

**Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices**  
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**Week – 06**  
**Lecture – 30**

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in the last installment of our lecture on colonial interventions and Khadi. So in the last lecture we have ended our discussion on this

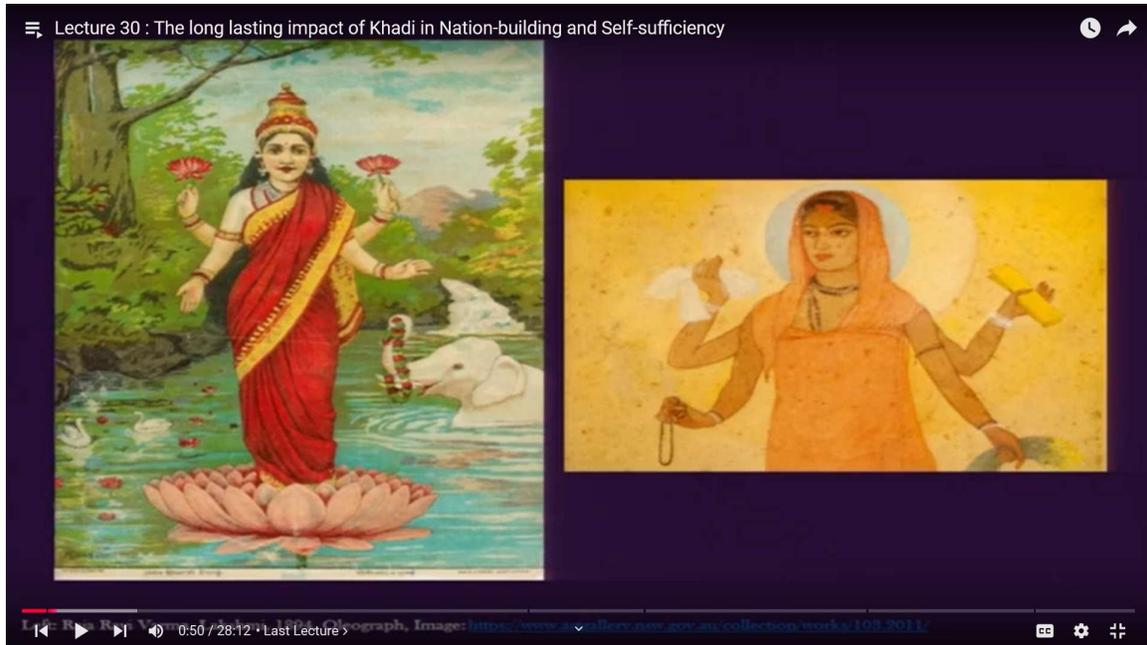


image of Bharat Mata by Abhanindranath Tagore and in which I said that there is a celebration of the common people's clothes and of course like the undyed fabric which Bharat Mata holds in the upper right hand and then like I mean of course the saffron dyed fabric which symbolises courage and sacrifice and that she sort of like I mean wraps around her body. In this one also we find that the kind of wrapping of the textile and also of course like I mean this presence of this common cotton textile both these things are something that is reminder for all of us about the common people's activities that's not really something that the goddess is considered as someone who's beyond the reach of the commoners, but someone who resides among the commoners and everyone else. It's a kind of a way in which the communities like the large communities who reside in Bengal and part of the Indian subcontinent were sort of identified with an image like this and how this image was thoughtfully created we can also compare it with like I mean some of the 19th century images of the goddesses and god figures and so on. So in the left side of the slide we have an image of goddess Lakshmi by Raja Ravi Varma and this images as we know that I mean

