kind of documentation would be there by Frans Balthazar Solvyns and Solvyns album that is called *Hindus* or like *The Hindus* which was published very early in the 19th century (though the documentation started earlier than that in the late 18th century) and in this one what we see is the anthropological approach or like this ethnographic approach of studying the different communities and their profession, how they live and everything else. So those things we certainly see them to be very prominently presented. Now what happens in these images that we see on screen. So in the left side image (I mean the left side of the slide) we see that there are two figures and they are certainly placed in this hut in this thatched roof hut setting and which suggests

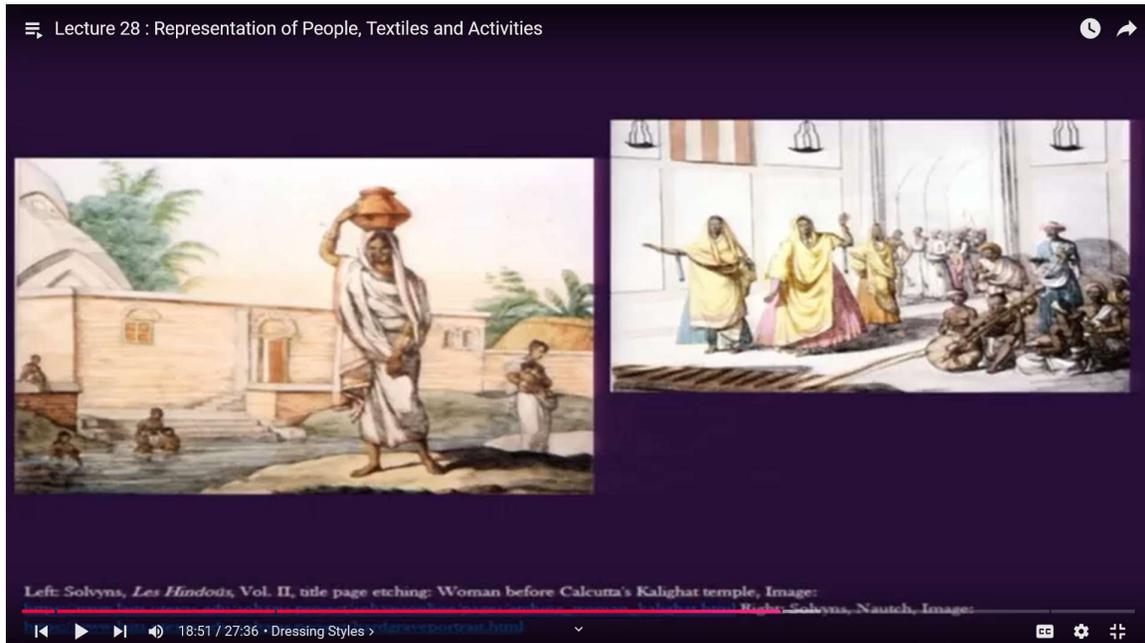
that I mean this is actually it's a residential quarter of these two people or perhaps like I mean one of those people. Then what we see that I mean this one man in the right end of this image is standing here and very prominently dark-skinned person and who's wearing a dhoti just a plain dhoti with perhaps a small border in his in the lower part of his body and then he is supervising perhaps the other person who's sitting in the loom and weaving. Now what we see in this case that I mean this weaving whatever is happening here it's again it's a pit loom and in which we have already discussed the characteristics of the pit loom in which we see that how the weaver sits on the ground level and then this loom is sort of like I mean spread on the ground and then it's sort of goes beyond the ground (the loom structure like the paddles and everything else). So this is something we see as a very typical depiction of the weavers and this image is also called Tatis and that means like I mean tati is the word for the weavers. Of course like I mean as we know that I mean Solvyns was there in the Bengal province from a late 18th century from 1790s to like I mean early 19th century. So during this time like I mean a lot of his documentations were focused on Bengal and so like I mean this very typical way of like I mean making this thatched half-hut roof I mean this thatched roof huts and everything else. So, all those things we certainly see them to be there prominently present.

