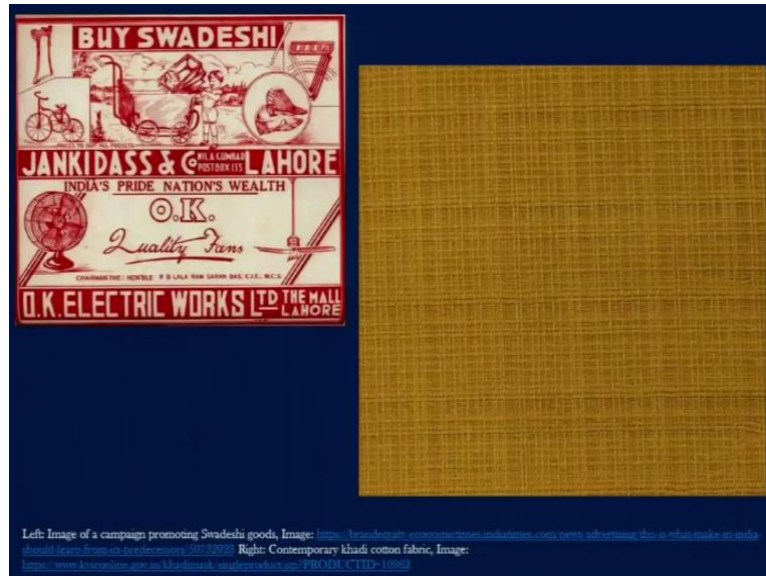


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 47
Daily Practices and Nationalism

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Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are continuing our discussion on nationalism and daily practices. Now, we started talking about certain things, for example the use of textile and its role in the nationalistic politics in the early 20th century. So, we have already discussed that how there were certain kinds of practices, highly skilled practices such as muslin and all and those were completely destroyed during the colonial period.

Now how did Gandhi reclaim that practice? In the early 1920s we find that Gandhi called for this movement in which we he also again suggested something very simple as the salt march to make like hand spun yarn and then to transfer them into hand spun cotton fabric. So, this act it seems that very simple, but if we consider how the destruction of this hand spun cotton fabric and hand woven fabric had happened in the 19th century by the British in the Indian subcontinent.

Then one can see this very simple act of spinning and weaving is also a highly political act. So, Gandhi did not ask for people to go out of their way to do this. So, he promoted having a charka or a spinning wheel in the household and then just spin and to make the yarn out of it and then

how that yarn can be used for making the loom in the handloom. So, by that what he meant was to again going back to this idea of self-sustainability that majority of the Indians did not have access to industry or to have them made by the Indian made in the machinery.

So that is the reason to reclaim some of this historical skill in India, so that became a very important gesture for sort of overthrowing the dominance of the British. So, by that we also see that Gandhi was not interested in producing something that is highly skilled, but he was interested in making things which is coarse cotton something like this that we have on the right side of the screen.

In which we find that in this one you can see that how all these yarns, the weft yarn are all visible and they are not really uniform in their shape and form, there are irregularities, some of the yarns are thick, some of the yarns can be thin and that happens because of their hand spun. So, it is not really machine made, they are not uniform like the way we find the products in the machine.

So, that kind of cotton cloth that Gandhi had promoted and his motive for doing that was to make things which can be used for daily life. He was not interested in doing something for the specialized cotton or specialized kind of fabric, but he was interested to do something that can be used by everyone starting from the people who are the elite to the people who are working in the field, so everyone can use that and everyone can wear that.

