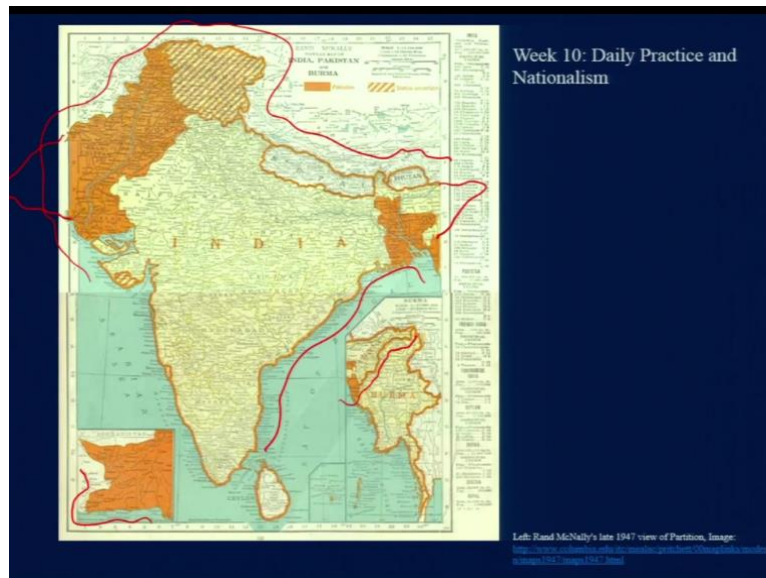


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 46
Daily Practice and Nationalism

Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are in the middle of this course, Indian art materials, techniques and artistic practices. Now, we are here at week 10 and then we will be talking about daily practice and nationalism. So, what do I mean by these two words? Let me get into nationalism first.

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So, as we have seen that in the last 2 weeks we have spoken about some of the practices which were associated with the colonialism in the Indian subcontinent, essentially how printing, painting those processes, those techniques, these new techniques have emerged in the Indian subcontinent and how they have also served the administration of the British government and then how the indigenous people, the people from India, the artists, the artisans they have taken up these practices and they have improvised to make them suited for the people in India.

Now, with that we see that in the late 19th century, of course it was there in the 19th century and perhaps like the 1857 mutiny and many other revolts in the 19th century could be considered as some of the major anticolonial movements. Now, in the late 19th century, we find that more sort of organized movement to overthrow the colonial government was there in place in the various parts of Indian subcontinent.

And with that we see that the rise in terms of like the rise of the idea of India as a nation and this nationalistic politics was gaining momentum. So, in that respect, when we talk about nationalism, when we will be addressing nationalism in this week, so we will be looking into the practices in the late 19th century, in the early 20th century and mid 20th century. Now, few of the things we will be looking at this week it might not seem directly connected to the way we understand art.

And that also happens because some of the things those were prompted by the colonial art education that what is art, what is not art, how art is different from the daily practices, how art is different from craft, all these differences, these binaries were also something that became more and more prominent in the colonial art institutions and in the colonial education policy. So, those things for that reason as I have already mentioned that certain things we will be looking at today might not seem conventionally situated in the sphere of fine Arts.

However, as we go with the lecture, I am sure we will all find out how they all are integral part of understanding the visual culture in India and also how our lives are situated around them. So, with that as we know here we have this map of India, it is a map from 1947, this this crucial moment when India gained its freedom from the British rule and it shows various parts of the Indian subcontinent.

So, as you can see that this entire area which was then considered as India and then in this map there are like the sections which are sort of removed. So, you can imagine like this section will be here and then like I'm in this part of the Indian subcontinent the north eastern part that will also be added. So, this was the entire breadth of the Indian subcontinent. So, one can imagine that today the way we understand India is not something that used to be in the late 19th century, in the early 20th century.

