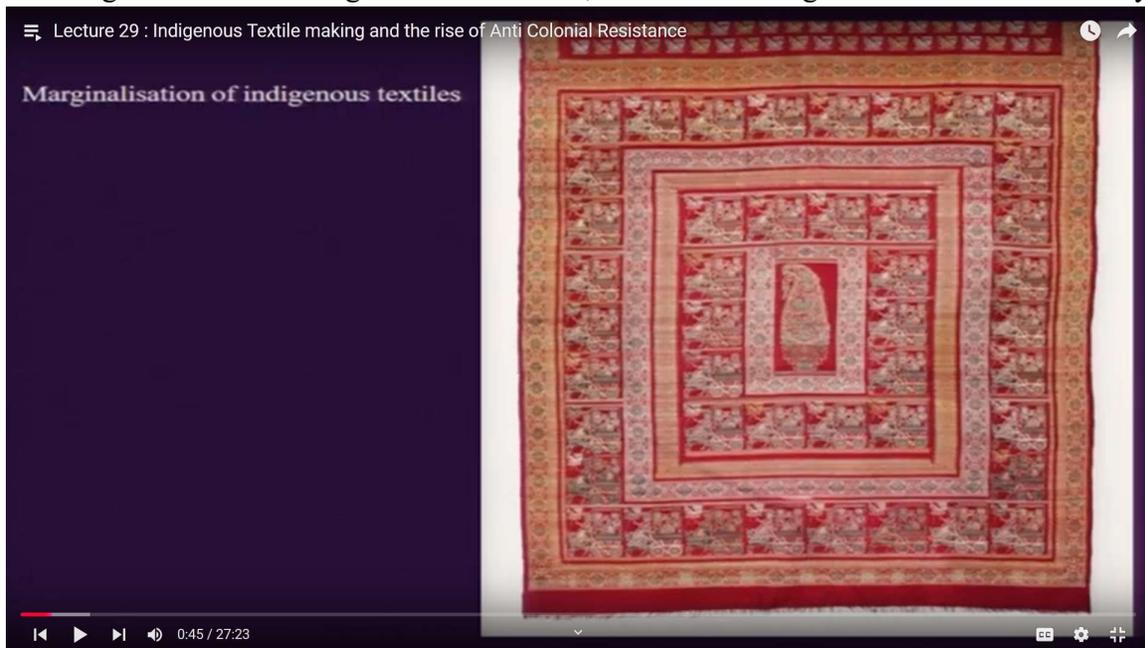


**Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices**  
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**Week – 06**  
**Lecture – 29**

Hello, everyone. This is Rajarshi Sengupta, and we are here in the fourth instalment of our week on colonial interventions and Khadi. So, we will start this discussion today with the marginalization of indigenous textiles. So, this is something that I mean we will study



in terms of one of the themes of this week. So, in terms of the marginalization of indigenous textiles, we definitely see a number of textiles which were made in the Indian subcontinent saw a marked decline during the colonial period and especially in the late 19th century and early 20th century. So, if this is something we can understand that I mean with the industrialization in Western Europe and if that is one of the reasons for which like this decline in the traditional textile sectors that took place. So, there are many different ways in which one can understand this situation, and one of the ways in which we see that I mean technology is something that is directly being made the prime sort of the reason for which the decline in the traditional textile sectors was made possible. But then we also see that there are scholars who would argue that there were more complicated issues involved in these cases and it is not just a very simplistic way in

which we can understand the technology this newly sort of like I mean available technology in the late 19th century in terms of industrialization and mechanization of textile sectors and like printing and synthetic dyes and so on. Those were not just the only reasons for which this decline took place.