Now the other image that we have in the right side of the screen is that sort of like I mean looks into the professions of the Kummars and Kummars are the .... Potters. But in this case it seems like they should be spelled as Kammars which mean the blacksmiths or the metal smiths and so in this case we certainly see that I mean how there is this man who's standing in front of the hut and in this case the hut is different from the one we see in the left side. So, the one in the right side is much more open and this man who's sitting in the background and is sort of like I mean blowing air into the fire so ... he can perhaps make the metal ready to be beaten and made into whatever shapes that they want. So, this is the process and here we also see that I mean vessels full of water those are kept which as we also know that I mean those things are indispensable for the work of the metal smiths. So, this kind of like I mean activities we find them to be represented in the colonial documentation. These images were made in etching technique and then after they were compiled into folio, they were also hand painted. So, the colors that we see on these

etching prints were added after these images were produced. So, in these two images what we see that craft plays a very important role. That different kinds of occupation (when we talk about the occupational sectors) so we see that I mean there are those unorganized occupational sectors that they have documented. This is definitely not a very organized sector and as we know that even today a lot of the craft sectors in our country remains decentralized and that is perhaps like I mean that that adds to the diversity of the craft production that we have in our country. So, this is something that they (the colonial documentators) were also interested in. They sort of like I mean focused on this and the focus on that is not just in terms of like understanding craft or profession but it is also in terms of like I mean how the making of the community that remains around making of craft objects. That's the reason like I mean as I have already mentioned that the British administrators wanted to sort of put people under different categories (that this is one group of people) and they specialize in particular kind of craft making or particular kind of skill and then like I mean then there are the criminal groups and so on. So, if this is the kind of like the way in which documentations were done cataloging was done. So, like making of the community is something we can understand that was also very much intertwined with the making of craft objects and that is the reason like making this idea of a process is something that has been depicted in this images. We can also see that I mean even though there is a way in which like I mean the making is emphasized in this images but then the prime figures who need to be sort of who grabs the viewers' attention as soon as we look at this images they are the ones this men or like women we see them to be like I mean standing firm or like sitting and sort of like ... they occupy a very important role in these images (either standing almost like centrally in this image or like I mean sort of making this L shift compositional arrangement in which like I mean the stability of the composition sort of like is reliant on the images or this prime images who are on focus). So this is how we find that there is this two things which are happening simultaneously one is like for this prime figures who are there for the people to read them their body the textiles they are wearing their physical features and everything else to understand that this is the community that they are talking about and then the identity of the community and the process and everything that sort of plays out in the background

for people to have more context on them. So, this is how like the idea of community, profession, textile they become intertwined in this kind of archives.

Now the other aspect that we also see that I mean there are those specific ways in which like I mean draping and everything are done and that is something we find that to be there



very it's significant in Solvyns documentation and the other colonial catalogues documentation as well. So, this specific way of dressing if we consider that what happens to people from different social strata, background and so on. So here in the left side of the screen we see there is this woman who's again standing prominently in the foreground and then like I mean this woman we see her to be draped in this plain cotton saree with the thin border and perhaps a pallu (here, this is what we see here). Then the way in which like the woman wears the saree, the way like I mean the draping style is there it's a very typical way of wearing saree that is found in Bengal and part of eastern India and which would be very different from the standardized way of wearing saree today. So, this is something we find that how this kind of plain, untailed cotton or like I mean this plain untailed piece of fabric (that can be dhoti. that can be saree) and then the cataloguers were fascinated by this different kind of dressing styles. So, this is something we find them to be there, that is, how attention, minute attention, was given towards this particular way of draping and what this signified. So this kind of like the significance if