they gained momentum in the late 19th century and Raja Ravi Varma's this both the oil paintings and the oleograph prints they were highly popular and that is how like I mean they also came to sort of mark the imagination of the common people about how the gods and goddesses might look like. That is the reason we find this Raja Ravi Varma prints they ended up being in calendars who were in circulation for a large period of time at least until the late 20th century as well. So what we see in the image of goddess Lakshmi, she is draped in this expensive red silk brocade textile and that also has this zeri border perhaps like I mean this gold thread that is there in this broad border of this red silk saree that she wears. The quality of the silk is then exemplified by the kind of the draping style, the fold and the flow of the textile all those things we do see. [It] is very different from the way in which the creases and then like the stiffness of the cotton textile would be. So, in this case what we see that this visual figure of goddess Lakshmi with all the jewellery and then like with this expensive silk saree that the idea of the goddess is something that is hailed as beyond the commoner's reach. So the commoners would look up to this figure and pray for prosperity but the thing is there is no attention towards like I mean bringing the figure to the realm of the commoner and for its context, the context is very different. But when we sort of like I mean take this in comparison to the image of Bharat Mata in which we also see this four armed goddess like figure is there but draped in the commoner's attire then we see that I mean how the use of textile in both these cases they are very much context-dependent. So it is not really like they were following some iconographical conventions blindly but this iconography is something that is also contextual. The making of the goddess Lakshmi's figure is something that demanded the use of this expensive silk, whereas like making of the image of Bharat Mata in 1905 during this proposed partition of Bengal by Abhanindranath Tagore that responded to this homespun and hand woven cotton. Because those industries were neglected by the colonial government and we see that with the loss of livelihood, with the loss of community identity and everything else, all of them they went back to like I mean this kind of craft making which served the common people and thus the reason a celebration of the commoner's textile was indispensable in this case.

As we see that the interest in commoner's fabric and costumes is something that is a strategic move in the early 20th century, it was eventually taken up by the prominent nationalists and it was posed as an anti-colonial tool towards the British government. So, this is where we find the impact of the khadi fabric that sort of like I mean enters the narrative. So there is this, we see that I mean as this kind of like I mean activities that started in the early 20th century in terms of celebrating the commoner's fabrics and the kind of like I mean the artisanal sectors that they spoke about there is this unorganized and small scale artisanal industries in which like hand



subcontinent we find that with the thriving trade and like the cultural activities and everything else, we find that there are those self-sufficient models which were there in many of the villages and in regions. In which we find that agriculture, artisanal activities and then like their market and everything else all were interconnected and people would know each other and that is how like the bond between the people within a set up would be strong. That is how like I mean people would know about from where all the materials they come from and like who all are involved and having like a much more sort of a close relationship to the land and its culture and the specificities of the region. So, with the advent of the mill made cotton which were sent from Europe to India this tie between the cotton producers, spinners, ginner, weavers and so on those were broken. Gandhi's idea about like I mean sort of going back to this pre-colonial ideal about self-sufficiency was actually to sort of rebuild this chain. That is the reason we find that it was not just like making the khadi fabric which was significant in this case but it was actually kind of reconfiguring this bond between people and bond between various stages of production which was lost in the colonial period in the late 19th century. Gandhi's attempt was to sort of bring back some of those ideals of those production and how those kind of ideals can actually contribute immensely to the nation building. So, nation is also this idea we find in the Gandhian thoughts that the villages are something that was understood as the site of the nation where many of this kind of the artisanal activities forming and everything that take place and the villages can also be understood as those self-sufficient units which can serve model for self-sustainment of an entire nation. So, this is the reason we find that how this kind of simple and mundane acts of making khadi like making hand spinning and weaving all those things can contribute immensely to the making of this new nation that all these nationalists have imagined that will be free from the rule of the British.

Now, Gandhi did not stop with the khadi movement in the 1920s, but then he sort of like I mean took that further with the salt satyagraha in the 1930 and then later on. So, during this time, he again focused on something that is very mundane, and that is about making salt. So, what we find that during this time that making of salt was definitely prohibited and the like I mean even though we had all the resources from like I mean making of the salt from the sea water and so on, but like I mean for the prohibition like the Indians had to rely on like I mean salt and everything else on the British administration or like I mean the producers who are approved by the British administration. So, this is again it is a way in which Gandhi saw that the basic rights of the people in India were snatched by the colonial administration. So, even if the resources are available in India or in the Indian subcontinent, those resources could not be sort of utilized by the Indians.