Now adding to this discussion we find that economic historian Tirthankar Roy had suggested that I mean there are many different things which were involved and perhaps one of the things that we kind of ignore in this case is when we talk about decline is the role of the individuals. So, in the South Asian scholarship on craft on textiles and so on we find that the collective is something that is given the priority. So, starting from Coomaraswamy's discussion and then of course like in the colonial documentation how like the community identity is sort of like I mean made very prominent and not really understanding the artisans or any of these people with merit as individuals. So, Tirthankar Roy sort of counters this approach and then suggests that how this kind of like I mean the individual decisions also made a huge deal of impact in terms of sustainment or decline of particular kind of craft making. Now Roy's discussion as we see that I mean that certainly sort of concerns the handloom sectors and some of the examples that he presents are also from like I mean this the sectors of weaving and so on. So let us come to like one of the examples that he sort of presents and that would be of this particular person called Dubraj. Dubraj is this weaver who we find to be there in the Murshidabad district of Bengal (and when I say Bengal that is the undivided Bengal) in the 19th century and usually the weaver community as we have already mentioned that Murshidabad was known for this different kind of silk weaving and then this highly complicated figurative narrative brocade making that is Baluchari Sarees. This Baluchar Sari we have on screen which we have already studied in the earlier modules and so in this case what happens that we find that Dubraj was someone who did not really belong to the usual weaver communities like there were weaver communities in the Hindus and then there were like weaver communities in the Muslims, but then Dubraj was someone who came from the Chamar community who were mostly the people to work on leather. So, and we find that Dubraj was someone who was self-motivated and perhaps he sort of took up this complicated way of doing this Baluchari weaving from his interest on craftsmanship and

of course like I mean perhaps a certain kind of like overlapping he had noticed in terms of his work on leather and the other kind of like I mean media he had explored and eventually sort of like I mean getting his focus on Baluchari making. So, then we see that, I mean, there was this another weaver a Muslim weaver who was his guru and who taught him this particular way of doing this weaving and this particular way in which this Naksha loom, (the Naksha loom is a draw loom, this complicated loom in which like all this figurative motives can be woven). So, this is something we find that I mean how this sort of like I mean passing of the knowledge or like I mean transference of the knowledge from this Muslim weaver to Dubraj that made this particular kind of making of this sarees possible. Then when Dubraj continued this particular craft we find that noxha loom is something that was not sort of widely practiced by the weavers in Murshidabad and other part of like I mean sort of central Bengal. So Dubraj became like with time he became almost this mythical character who could do this fantastic almost like I mean this wondrous weaves on the sarees and this figurative motives the figurative narrations and everything else which was undeniably highly complicated. So, after what happened after Dubraj died in around 1902 this particular tradition of Baluchari making we find that to have also declined. So we can see that it was just not about the threat from the technology, it is not just about how a particular kind of industrialization that sort of like affected the making of Baluchari in central Bengal, but it was the lack of skill sharing as Tirthankar Roy also suggests. If there was a way in which like I mean this transference of knowledge from Dubraj to someone else could have happened this particular tradition of Baluchari making could have survived. So this is something we find that it is not just about a large decision that is taken somewhere else or like I mean something that is dictated by the industry. But it can also happen in the very individual level and Roy presents a number of instances in which we find that how there is this tension between how we understand community, how we understand individuals and sort of emphasizes the role of the individuals in terms of like I mean sustainment or decline of textile making or craft making. So that sort of complicates this idea about what is being affected by industrialization and what is not.