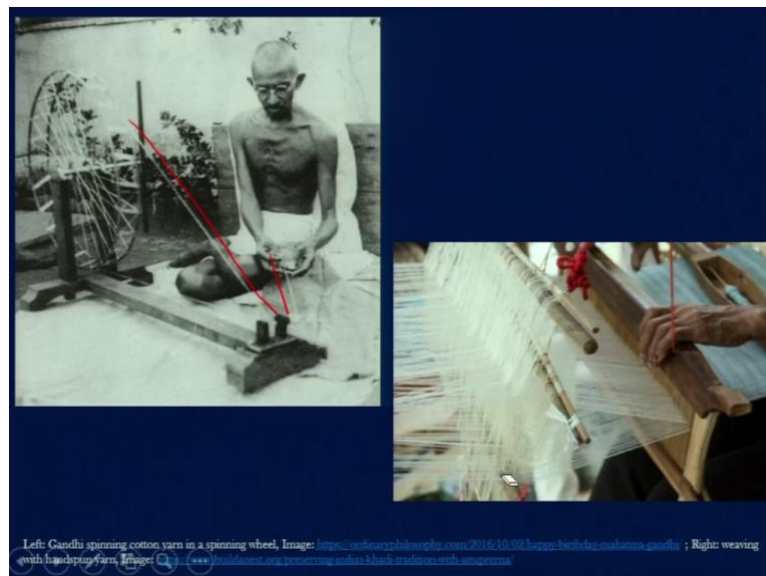
So, when Gandhi's the Swadeshi movement, this movement was using Khadi also became more and more popular, then we find that there were bonfires of the foreign goods in various parts of the country where all the different the mill made products and these fabrics were burned down. And people sang, people made speeches about using this coarse cotton cloth, which is not fancy, which is not always very good looking but still they have the pride of reclaiming the past.

And that is how we find that this is another very important act of not only just reclaiming the past, but also reminding the Indians about the self-sustained economy. And with that, we also find that how many of the other practices also started taking reference from that. So there is this campaign here we find that in the in the upper half of this advertisement that buy Swadeshi.

And then here these are certainly not fabric that we see on screen, but these are more like the cycle, trolleys and things like them, but how this idea of Swadeshi that perhaps started with Khadi in early 1920s by Gandhi that gained prominence and many other sectors also started following that. So, that is how we see that how this one small gesture that started by him had its resonance in many different kinds of materials and practices that they constitute our daily life.

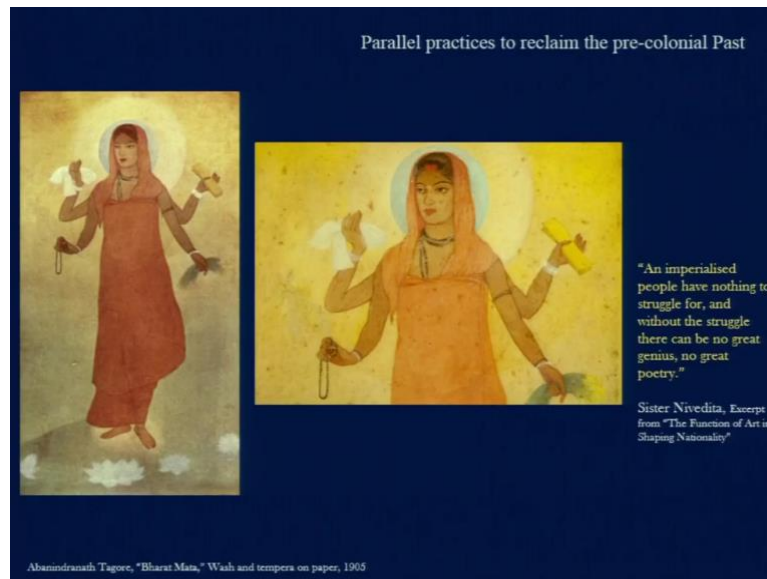
So, again we are not talking about things which are strictly sort of in the sphere of art, but we are talking about things which support our daily life in various different ways. And something that should be equally given importance as the art objects that we study.

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And these are some of the other images in which I just wanted to show that how the spinning wheel that makes the cotton yarn and then how the yarns, each and every yarn is used for weaving. And then this is a hand loom, it is a contemporary setup, and how this handloom utilizes this kind of hand spun yarn for making them into fabric.