So, what Gandhi did, he marched to this one particular (which is known as the Dandi march) spot, Dandi in Gujarat and picked up salt from the ground. And that is how like I mean this entire movement of salts of Satyagraha started that he proposed that this salt can be produced by the Indian by this mundane act and by doing that again we can go back to like this idea of self-sufficiency which he already proposed to do with making our own textile. And with these things we find that I mean Gandhi was jailed for this action and then all his followers were discouraged highly, but then like I mean this kind of activities they gained momentum and eventually they became a very important tools or weapons for the anti-colonial resistance.

Now, when we talk about Khadi cotton then what kind of like I mean cotton we are talking about here. So, this is an image of Khadi cotton and of course like I mean these are contemporary ones,



but one can see that I mean we are talking about like I mean hand spun hand woven cotton in which both the warp and the weft are hand spun. Since we are talking about spinning from cotton in the rural households or like I mean anyone who is interested in doing the spinning they can do this and that is the reason there can be irregularity. So, one can see in this yarns that there are all those irregular weft yarns which are there and of course like I mean we can see that in the warp yarn as well. So, like I mean this irregularity in the yarn is something that also attest that how this is made by hand and thus the reason there is a lack of standardization that happens in the mills. So, this irregularity is something that was discouraged and then of course I mean this kind of like I mean this hand spun yarn will be much more thicker and it is not really as fine as the mill made cotton. So, we can think about muslin and all those ones, but those are again like I mean highly

prized textile making and not available for the commoners. So, to oppose the mill made cotton production we find that the followers of Gandhi, Gandhi and many other nationalists they have proclaimed that even if this kind of kadhi cotton they look coarse and not really as attractive and as super fine as the mill made cotton, but still they have the touch of the people who are there, who reside in the same land and then like I mean the kind of technology which are used for weaving this cotton fabric is also indigenous which is also related to the land and that is the reason more than anything else that one needs to support them. But that said we also know that how the kadhi cotton like with this irregular yarn and even though sometimes they look coarse and not as fine as the mill made ones they are much more comfortable and suited for this tropical hot and humid climate that we have in the Indian subcontinent. So, those are the reasons we find that it is not just a tool for the anti-colonial resistance, but it is also something that is very much suited for the land in the Indian subcontinent. So, these are the kind of issues we find that why what kind of textile we are talking about when we say kadhi and why this kind of textiles were also held by Gandhi and the other nationalists during this time period.

Now, we also see that I mean during this time that Gandhi's the activity of like I mean prioritizing kadhi and we have also seen that I mean how Gandhi himself had sort of did this