Now when we consider this and this is definitely like this innovative sort of Naksha loom that Roy sort of like I mean emphasizes on but then we also need to understand that this is a kind of textile if we think in terms of like I mean Baluchari textiles as we have already mentioned it earlier that Baluchari textile is something that is not really meant for everyday use. So it's a very highly specialized kind of textile making that takes place in a draw loom in this very complicated draw looms in which there are draw people who are involved in sort of like I mean, pulling the warp and then sort of inserting those weft threads in particular places and then many different weft threads are used for executing this highly complicated figurative motifs. So, this kind of highly specialized hand loom weaving was definitely not possible in sort of like replicating in the machine setup. So even though we find that I mean eventually the Jacquard loom came into being but even in that like the kind of complication and this complexity that we find in this kind of weaving was certainly not made possible. So, this hand loom weaving like this highly specialized hand loom weaving it was very clear that even with the intervention of technology this kind of weaving cannot be replicated, this kind of weaving cannot be replaced by something else. So, this issue was clear and perhaps like I mean this is also the point from which like I mean sort of Tirthankar Roy sets up his journey to understand that if this kind of highly specialized hand loom weaving could not be replaced by the industrial production then what mark the decline of this kind of handloom weaving. So if this is one way to think about like I mean whether the technology was solely responsible for the marked decline of this kind of textile making we need to also understand that this kind of highly specialized textile weaving was just a small fragment of the large body of textiles which were produced in the Indian subcontinent. If we think about the majority of the textiles those will perhaps be those undyed or just mildly dyed cotton textiles, the unbleached cotton textiles perhaps and which would be used by the people the commoners all across the Indian subcontinent. Those are the ones which were produced in a large number and not this kind of highly specialized textiles. This kind of textiles must have retained their market or like I mean must have retained their significance among the few elites but that cannot really be come I mean that cannot sustain the entire textile industry or like I mean the all the activities across the subcontinent. So we need to understand that what Roy sort of looks at in terms of like this specialized means of

production is something that can explain certain aspects of the decline of textiles. But then there are also other aspects which we need to sort of like I mean focus on

As I have mentioned that in the 19th century the focus of the colonizers and the British