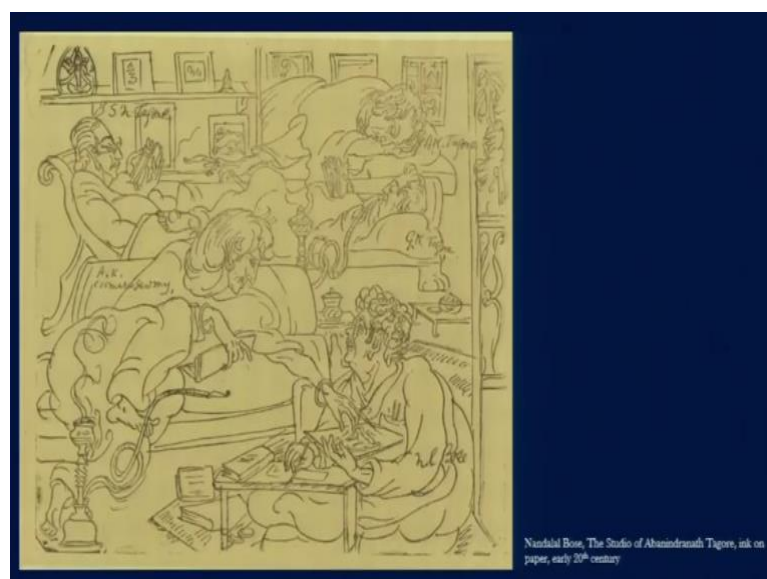
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So, when we see that this was unfolding in the 1920s, it was not something that was happening in isolation as we have already seen that in all the other different periods that whatever the material, whatever different kinds of techniques and practices we have studied, that we have seen that nothing really grows in isolation. So, from the early 1900s we see that there were also many other people who were involved in reclaiming the precolonial past of the Indian subcontinent.

And reclaiming why precolonial past was important because that was a time which was imagined that when the British subjugation and British destruction of the indigenous material culture, indigenous craft sectors and artisanal sectors had not taken place. So, that is the reason why reclaiming the precolonial past became such an important part of the anticolonial act.

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Now, when we find that we know in the early 1900s that Gandhi was active, during that time we also find that a group of people, for example Abanindranath Tagore from this very prolific family of the Tagores in Calcutta and then Ananda Coomaraswamy one of the most important art historians and master interpreter from 20th century India or the Indian subcontinent we can say, So, these people were also very much active.

And this is a drawing that shows that how all these great people they had regular meetings. So, this is the studio of Abanindranath Tagore and this particular drawing was made by Nandalal Bose and we will come to Nandalal Bose's work in the later part of this week, but what happens in this one we see that this is the studio of Abanindranath Tagore, we see Abanindranath Tagore here dozing off after smoking hookah.

And then here we see Abanindranath Tagore and S.N Tagore here and Nandalal Bose here, who makes the drawing. And then here we see Ananda Coomaraswamy. So, all these people, there were meeting of these different people we find and that is how they nurtured the idea of reclaiming the precolonial past of India. Now, Coomaraswamy was the one who was involved in different archaeological excavations and then he had extensively travelled in the Indian subcontinent and parts of Southeast Asia and Europe and North America.

And then what we find he had this extensive knowledge about the various different sites, different kinds of artisanal works, at the same time a number of languages including Sanskrit, Tamil, Latin, Arabic and so on. So those are the ways in which we find that for them this reclaiming of the past was very much through the heritage sites or the historical sites, some of the sites that we have already studied as part of our course.

And then also very much of the artisanal sectors like many of the artisanal sectors which were heavily disrupted by the colonial policies, so those also became important sites for reclaiming the precolonial past for them. Now, among all those people we find that Abanindranath Tagore's approach was also something that requires much attention. Now, Abanindranath Tagore was someone who was trained as a painter and early in his career we find that he was trained to make European style dry pastel and oil painting works.

And then after a point in the last decade of the 19th century we find that he had become more and more interested to find out that what are the indigenous modes of expression and he was

also assisted and supported by E. B. Havell who was the principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta during that time. So, we find that Abanindranath Tagore during that time, he started doing his experiments.

And then slowly we find that he did his oil painting works, but imbibed the pictorial arrangement and the composition and strategies of Mughal miniatures and then slowly from there we find that he had moved on to use something that is called the wash watercolour. So, wash watercolour is a very specific technique which was developed by looking into the use of tempera or opaque watercolour in the past in the Indian subcontinent.

But also by looking into the Japanese and Chinese watercolour techniques and in this particular wash watercolour technique what we find is that the colours are applied onto the paper surface and then that is washed. So, only part of the colour remains on the paper and then like more colours are applied on to the paper surface and that is our layer by layer this watercolour is developed onto paper.

And for that reason, what we also find that there are also these subdued tints of colour, instead of anything that is too bright or too contrasting. So, those things were something that we find that Abanindranath Tagore had mastered and medium became very important for him. So, as we have discussed in the earlier lecture about the use of for example Ravi Varma's use of oil painting that how he wanted to learn this European technique to depict Indian subject matter, very specifically the Hindu mythological themes.