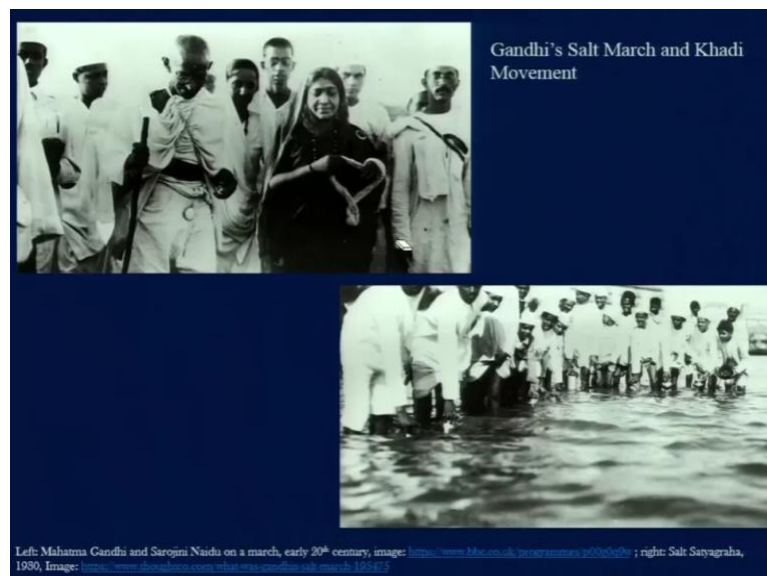
So, the places what we understand today as Pakistan and Bangladesh, both those places were also part of the United India or the Indian subcontinent the way India was considered in the late 19th and early 20th century. Now with that, we see that with the growing the nationalist and anticolonial activities, there was an attempt In 1905 to divide the Bengal presidency into two parts.

So this is the area what I am talking about and so that is where we find today's Bangladesh and India's West Bengal, both they all constitute the area of the Bengal presidency. And since the seat of power, the capital city of the colonial India was Calcutta here, so that is the reason Bengal presidency certainly had its prime importance in the nationalistic politics. Now for that reason, what we see that during the 1905 there was a large scale protest against it.

And then there have been many different kinds of activities including Rabindranath Tagore's attempt of going out in the street and tying rakhi in the hands of all the people to promote this idea of undivided Bengal and then through those practices we find that the British had finally made a decision to move the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. And all these political decisions, these political shifts, all those things were taking place during this time.

And then from 1905 until 1947, we see that there were a number of different kinds of activities that marked the first half of the 20th century in the Indian subcontinent and not only just there the political events, but they also had a huge impact on the way we understand materials today.

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Now, what are those important political movements or the movements which are also connected to our study? So, two movements in particular I had mentioned here, these two movements which were spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi. And so in the early 1920s we find that Mahatma Gandhi who was already a prominent political persona in India and then he would take up some of the measures for his very well-known violent movement.

So, what is non-violent movement? So there were two kinds of movements which were two kinds of strategies which were there during this time. So some of the strategies involved violent clashes between the British troops and Indian nationals of course, freedom fighters and then some of the other strategies would include one which was prompted by Mahatma Gandhi, was this non-violent movement in which he urged everyone not to take up arms or not to attack the British troop.

But to continue doing their work without any kind of violent move and then the thing is this was a revolutionary move and with that what we find there were two movements which were perhaps the most important ones and for that reason I would not start with the movement that happened in the early 1920s, but I will start the discussion from 1930. And so the first one that came up in 1930 was Gandhi Salt March or the Salt Satyagraha.

And then salt satyagraha was the one in which Mahatma Gandhi announced that since making salt that is the one of the basic need for every Indian or perhaps everywhere in the world. Making salt by the Indians was banned and that is something that he considered as denial of one of the basic rights by the Indian nationals under the British rule. So he said that we will be taking up this non-violent gesture of walking from the city of Ahmedabad and Gujarat to the coast in this place called Dandi.

And then from there he proposed to make salt from the seawater. In one hand, one can see it was a very non-violent gesture, at the same time something that is related to our daily lives making salt that goes back to the depth, enriches our daily live that is something that should not be considered as a violent mode of protest, performance I would say. This performance was so effective that the British government eventually came and stopped the people who were part of the salt march.

And then Gandhi was put in jail for around a year and during this time more and more people would come forward to make their own salt from the seawater and thousands of people were put under the bars. So, this is how he sort of introduced some of these ideas and when the British reacted violently upon these non-violent marchers who were part of Gandhi's group.

So, when we see this kind of violent mode of action had taken place on them that was also something which was looked down upon by the people not only in the Indian subcontinent, but

all over the world. So, those certainly gained momentum, they certainly helped the Indian nationals to have a have a strong cause to overthrow the British government. So, these are these are some of the ways in which we find that why these activities.

