The Role of Textiles in India's Freedom Movement

Image no: 1

Caption: *Gandhi during the Salt March,* March 1930, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marche_sel.jpg#/media/File:Marche_sel.jpg

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Image no: 2

Caption: *Gandhi during the Salt March,* March 1930. Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_Salt_March.jpg

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Image no: 3

Caption: *Demonstrations against British Rule in India,* 1930s, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Demonstration_against_British_Rule_in_India_-_c1930%27s.jpg

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Image no: 4

Caption: Briana Blasko, *Indigo leaves immersed into large vats of water,* Tamil Nadu, 2010, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: N/A

Image no: 5

Caption: Teona Swift, *Surface of blue water with drops,* Pexels.

Link: https://www.pexels.com/photo/surface-of-blue-water-with-drops-6850734/

Image no: 6

Caption: *Tana Bhagat with Gandhian Charkha taken from Ranchi,* Jharkhand, 2018, Photograph, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TANA_BHAGAT_WITH_GANDHIAN_CHARKHA.jpg

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Image no: 7

Caption: Pragadeesh Marimuthu, *Eri cloth photographed against the light,* 2021, Digital Photograph, © MAP Academy.

Link: N/A

Image no: 8

Caption: *Indigo Cultivation,* Tirhut, Bengal, 1881, Etching, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indigo_Cultivation_in_Tirhoot,_Bengal.jpg

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Image no: 9

Caption: William Simpson, *Indigo factory,* Bengal, from the album 'India: Ancient and Modern,' 1867, Chromolithograph, British Library, London.

Link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Indigo_factory_bengal2.jpg

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Image no: 10

Caption: *Indigo plant from which indigo is produced,* 28 July 2013, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indigo_plant.JPG

Image no: 11

Caption: Thomas Buttersworth, *Mahratta pirates attacking the sloop 'Aurora',* Bombay Marine, 1816, Painting, 33.0 cm x 54.5 cm, National Maritime Museum, London.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mahratta_pirates_attacking_the_sloop_%27Aurora%27,_of_the_Bombay_Marine,_1812;_beginning_of_the_action.jpg

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Image no: 12

Caption: *Clothes Being Dyed Blue,* Video, Videvo.

Link: https://www.videvo.net/video/clothes-being-dyed-blue/6327/

Image no: 13

Caption: E Theronad, *Indigo Factory at Allahabad, from John Clark Ridpath's History of the World,* 1897, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ridpath%27s_history_of_the_world%3B_being_an_account_of_the_ethnic_origin,_primitive_estate,_early_migrations,_social_conditions_and_present_promise_of_the_principal_families_of_men_(1897)_(14597001160).jpg

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Image no: 14

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Luggie (measuring lands for cultivation)* Allahabad, India, 1877, Albumen

silver print, Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:02-Luggie-(measuring-lands-for-cultivation).jpg

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Image no: 15

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Beating the vats,* 1877, Allahabad, India, Albumen Silver Print, Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:08-Indigo-factory-(beating-the-Vats).jpg

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Image no: 16

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Sowing with drills, The planting and manufacture of Indigo in Allahabad,* India in 1877, Albumen Silver Print, Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:04-Sowing-with-drills.jpg

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Image no: 17

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Loading a vat with plant, The planting and manufacture of Indigo in Allahabad,* India in 1877 Silver Albumen print, Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:07-Loading-a-vat-with-plant.jpg

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Image no: 18

Caption: Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, *Opium Poppy,* 1575, Painting, 24.2cm x 26.3cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacques_Le_Moyne_de_Morgues._Opium_Poppy.jpg

Image no: 19

Caption: *Indigo plant (Indigofera tinctoria L.),* Line engraving with Watercolour, platemark 34.7 x 21.5 cm, Wellcome Library, London.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indigo_plant_(Indigofera_tinctoria_L.);_flowering_stem_with_Wellcome_V0042997EL.jpg

Image no: 20

Caption: *A riverside scene in rural east Bengal (present-day Bangladesh),* 1860, British Library, London.