we consider it here it's not just about documenting the specificity of this this draping but it is also about like I mean how this draping goes back to the idea of a community and by that I mean that I mean how this kind of draping can make the cataloguers or the administrators understand from which region, from which caste or community these people belong to. So that becomes easier for the administrators to sort of like I mean make sense of this land that which was way too chaotic for them to rule over. So we see that, I mean, this person who's standing prominently with a pot of water on her head, so she's there by a water body, and then on the and behind that, we see that there is this kind of this gateway, and presumably it's a temple complex, and then here we see the temple towers, and that is the temple tower of Kalighat temple in Calcutta. So Kalighat temple being perhaps the foremost important temple in Calcutta and so here what we see that I mean what kind of like I mean activities that take place around the temple. So, people are taking bath in this water body it is perhaps this is this canal or the river Adiganga and then like I mean after taking bath in the river they go to the temple and pray. So, this is the usual like I mean the process that sort of like I mean takes place here so in this case we do not really see a particular kind of livelihood or profession or occupation is shown, but it's a way of life that has been depicted. Again like I mean even in this case how textile plays a very important role that it is about this very specific custom taking bath in this particular canal and then going to the temple and pray and also like I mean collecting water from this canals or rivers and then sort of like I mean going back to home for serving the household members. So, all those things are then sort of like I mean situated around this area, so the regional specificity and everything which we also see in the architecture then that is sort of like I mean you know is also reflected in the textiles as well the particular way of draping the textile. So, this is how all the visible sort of like I mean the science of reading a community and then all put together in images like this and as I have mentioned that how textile as we see in all these bodies are draped, so how textile play a very important role in sort of like marking their identity.

Now the other image that we have in the right side of the screen and that is called nautch and this is usually the courtesans that we see who would be there at the zamindars. It's not just there as an everyday activity, but they mark special occasions in which the

courtesans would be called to the wealthy people's houses (mostly the zamindars or the babus). This 19th century, this newly created elite in the 19th century who sort of, like I mean, gained sort of cultural and not primarily cultural but also like the economic capital in the 19th century and they became wealthy during this time. So, we find that that how there's this particular occasion or like I mean this way of sort of doing the nautch is something that sort of like I mean says about a different kind of a societal structure. If we compare the kind of textiles which are shown here there are also something that says very clearly about the social stratum of the people. So, for example, the group of people that we see on the right side of the image here, we see that the people who are playing the musical instruments or perhaps like I mean supporting the dancers, all of them are draped in just plain lower garments (that is this white unbleached undyed dhotis). Then some of them also have like, I mean head coverings which are also like, I mean unbleached undyed cotton so this is something about like, I mean these people also belong to the similar people that we have already looked at the communities of the artisans or like I mean the performers whose professions are around like I mean making either craft objects or like I mean attributing music and different kinds of like I mean these cultural activities. Now then if we see that the other people who are surrounding here so here we find that there is this elite musician who seems to be very different from the other musicians who are seated here and this sarangi which this musician is playing is also a very different kind of instrument from like I mean the other instruments like I mean the mridangam and then like the veena and all those other things that we see them. Then in the center stage we have this three women who are elaborately dressed and we can see that I mean the colors which are there in the attire of this women are something that is drastically different from this unbleached undyed cotton. That says something that I mean perhaps these are not cotton textiles, but I mean as we know that I mean also looking at the costumes which survived from the 19th century that a lot of this kind of costumes would be made of like heavy brocade or silk and so on. So, all this different kind of like I mean it's not just about the bodies of the people which I am trying to say here, which I am trying to make a point here but it is also the kind of textiles. If we compare them to the different kinds of brocades and cotton and everything else that we have studied so far, we can understand that by means of depicting textiles was a

successful and effective way of sort of like I mean marking the community identity of the people which they were documenting. So, this is something that says that about, like, I mean how the documentation, the colonial documentation of the people, community and then like, of course the profession and everything else all of them they were very much dependent on the depiction of textile the depiction of like the dripping style and everything else. We will continue this discussion in the next lecture. Thank you.