Gandhi's activities which were focused around daily life was such a potent act, such an important gesture to overthrow this colonial government and that is how we find that the daily life, the daily practices of like making salt, using it and then nationalism that this mammoth task of overthrowing the British government which was ruling India for more than 150 years then. So, these two things became integrally connected.

And in this particular gesture of connecting daily life to nationalism, something that is not really compelling people to go out of their way to support the cause of overthrowing the British government, these things we would find it had a huge impact on the kind of materials that we use even today.

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Now before this salt satyagraha or the salt march, we see that in the early 1920s Mahatma Gandhi also started something even more revolutionary and that is to make hand spun and handwoven cotton cloth. Now, when we see that this particular gesture, this is also something that goes back to the daily practice of weaving and spinning that had been prominent in the Indian subcontinent for millennia.

Now, again why this act is such an important one and why this particular gesture of making hand spun cotton and then weaving it into just regular cloth that became such an important tool

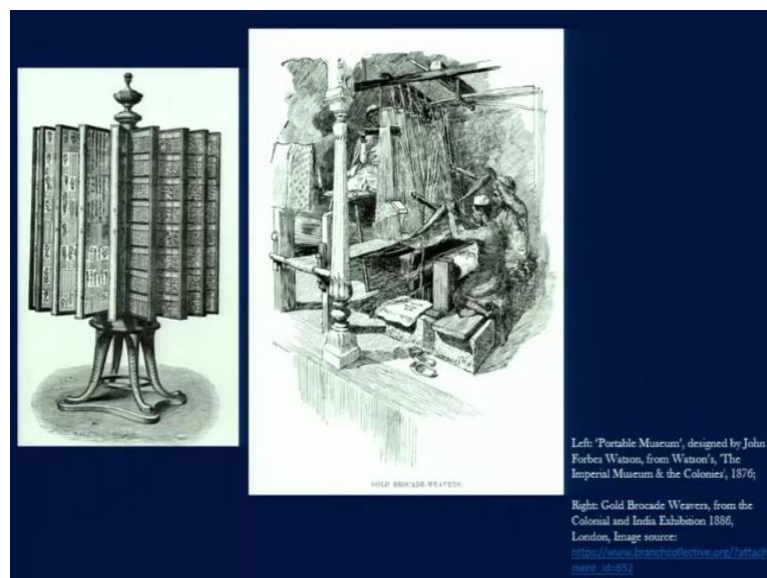
or an important weapon to fight the British government? So, this particular cotton that we have already addressed, this hand spun and hand woven cotton is something that is known as khadi and khadi this word comes from the idea of khaddar and so what happened with that?

So, here on screen we have images and this is an iconic image of Mahatma Gandhi and what we find here this photograph was taken by Margaret Bourke White and what we have here is that there is this spinning wheel in the foreground and in the background, we see that Mahatma Gandhi is seated there only draped in a lower garment and that is also just a regular white cotton dhoti.

And then he is engaged in reading something and this is an image which was taken in 1946, it was right before the independence. And on the right side of the screen we have an image of this cotton, so this is cotton which is produced in the state of Telangana today. And just to give a sense of how cotton looks like and how cotton is harvested and then that is spun into thread and then that is used for weaving, and ultimately we have clothes like this to wear.

So, there is a long process involved and Gandhi was an advocate for making this hand spun hand woven fabric. So, to understand the politics of what was happening around textile, we need to go a little back in time.

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Now, from the beginning of the colonial rule in the 18th century we find that textiles have played a major role because historically the Indian textiles both dyed and undyed and patterned and everything, so all different kinds of textiles had a huge overseas market and this market

system had sustained for more than 2000 years. Now, during the colonial rule we find even when the British or the other European administrators and the traders they have arrived in the Indian subcontinent, one of their major attractions was textile apart from the spices.

So, we see from the beginning in the 18th century there was much stress in terms of getting the Indian textiles to Western Europe and that is how there was a huge market for this Indian textile and that is how they made huge profit through this. Now, slowly we find that there was also an attempt of destroying the this self-sustained industry of making textiles in the Indian subcontinent and by doing that what the British people did?