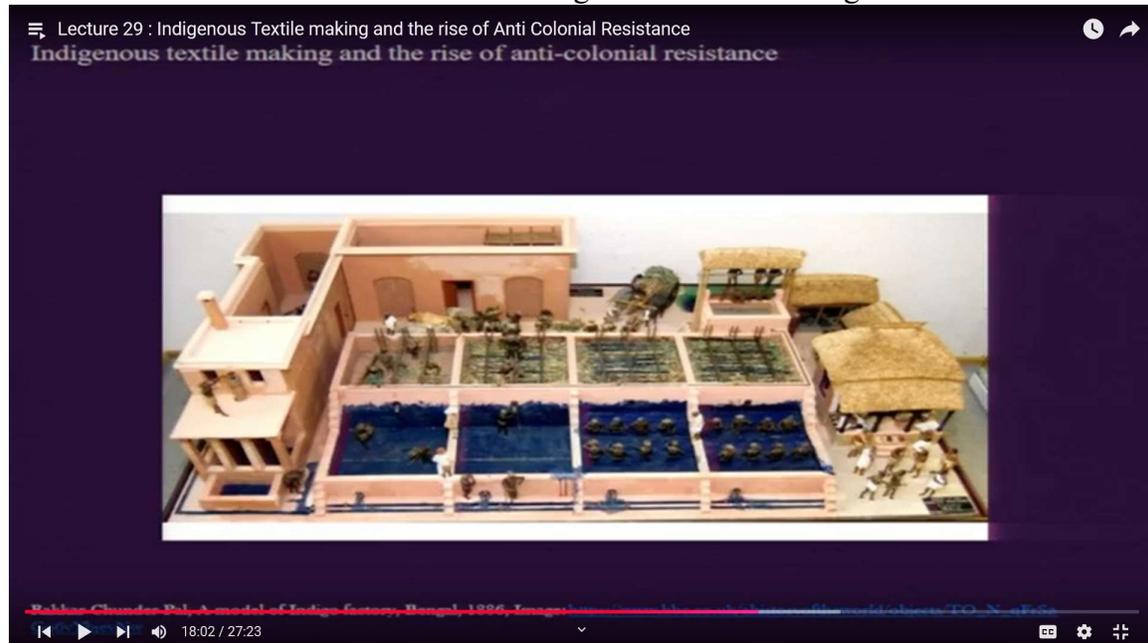


administration that sort of move towards the raw material. So, by 1850s during this time what we see that I mean with the rapid industrialization in Western Europe all the textile mills and everything were established. So there was a high need for the raw material for example the cotton and we see that I mean how cotton production in India that sort of like I mean rapidly grew during this time and also not just in India but in the other colonies and part of US and so on we find that I mean how slave trade and everything all of those things were related to producing cotton. Now with that, we also see that there was the establishment of certain mills and cotton mills that sort of, like, I mean, happened in the Indian subcontinent. So for example, in 1851 we see the Bombay spinning and weaving mill that took place, and this is perhaps an image from Bombay spinning and weaving mill or a similar mill from India, and with these things we see that I mean the Parsis in Western India they became very important part of like I mean this trade in which like I mean yarns were produced and then sent to Manchester or like I mean a part of Western Europe to be made into textiles (I mean wearable goods) and then eventually send back to

India and the other colonized countries for selling them and having a high profit on them. So when this kind of mills came up and which were sort of like I mean established by the people in India and not by the colonial administration that was also seen as a threat to the British textile industry, because the monopoly in of like I mean sort of like I mean on the raw material on cotton if we think about it that I mean that can be like I mean destabilized if there are many stakeholders who can control the raw material in this case. So this is something we find that I mean how if in one hand we think about like those highly specialized textile making in terms of like Baluchar and other like highly priced silk brocked and everything those could not be sort of replicated or reproduced in the industrial setup, but then when we think about like I mean the commoners cloths right like I mean in terms of like I mean just the plain woven cotton and everything. So if like this kind of raw cotton can be like I mean processed made into yarn and then sent to the industry for making them into the mill made cotton textiles then they can be sent back to India and everywhere else and the commoners can be forced to sort of like wear them instead of like going back to sort of like I mean the hand spun hand woven cotton. So this is something we find that I mean this is in these two cases like for the specialized highly specialized textiles and the common textiles this too must have been like I mean in very different situations. If we think about like I mean what was the role of technology in terms of like I mean shaping the textile industry in the 19th century. So for the specialized textiles the technology might not have been that important, but for the textiles which are produced for the common people technology must have been very important. If this mill made textiles were made readily available to people, people might go for those kind of textiles more often than sort of like I mean going for the hand spun hand woven textiles. This is something we find that the marginalization is very much there and perhaps I'd suggest that the marginalization of the textile making is something we can evidence more in the common textiles as opposed to the ones which are the highly specialized textiles. So, the day to day people and then their wearables that suffered the most instead of like I mean this highly prized textiles. So, when we think about the marginalization of the textile sectors we need to consider this aspects that which sector gets more affected than the other. As we also see that I mean the many textile makers like the weavers, the farmers, spinners, ginner and so many other people who are involved in

making textiles majority of them would be making textiles which are plain undyed cotton or like I mean perhaps like I mean dyed cotton but the regular ones which would be used by commoners. So, if those sectors are marginalized then there is a huge crisis in terms of the livelihood of the people and then the kind of the sustainment of the community life that took place for the centuries or millennia that was completely disrupted by the intervention of technology. So, these are the grounds in which we can consider them different. In this image or what we also see that I mean how this in this industrial setup where we have like I mean the press for packing cotton. So, for example, here we see the this the abundance of cotton that is there and then there are those laboring bodies the dark skinned people that we see from Indian subcontinent who are wearing like I mean just a turban and then a small loincloth and they are toiling to sort of like I mean make them into this small packaged boxes the boxes what we see it here. So, that like I mean they can be easily transported to Europe. So, this kind of like I mean activities that say something about like the intervention of this new technology, but at the same time like I mean perhaps continuation of the labour sectors from South Asia. So, it is a kind of like a juxtaposition of both and this hybrid mode of production that we see in which like I mean certain aspects of the South Asian life is sort of utilized for the betterment of the textile industries in Western Europe is something that was prioritized, but like I mean giving no profit of this textile making to the people who were actually involved in sort of producing the raw material.