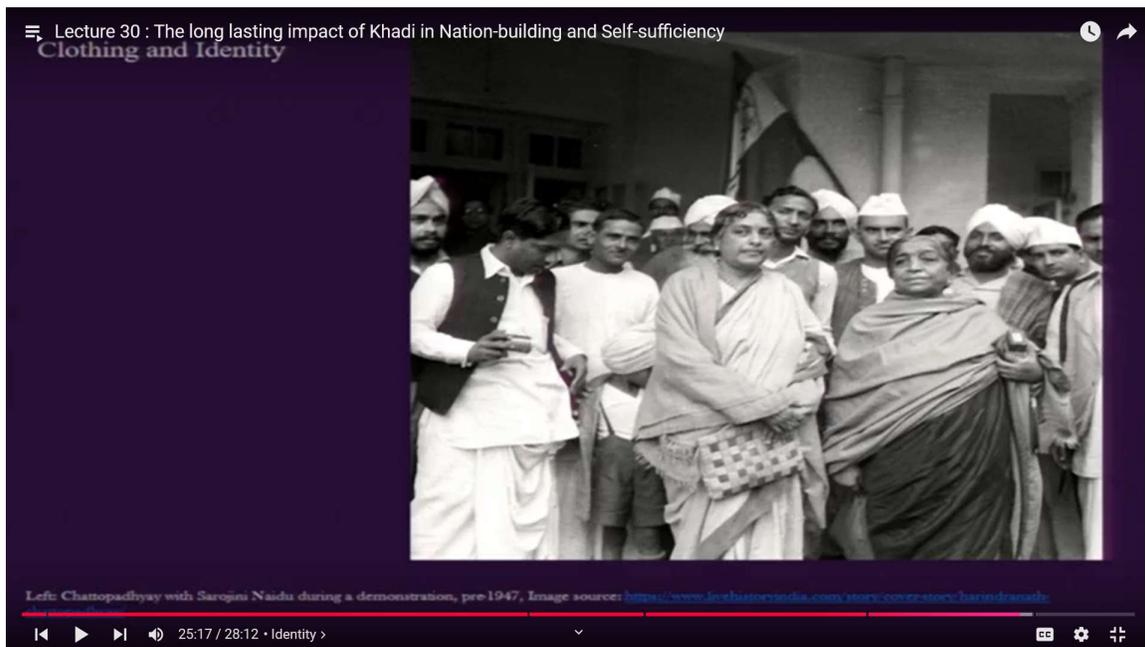
spinning and then like I mean making his own yarn. During this time from at least from 1917 we find that he had established a number of this ashrams or the ashram set up like for example we see in Sabarmati in Gujarat where we see that the ashram, the Gandhi ashram, Sabarmati Ashram that came up and was a reminder of the hardships and then also at the same time like the

resilience and then like dedication and everything else. In this ashram set up many of this so-called mundane activities like spinning, weaving and other similar kind of like artisanal activities would take place which could serve the common people. These things were not really meant for anything that is specialized but these things were meant for something that can serve a large number of people, the communities. That is the reason we find that a resonance of this kind of actions that remained and that did not just made its significance evident in the colonial period but also after the independence of India. So, in this time what we also find that in this act something was prioritized and that is the act of making. So, in terms of like I mean understanding that what is making what we see that in Gandhi's actions that it was not really like the final product which came out of like hand spinning and hand weaving was prioritized. All knew that the final product will probably not be visually enticing, they will just be very common fabric which are used by people on a day to day basis, but then like the action, like the set of actions which were involved, the intention for sort of driving these actions, all those things were much more important than the final product. And that is something we can also see that this idea of making is something that became a very important part of Gandhi's philosophy. And we can also see that how this idea of making and in respect to studying textile is something that is also prioritized in the recent scholarship in art history. So, we can clearly see that there are certain kind of parallels to look at them that how today when we sort of move away from the idea of assessing textiles through its final product and instead of that we sort of prioritize the idea of making the role of the communities, materials, techniques and then like of course the actions which are involved in making these textiles. So, these ideas as we know today in the visual culture theory that how they have been sort of prioritized and visual is something that is been considered as part of the making and not really the end result of making is something we can see that to be like also a parallel process of what Gandhian philosophy also suggested. Even though Gandhi was definitely not interested in art history or like I mean the textile studies as such, but he clearly saw that there are certain potential in textile making or getting involved in this kind of activities which can enhance the idea of like I mean community livelihood and also like I mean our approach towards life and that is the reason we see that I mean when we sort of focus on this idea of making, it's not just about redefining the way in which art history functions today, but it is also about a sort of perhaps a renewed way of looking at the communities around us as well as looking within ourselves.

Now with these activities we find that with the establishment of the Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat, there were the other ashrams those were established like Seva Gram and so on. And then later on in 1947, this Gandhi Gram in Dindigul near Chengalpattu, in Tamil Nadu was also established. It

was the very spot where Gandhi got out of the train and sort of like I mean encouraged a large group of people there to sort of establish this ashram and also having this activities there. So that was the same spot that was select in Dindigul to establish this Gandhi Gram. So this kind of activities we find that even though it started from this very mundane way of looking at the community and everything around us, then we also see that I mean this kind of activities they left a huge impact on the community across the subcontinent and many different politicians, nationalists and significant people who hold significant places in the society and culture and everything else, participated in that and that is how the significance of Khadi was made widespread across the communities.