Then for Abanindranath Tagore he was not just interested in depicting the themes which are relevant for the Indians, but he was also interested in investing time to think about the medium of expression and that is the reason he chose watercolour, this opaque watercolour upon oil colour or the British watercolour. So, we have already discussed the differences between what is British watercolour, what is the opaque watercolour and how those two things are different from each other.

So, Abanindranath Tagore went back to the opaque watercolour and in 1905, he made this particular image, this iconic image of Bharat Mata and in this one what we find that he deliberately denied the anatomy which was taught in the colonial art institutions. So, in the European anatomy, we find usually the body is considered seven and half parts of the head, but

in the art Indian artistic anatomy we find that the humans have a different anatomical proportion than the deities, the divine figures.

So for the divine figures, we find that number navatala or like the ten tala, so like either nine tala or ten tala was something that was used. So, in this case that I mean the body will be nine parts of the head or ten parts of the head. So, in this case for the depiction of Bharat Mata we certainly find that this elongated body that responded to this you know, historical mode of pictorial representation of the body, so either navatala or dasatala.

So, this is something we find that how Abanindranath Tagore by the use of this particular medium and then also by his incorporation of this Indian artistic anatomy was making a different kind of attempt of reclaiming the precolonial past. Now if we get into the iconography of this image, this image was also something that is very different from the other images of Bharat Mata, perhaps the different images of the goddesses which were floating in the late 19th century as personification of the land.

So what happens in this image, we find that who is made as Bharat Mata, she does not have any goddess like attributes except for her four arms. So, her face, her expression everything is very ordinary, very mundane, someone who we can encounter around us, it is not someone who is extraordinary. And then what else we find that she is not adorned in jewellery, but only in beads. So, the beads are there as part of this bead necklace as well as in her upper arm and as a bracelet as well.

So, these are very humble adornments which are not really worn by people who what the elites, but this is a sign of this abandonment of the society. So, basically if someone is dedicated to a cause, so they need to abandon all the material pleasures of the life and go on with it, so that was the kind of message that we find in this image. And what she wears is also this very, the saffron fabric that we find and the saffron fabric that we see here it was a sign of courage, it was a sign of renouncing the material world.

So that is the reason again going back to that what Gandhi was also referring to this mundane fabric, it is not something that is highly adorned, highly skilled or anything else. But this is the kind of fabric we see that is used by everyone and even the ones who have abandoned the

society to walk on the path of courage and of course for the anticolonial struggle. So, this is how we find that this image was made in 1905.

But this idea of making fabric and to have this humble way of life to make the anticolonial movement as an integral part of our life of our daily life is something that was already there in the early decades of the 1900s. Now, if we see what else she holds in her hand, so here is depiction of crops, so that is something that is related to agriculture and again going back to this self-sustainability that without agriculture, without producing food, one cannot really think about overthrowing the British government.

Then what else she holds, here is manuscripts. And manuscript is something that is related to education that only with education that one can think about what the harm has been caused to the Indian subjects as well as the entire land, so that is the reason like education and agriculture, these two sectors are very important. The third thing that we find here is again prayer beads and prayer bead is something which is not about the religious worship.

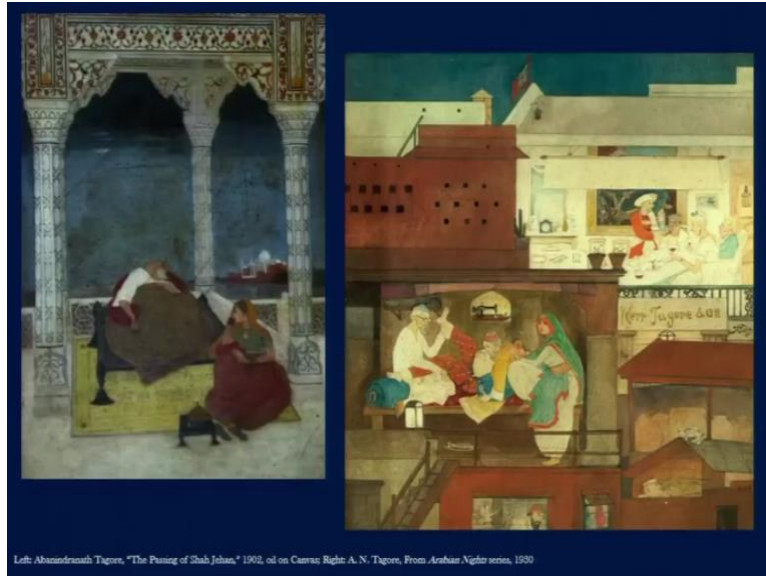
Even though it definitely has religious connotations, but here the prayer bead also sort of indicates abandonment of the material pleasures, at the same time being dedicated to the work they are pursuing. And then the last thing I would mention here is this piece of fabric that she holds here. And this piece of fabric is again that white unadorned fabric, an unadorned piece of fabric that she holds in her upper right hand.