With this we also find that I mean this indigenous textile making and how that suffered

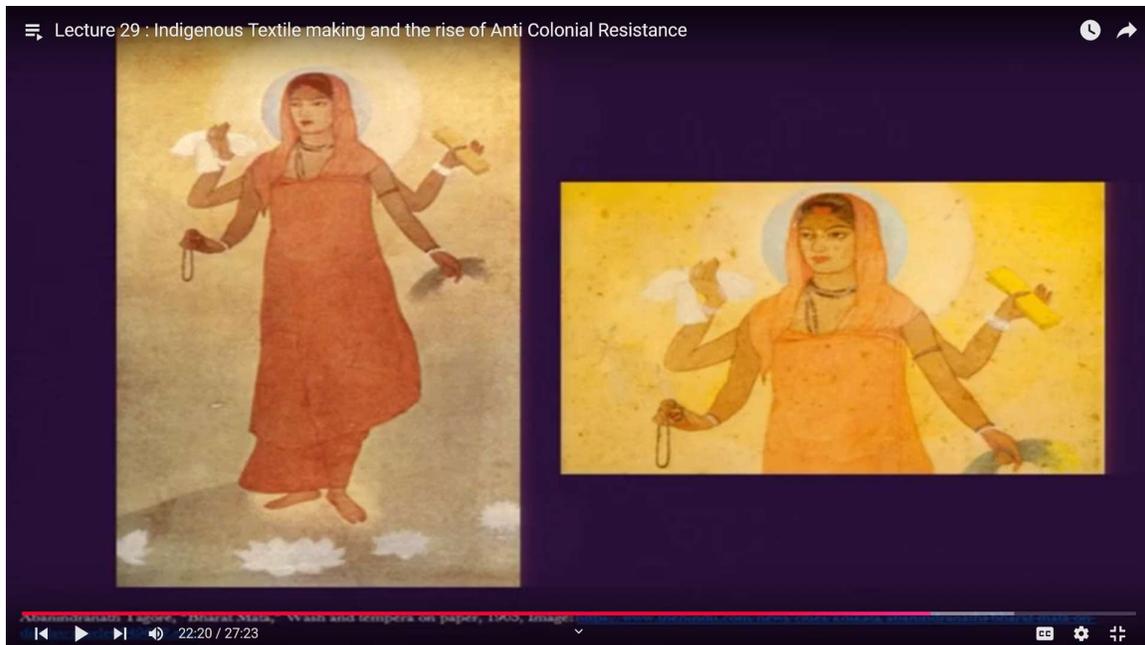


the blow of industrialization and also the blow of colonization and during the mid 19th century we find that a number of revolts that sort of like I mean came up and not only in the sector of textile making, but in the agricultural sector mostly. This [image] is the model of an indigo factory and it was perhaps made in Krishnanagar in southern West Bengal today and which is known for making clay models and those miniature models that we see them in the 19th century and later on. In this one what we see that it is an elaborate setup of indigo factory in which we see that there are like I mean around 96 people (like I mean this small figurines human figurines which are made) and then they are all sort of set in this entire model and in here in this part of the model we find that how there are this indigo leaves are dampened and sort of kept in water for releasing the color and then how this water will be then processed and used. Then lime is used for sort of like extracting the indigo (the dye fermented solution) and then eventually how this is beaten over and over by people here in this open tanks. For that reason, we find that these tanks are completely coloured in this indigo colour (blue). So, this is how like I mean this indigo solutions are step by step are produced and then the concentrated solution of the dye stuff is produced. They are dried under the sun and made into those indigo cakes and those indigo cakes can then be like sort of sent for different places for dyeing purposes. We see that in this indigo factory in the center stage there are all those open tanks and

around them there are some of those buildings and structures in which we see like I mean perhaps like I mean the later stages of processing and everything that takes place. Here we also see this characteristic this hut shape like the chala shaped roof which is there in Bengal and that also suggest something about how this is a very Bengali indigo production factory that we are looking at. This model as we know that I mean that was actually produced for this 1886 exhibition that is The Colonial and India exhibition something we have already studied that I mean how in that exhibition people from the Indian subcontinent were sent to western Europe for sort of like I mean you know like being present in the exhibition venue and demonstrating that what kind of work they do. This kind of models would also sort of be presented in the exhibition for people to see them, people to sort of like I mean study them and everything else.