Link:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Company_rule_in_India#/media/File:Company_rule_riverside_scene2_bengal1860.jpg

Image no: 21

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Cutting Indigo into cakes, The planting and manufacture of Indigo in Allahabad,* India in 1877, Albumen silver print, Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:17-Cutting-Indigo-into-Cakes.jpg

Image no: 22

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Tumnie, turning up lands, The planting and manufacture of Indigo in Allahabad,* India in 1877. Albumen silver print, Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:03-Tumnie-(turning-up-lands).jpg

Image no: 23

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Bailing water in times of drought, The planting and manufacture of Indigo in Allahabad,* India in 1877. Silver Albumen print, Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:18-Bailing-water-in-time-of-drought.jpg

Image no: 24

Caption: Oscar Mallitte, *Loading a Vat with plant, The planting and manufacture of Indigo in Allahabad,* India in 1877, Albumen Silver Print, Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:07-Loading-a-vat-with-plant.jpg

Image no: 25

Caption: *A famine relief project: road work in Bengal,* 1936, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_famine_relief_project-_road_workin_Bengal,_1936,_in_a_news_bureau_photo.jpg#/media/File:A_famine_relief_project-_road_workin_Bengal,_1936,_in_a_news_bureau_photo.jpg

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Caption: *Gandhi in South Africa,* 1906, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_London_1906.jpg

Image no: 27

Caption: *Gandhi (center) with his secretary, Miss Sonia Schlesin, and his colleague Mr. Polak in front of his Law Office,* Johannesburg, South Africa, 1905, LIFE Photo Archive.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_Johannesburg_1905.jpg

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Image no: 28

Caption: *Demonstration against British Rule in India,* 1930s, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Demonstration_against_British_Rule_in_India_-_c1930%27s.jpg

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Image no: 29

Caption: *Gandhi and Sadar Patel Bardoli Satyagraha,* 1928, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_and_Sadar_Patel_Bardoli_Satyagraha.jpg

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Image no: 30

Caption: *Gandhi,* 1931-1932, Video, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_in_1931_and_1932.webm

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Image no: 31

Caption: *While addressing his followers, Gandhi spins by hand,* 1930, Photograph, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:While_addressing_his_followers,_Gandhi_spins_by_hand.jpg

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Image no: 32

Caption: *Mahatma Gandhi arrives in Delhi with members of his staff to confer with Viceroy Lord Linlithgow on the question of the War: To the left of Gandhi is Mahadir Desai and further left is Rajendra Prasad,* 1950, Photograph, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_in_Delhi,_October_12,_1939.jpg

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Image no: 33

Caption: *Gandhi and Mrs Sarojini Naidu, Picture taken during the Salt March,* 23 April 1930, Photograph, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_et_Mme_Sarojini_Naïdu.jpg

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Image no: 34

Caption: *Mrs. P. J. Malagar (standing far left) talking to a group of widows in the widows home compound in Bihar,* India, Photograph, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Pennsylvania.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mrs._Malagar_visiting_with_widows,_Bihar,_India,_undated_(16911229266).jpg

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Image no: 35

Caption: *Widows' Home,* Balodgahan, India, 1949, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Pennsylvania.

Link:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Widows%27_Home,_Balodgahan,_India,_1949_(16806770 279).jpg

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Image no: 36

Caption: *Gandhi at a spinning wheel during a 'Charlea' demonstration in Mirzapur,* Uttar Pradesh, June 9, 1925, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_in_Mirzapur,_June_9,_1925.jpg

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Image no: 37

Caption: *Photograph of a Kashmiri family group in the modern-day state of Jammu and Kashmir,* 1895, Photographic print, 14.1cm x 20.1 cm, British Library, London.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kashmiri_home_life,_1895_(Photo_15-10-23).jpg

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Image no: 38

Caption: *TPR Spinning Cotton,* 1 January 1975, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TPR_Charkha.jpg

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Image no: 39

Caption: Cecil Beaton, *Bengali boy using a spinning wheel,* India, 1944, Imperial War Museum, London.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cecil_Beaton_Photographs_-_General,_IB1793_-_Bengali_ boy_using_a_spinning_wheel_(India,_1944).jpg

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Image no: 40

Caption: Bieuiner & Co., (Lahore), *A woman of Cashmere spinning cotton yarn,* 1915, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_cotton_(1915)_(14746289326).jpg