And so why this particular kind of fabric is important is because that we see that there is again no decoration, nothing and it is just a very simple piece of fabric something that we probably see people wearing on a daily basis. Now, this is also the kind of fabric if you remember that whatever different kinds of colonial documentation of the occupational group and caste groups that we have seen in the earlier weeks.

Like Balthazar Solvyns' *The Hindus* or like the figure of the weaver from Murshidabad and so on. So, everywhere we find that this very humble simple white cotton fabric is something that is worn by people, so this is a fabric of ordinary people and that is something that we find that it was first painted in 1905. And then this is something that was taken up later in the 1920s by Gandhi as a very important part of the anticolonial movement.

So in other words, one can say that when this fabric replaces a weapon in this goddess or Bharat Mata's hand then one can think this humble fabric or this humble mode of promoting education or agriculture, they are very important and effective tool of the anticolonial struggle.

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So, from there I just want you to give a little more sense of what Abanindranath Tagore larger practice looked like. So, he was as I have already mentioned that in the early 1900s, like in 1902, he made this particular painting which is known as the passing of Shah Jahan. And so, in this particular image what we see that it was perhaps one of his first interventions into Mughal miniatures in which he meticulously reproduced this stone inlaid architecture here.

And then like also that how he imagined this old Shah Jahan who is gazing towards Taj Mahal, and then like also attended by perhaps Jahanara, his beloved daughter. So of course, it is romantic historical reconstruction, but in this one, what we find that Abanindranath Tagore was deliberately moving away from using this single point perspective and bringing some of the essence of this multiple perspectival views, those things which are used in the miniature paintings.

Also, if you see the; kind of figuration that is used here, it does not really go towards this European artistic anatomy, but it is sort of goes back to the style of Mughal miniatures. And this image in 1902, we find that it was painted with oil. So, oil colours were used for making this image but the thing is then slowly he abandoned oil painting altogether and then he experimented more and more with opaque watercolour as well as a wash technique.

So, this is an image that we find in the 1930s that Abanindranath Tagore had made and in this one again it is called the Arabian Nights series, it comes from this set of images. And in this one we see that this one particular episode of Arabian Nights how that is unfolding in in a house in Calcutta. So, this is a scene of north Calcutta and where we find in distance there is this white quarter which is inhabited by British people.

And then there is flag of the British government, right. And then here, these houses which are distinctively red in colour they are the ones we find where mostly this colour and the kind of the architecture that is something that was preferred by the people from India. So, there is a drastic difference between these two different kinds of houses, but at the same time also how this miniature like this multiple perspectival view is brought into the image and how certain precolonial mood of picture making was brought into the contemporary times.

So, contemporary was not considered something, so we see this particular architectural setting is something that that reflects the architecture and the daily life of early 20th century Calcutta. And of course, we also see this shop sign here as well which is also not necessarily seen in many paintings during this time. Now, by that what he tried to do is to bring some of the visual characteristic features from the precolonial miniature paintings.

And then the overall aesthetics in terms of the colour, distribution of forms and figures and then how the entire narrative can unfold in one picture plane. So, those things he had imbibed from the precolonial different miniature paintings, mostly from Mughal, but then he also transplanted them into the contemporary Calcutta and that is how he sort of made this silent gesture of nationalistic practice prominent.

The reclaiming of the past is something that needs to be there in the contemporary times, only then we can be aware of our rich history and that gives us a strong cause for fighting against the British. So, these are the different ways in which we find that many people if Gandhi had one way of directing people's attention towards self-sustainability and production of artisanal goods.

Then Abanindranath Tagore is someone who was interested in terms of the rich cultural history and the visual culture and how to bring them back to the contemporary situation to

recontextualize them and use them as part of the anticolonial struggle. We will continue more on that in the next lectures. Thank you.