Now we also see that I mean during this time there was also how particular kind of clothing that became synonymous with the idea of identity. Now we can see this that how in the 19th century in the colonial documentation, in the cataloguing and everything else, the particular style of clothing that was also sort of available to the colonial administrators for them to understand which kind of people they were looking at and then eventually like categorizing them in different groups and so on. So, in the early 20th century until the mid-20th century and later on after the



independence of India as well, we see that particular kind of clothing was definitely prioritized by the social elites and then like I mean the significant political figures and social reformers. And here in this image we have two prolific activists that is Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay and Sarojini Naidu and both of them are dressed as commoners. So even though both of them were social elites but we see that I mean they have embraced the fabric or like I mean the dressing style of the

commoners and it is a continuation I would say that I mean of some of the ethos of course like of Gandhi. But also like I mean some of the resonance of Bharat Mata's image that we have seen in the early 20th century by Abanindranath Tagore. In which we see that there was a need for the prominent personalities to associate themselves with the commoners. And that is the reason that a deliberate embracing of the commoner's costume in their body that became a part of defining their identity. So, this is something we find that I mean a large group of like the politicians, nationalists and social reformers they would embrace this kind of attire and so on. So, we see that the home grown textile production is something which had its high significance in the 1920s and then of course the significance never really died out. So those then became part of like I mean the identity of the social elite as well. So, we can see that how in the 19th century textile was very much part of like defining the identity of the people in the Indian subcontinent. And then, in the 20th century, we find that with this renewed idea of what textiles could do to serve the nation and to serve the community, the social elite deliberately embraced the commoners' textiles to counter the kind of use of textiles that we saw in the 19th century. So, in the 19th century if we see like I mean the use of textile by the or in the colonial archives and to show that I mean how common people in the Indian subcontinent they wear different kind of textile. It was a way for the administrators to understand that this is what the role of textile is to define the community identity. And then in the 20th century we find that the nationalist these prominent personalities they embraced particular kind of textile to show that this is their identity. So, taking charge of their own bodies and actions and identity was very much associated with the kind of textiles they would wear. And that is the reason we find that in both cases clothing and identity in the colonial archives as well as in the nationalist struggle that I mean clothing and identity they remain very important. But then we can also see the underlying politics in both these cases are very different, and that says something about the expanse in which, like I mean, textiles operate in the society. And the significance of Khadi is something we will be sort of like I mean continue to explore in the later modules as well.



So just to sum up the session I would say that I mean textiles if we see in the colonial interventions and also in terms of Khadi and making of textiles in the nationalist context. We find that a number of different concepts are actually associated with textiles in the 19th and 20th century. And those would be that I mean how collection, making archives and then the construction of community identity all those things in the colonial archives we can find them to be associated directly or indirectly with either textiles or textile making. And then we also see that I mean how the same textile is used by the nationalists by these prominent figures to pose a threat to the colonial government. So, textile becomes important both for to serve the colonial government to understand that I mean the community identity and so on. And then the same textile we can find all are like I mean made in India in the unorganized sectors. And the same kind of textile will find them to be used by the nationalist leaders and so on to sort of like I mean redefine their identity. So, in all these cases we find that textiles can be used or like I mean textiles can be read in many different ways. One can read it as a tool for resistance but also one can read it that I mean how textile was very much part of like I mean subjugating people, suppressing the voices or categorizing them in different groups. So, all those things are possible. It is not just one way to look at the textiles which were produced in the Indian subcontinent and how they were related to the state politics. But there are many different ways in which we find that textiles have manifested and then made their presence felt for different group of people. Thank you.