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Image no: 41

Caption: D. J. Keymer & Co, *Inauguration of Republic of India,* 1950, Stamp, Offset Lithography, Post of India, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamp_of_India_-_1950_-_Colnect_986626_-_1_-_Spinning_wheel_and_cloth.jpeg

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Image no: 42

Caption: *General Election Scenes in Delhi, a cyclist canvassing for the Congress candidate,* January 1952, Photograph, Photo Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_cyclist_canvassing_for_the_Congress_candidate_(1952).jpg

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Image no: 43

Caption: *A Japanese woman sitting at a large loom,* 1878, Ink Drawing, 114.8 cm x 19.3 cm, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Japanese_woman_sitting_at_a_large_loom,_weaving_LCCN2009630060.jpg

Image no: 44

Caption: *Gandhi during the Salt March,* 1930, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_during_the_Salt_March.jpg

Image no: 45

Caption: *The Hindustan Times front page on 15 August 1947,* from the Hindustan Times, 1947, Wikimedia Commons.

Link:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Hindustan_Times_front_page_15_August_1947_(1187_%C3%97_1600).jpg

Image no: 46

Caption: *Clothes Being Dyed Blue,* Video, Videvo.

Link: https://www.videvo.net/video/clothes-being-dyed-blue/6327/

Image no: 47

Caption: Pramati Anand, *Woman Spinning Cotton on Charkha,* 2017, Video, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: N/A

At the turn of the 20th century, textile traditions became deeply intertwined with India's freedom movement. India's first forms of civil disobedience and expressions of dissent in relation to colonialism were closely linked with Indigo and Khadi, the country's handspun and handwoven cotton fabric.

Dyes of Dissent

Let's first look at how exploitative practices in indigo production led to one of India's first organised resistances. The country's warm climate was uniquely suitable for growing indigo. Owing to its vast popularity across the world, British landlords and planters in India profited immensely from exporting the brilliant blue dye that this plant produced.

A consequence of this prosperous trade was the widespread oppression of indigo farmers throughout the 19th century. To maximise production, the colonisers imposed long working hours, brutal land laws and high fees and taxes, entrapping farmers in a vicious cycle of debt and forced labour. The grim reality of these working conditions are captured in these images.

As you can see, British officers strictly supervised the farmers, making them perform to their maximum capacity. The excessive farming of cash crops like indigo and opium, leached fertile soils of their essential nutrients, and prevented them from producing food crops. This contributed significantly to the widespread famines in Bengal, Bihar and Madras through the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The brutal conditions of farmers led to various resistance movements in India, most prominently, the Blue Mutiny, a yearlong revolt that took place in Bengal in 1859, and later, the Champaran Resistance in 1917, which had far-reaching consequences in India's struggle for independence.

In Champaran, a district in Bihar, a group of desperate farmers turned to Gandhi for help in improving their oppressive circumstances. Gandhi, then a young lawyer who had recently returned from South Africa, intervened by facilitating a public outcry. The Champaran revolt was accomplished by lawfully dissenting against

colonial authorities and educating farmers of their civil rights. This was an initial materialisation of Gandhi's revolutionary philosophy of Satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance, that led to India's eventual freedom in 1947.

Fabric of Freedom

Let's now turn our attention to Khadi, India's handspun and handwoven cotton fabric, which was at the heart of the Swadeshi Movement, another key arm in Gandhi's independence philosophy. This movement encouraged the production and consumption of Indian commodities, particularly textiles, and the boycott of British imports.

While the movement did garner overwhelming support from Indian people, some women leaders of the independence movement were opposed to using white khadi due to the colour's association with notions of widowhood and female purity. Nevertheless, khadi soon transformed from a fabric into a way of life, symbolic of India's self-reliance and economic independence.

As a result of the Khadi movement, textile production in India, which was typically caste based, was democratised. All members of society, despite their religion, caste or gender started engaging in spinning and weaving. Alongside the fabric, the charkha, or spinning wheel, became synonymous with the nationalist movement and India's independence. In fact, in 1931, the Indian National Congress officially adopted a flag portraying a charkha, as you can see here.

The protests and dissent surrounding indigo production and the Khadi movement contributed to the rising consciousness against the colonial regime, compelling the emergence and persistence of a new national identity. The natural blue dye, coarse khadi fabric and the charkha are enduring symbols of resistance, sovereignty and Indian patriotism.

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