The administrators they focused on getting the raw material mostly, so slowly we find that in the 18th century, in the early 19th century whereas there was more stress in getting the textiles and then transporting them to Europe, then slowly we find that there was a drive towards destroying the indigenous industries and then getting the raw materials cotton and silk and so on and sending them to Europe for making them into a mill made cotton fabric.

And that is how the mill made cotton fabric would be sent back to India on a much higher price and sold to the people in India. So, if there is no self-sustained textile industry in India, then the Indian people would be compelled to buy the cotton which was brought by the British and that is how all the revenue will go back to Britain. So, this is how we see that this systematic way the textile industry was highly disrupted during the colonial period.

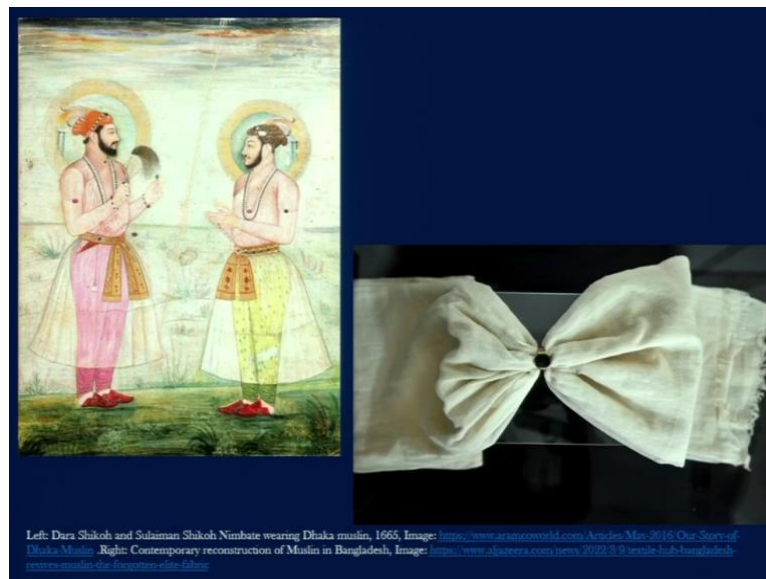
And for this reason, we also find that in some of the exhibitions, so for example if we talk about the 1851, the great exhibition in the Crystal Palace in London if we see that in this one there were objects from the Indian subcontinent, from various other colonies which were under the British rule. So, in among different kinds of objects, we find that textiles definitely had prominence, different kinds of specialized textiles.

So, here on screen we have this one particular this unique design for making a portable Museum of textile and this was made by John Forbes Watson and it was around 1876. And in this one we find that there is this portable stand upon which there are those frames in which there are many textile pieces of swatches which are arranged and perhaps there are also description of those textiles swatches so that one can just like flip them around and see them and know about the different kinds of textile practices.

And Forbes Watson was someone who had also extensively documented the different kinds of textile practices in the Indian subcontinent. Now, with that we also find that in some of those exhibitions in the later half of 19th century that even the weavers, the entire loom setup was a transported from India to Britain during exhibitions. So, this is this one image that we see here on the right side of the screen and here we see that the gold brocade weavers.

And they are from the Colonial and India exhibition in 1886 that took place in London. So, this entire setup of the loom with the weavers all of them were transported to London and they were displayed in the museum setup. So, alongside the loom which produces the textile, these weavers were also made part of this anthropological display where people can see them working. So, these are the context in which we find that I mean textile had this huge importance for the colonial administration.

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Now if we get into the details about like what kind of destruction took place and one of the things that got lost during the colonial period among many different practices was muslin. Muslin is this very specialized technique, very specialized cotton fabric which is considered as woven air, so that means it is diaphanous in its quality, it is transparent, it is so transparent, that one can see through it.

So even after wearing like several layers of muslin, one can still see what is beneath the layers of it, so that kind of thin, highly skilled weaving is involved in making this this muslin fabric. So, some of the representation of the muslin we find and muslin was not produced in various

parts of the Indian subcontinent, but only in the area around Dhaka or part of Bengal. So, that particular area with its riverine land.

We find that was this damp and humid weather was perfect for cultivating this particular kind of cotton which had this fibre for making this superfine thin yarn and that kind of yarn was woven into the muslin fabric. And then we find those kinds of fabrics were represented in the miniature paintings during the Mughal time period and even before that. And of course muslin has a longer history that as we know it had been exported to various parts of Europe and other parts of the globe for the last 2000 years or so.