Now this indigo production is something that also saw or that is very significant in terms of understanding the anti-colonial resistance. So for the high profit in indigo and high profit in terms of yielding this dye stuff we see that there was a forced agriculture of indigo that was imposed on the farmers in Bengal and Bihar and places like that. Then by 1859 we see a huge farmers revolt that eventually led the colonial government to reconsider this forced agriculture of indigo. Eventually it was reconsidered and then in the late 19th century with the advent of the synthetic indigo we find that the demand for this kind of indigo cultivation was lowered (I mean subsequently). But then we also see, how this forced production of indigo is something that is very much related to making particular dye stuff that is again like I mean making this raw material which would be then utilized for the textile industries in Western Europe.

With this kind of like interventions we also see that I mean how the artist and everyone else they have responded to this marginalization of indigenous textiles and then also like I mean bringing certain aspects of the indigenous textiles was explored. So if we think about like all those things that happened in the 19th century, in the early 20th century with the partition of Bengal (the proposed partition of Bengal) we find that there was a strive towards understanding certain cultural aspects of the Indian subcontinent, and textile making was also something that was given high priority. So in



Bengal we find that during the partition of Bengal a number of the nationalist leaders and then artists and commenters and so on all of them they have sort of prioritized and they celebrated the very mundane things which we associate with the land, with the people and everything, and in that respect we find this prolific image of Bharat Mata or Bango Mata which was initially made as the Mother Bengal and then was held as Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore (this significant artist art historian from the famous Tagore family in Northern Calcutta). So, what we see in this image of Bharat Mata we see this Goddess figure who seemed to be similar to like I mean many of the commoner women we see in Bengal and but like I mean the Goddess structure of her is something that is evident in the four hands, the four arms that she has. Then her proportion of the body is something that is also that follows this Dasatala convention in which we see that I mean how this particular kind of this ten part of the head is something that is implemented in the body is associated with making of the images of deities. So in one hand we see that the deity or like the Goddess like qualities in this woman, on the other hand we see that all mundane things are then associated with her like for example here we see palm leaf manuscripts which is associated with learning, here we see like I mean perhaps like I mean the haystack and like I mean the which is associated with rice cultivation and so on, here we see in her hand that is rosary and rosary is something that is associated with like leaving the society or being dedicated to a cause and on the upper right arm we see that

there is this undyed piece of fabric and that is something very significant. What we see here is actually how this woman or the Goddess is hailing this indigenous mode of textile production. Something which we also know that during the partition of Bengal the nationalist they have gone back to the ideals of making hand spun hand woven cotton and they rejected anything that has to do with the Western European intervention. That is the reason we also see that I mean this woman is also wearing this saffron dyed fabric and which is also associated with courage and sacrifice. So we see that I mean this fabric of the commoners they were held I mean and they were shown to be like I mean much more significant than something anything else. So the common things which we associate with like I mean the daily life and then like I mean the common people in the country is then hailed as something that is very significant part of the anti-colonial resistance. So and this image is just one example among many of the other things that we see during this time which would test that this kind of imagination of going back to this hand spun. hand woven fabric making textile making is not just an exclusive imagination of an artist but it is something that was an emotion or a concern that was shared by many in the Indian subcontinent. So, we will continue on this aspect of like I mean the anti-colonial resistance, the role of textile and perhaps like I mean the role of this the undyed or just you know plain dyed fabric which is used by the commoners in nation building and everything else in the next lecture. Thank you.