So, this particular skill or this particular practice of making or producing the muslin cloth, this highly specialized muslin cloth was there it sustained in Bengal for nearly 2000 years. And so, this is an image that we have and this comes from 17th century on the left side of the screen in which we find that Dara Shikoh and Sulaiman Shikoh, these two Mughal princes and then what we see them they are draped in muslin.

So, we see the muslin jama that they wear. So, as I have already mentioned the translucent quality of muslin, so one can see the trouser through this jama, one can see their skin through this jama. So, this is something very characteristic feature of the muslin and the miniature painters they made sure to emphasize this particular character because muslin was not just highly skilled fabric, but it was also a highly prized possession.

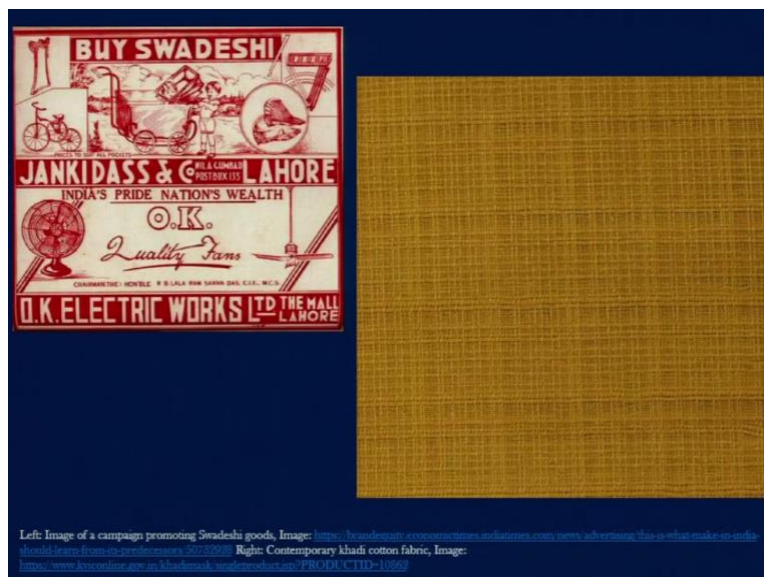
It is not really like everyone can afford to have this muslin fabric. So, that is the reason we also find how the miniature painters in the Mughal court have put the effort to show this diaphanous quality, this translucent quality of this fabric and that also stands as a marker for us to see how this was used for during the early modern period and so on. So, the other quality of muslin that we also know.

As how for the superfine thread which is used or the yarn that is used, it can be passed through a ring, which is worn in a finger, so like this one, and this is a contemporary construction of a muslin in Bangladesh, so this kind of fine quality of fabric was produced. Then what happened during the colonial time period was in the eighteenth 18th century, in early 19th century muslin, also it became a prized possession for the elites in Britain.

But then slowly there was a drive towards we can see that how the British was involved in getting more and more fabric out of the weavers in Bengal, but the weavers were underpaid and they had horrible livelihood conditions. So, it was certainly not possible for the weavers to continue working in this method. At the same time, we also see like the textile mills in Manchester, they started producing this mill made fine cotton which was not comparable to muslin.

But it is sort of replaced the market and that is how slowly we find that the muslin was discarded and with the dire livelihood conditions of the weavers it was not viable for them to continue making this muslin cloth anymore. And with the mill made cloth from Manchester in the market muslin also lost its market in the Indian subcontinent and so on. So, that is how we find that this particular, this highly specialized fabric had died out in the Indian subcontinent.

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Now, in the next phase we will be seeing how Gandhi's act revitalizing the textiles in the Indian subcontinent has sort of breathed new life into this fabric. Now, we do not see that Gandhi revitalized the muslin in itself, but what he considered important in this case was to think about this mode of production, how muslin if we consider that how muslin was produced that it is hand spun, handwoven.

And it is likewise like all the other different kinds of textiles that we find in the Indian subcontinent that all of them were hand spun, hand woven before the advent of this mill made cotton or mill made fabric from Manchester and parts of Western Europe. So, Gandhi reclaimed

this part of the history and then we know sort of folded into the nationalist movement. We will get into more of the details in the next lecture. Thank you.