

Sari-Kimono and the Making of a Transnational Craftscape

Aarti Kawlra

In this exploratory paper, I inquire into the re-articulation of craft in India and Japan during the first half of the 20th century. Examining notions of craftsmanship as expounded by Muneyoshi (Soetsu) Yanagi (1889–1961) in Japan and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903–1988) in India, I explore how craft came to be initially deployed as a peg to situate an imagined ‘Asian’ civilizational affinity following the friendship forged between Okakura Tenshin and Rabindranath Tagore. In the post-War period craft came to be accepted world-wide as a modernist project for Asian countries seeking to re-build their national self-hood. What were the routes taken by India and Japan? We know that Kamaladevi was deeply impressed by Japan’s valorisation of its artisans as ‘national treasures’ and understood well the significance of state-led institutionalisation of craft for India’s national development. How did Kamaladevi and Yanagi re-constitute folk craft as aestheticized labour on the international stage of nations emerging from the ravages of war?

What were the metaphors, affinities and aesthetics invoked by the two cultural interlocuters in shaping the emergent transnational craftscape, whose legacy continues in contemporary craft (and design) conversations between India and Japan? The paper will take up articulations around the linkages between the sari and the kimono as unstitched or textile garments, to constitute a shared crafts ethic.

An ‘Asian’ Aesthetic¹

In the imperialist paradigm of the late nineteenth century, craft was predicated upon the orientalisation of handmade products, skills, technologies and artisanal life-worlds within the oppositional frame of tradition and modernity. Capitalist expansion and imperial power together fueled a ‘traditionalisation’² (Washbrook 1997: 410) of the colonies such that, by the first quarter of the twentieth century, craft was deployed to establish the colonies as ‘traditional’ in opposition to ‘modern’, industrialising Europe (McGowan 2009). On the other hand, nationalists canonised as ‘tradition’ a reconstituted and selectively idealised past shared by countries of the East to counter imperialist interpretations of the colonies as non-modern and ‘backward’. In India, for instance, the notion of an ‘Asian’ civilisation presented to them an equal and opposite spiritualised ‘Other’ confronting the materialism of the West (Stolte and Fischer-Tiné 2012: 65–92). The period of World War II, in particular ‘represented a peak of transnational optimism...heralding the imminent arrival of a non-Western, alternative modernity.... Envisioned in national and transnational formats, this “Asian” alternative would harness up-to-date “Western”-style scientific rationality, meritocracy, industrialization, and socioeconomic planning to the imagined, time-honored “Eastern” strengths of community, morality, and spirituality’ (Mark 2006: 462).’

By the early twentieth century the newly emergent field of ‘Asian Art’ legitimised a wide variety of works from India, China, Japan, South-east Asia that were hitherto ‘ignored,

unknown, or, in the case of Hindu imagery, debased as “monstrous” within Europe and North America’ (Brown and Hutton 2011: 5–6). Asian essentialism, even if it participated in the ‘orientalist production of Asia’ and its creative expression as transcendental beauty (ibid.), offered a spectre of humanity in the face of the near-certain cultural degeneration accompanying capitalist modernity. The common past that the Asian literati invoked was united by maritime trade and cultural exchange through pilgrims and travellers (Bayly 2004; Deshingkar 1999; Frost 2011) and constitutive of a fresh approach to craft in the opening years of the twentieth century.

The works of two influential intellectuals and cultural interlocutors, Okakura Tenshin (1862- 1913) and Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), give us an insight into the re-articulation of craft as an aspect of an ‘Asian’ aesthetic in India and Japan. Coomaraswamy and Okakura, each in their own specific ways, used moral, spiritual and aesthetic ideals drawn from a common pool to re-constitute ‘tradition’ as the antithesis of Europe and the ‘soul’ of Asia. Even though they did not meet in person, despite being part of the intellectually vibrant ‘Tagore circle’ at Calcutta (Frost 2011), Coomaraswamy and Okakura were nevertheless familiar with each other’s work and, as it happens, spent part of their working lives at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in America.

Okakura’s first major work, *The Ideals of the East*, written after a long stay in India and published in 1903 in London, begins with the famous proclamation ‘Asia is one’, while his subsequent book, *Awakening of Asia* is a ‘manifesto calling for a revival of traditional practices and values’ that outlines an agenda for pan-Asian unity to confront the spectre of Western domination (ibid., 8–9). Okakura sought for the restoration and re-assertion of ‘Asian’ values drawn from a pre-Meiji past lost under the impact of Western imperialism. His notion of a *Pax Asiatica* was a clarion call for other nations to ‘awaken’ to their own cultural heritage as a means of resisting the West: “...the brilliant resurrection of Japan is very instructive as an instance of Asiatic revival.... The sun has risen again in the East to dispel the night of despondency.... Forty millions of self-sacrificing islanders have accomplished this, why should not four hundred millions of China, and the three hundred millions of India be armed to stay the further aggression of the predatory West? And a mighty Asiatic peace shall come to clothe humanity with universal harmony. And Europe shall receive the blessing of Asia given with a freer if a firmer hand (quoted in Clark 2003: 81). This ‘message’ of superior modernity from the East not only provided a platform of solidarity vis-à-vis imperialist domination but also forged a legitimate cultural affinity and political alliance between the countries of Asia.

Coomaraswamy re-articulated an Asian aesthetic through the conjoining of Hindu, Buddhist, medieval Christian and Muslim art as the art of ‘traditional’ cultures, and posited craft work as spiritual revelation embodied in oral traditions and literary texts drawn from the East. Though Coomaraswamy deployed ‘tradition’ to be the basis for the unity of Indian culture in his earlier work, it was during his time as curator at Boston from 1917 that he expanded his ideas to produce what he called an ‘Asiatic philosophy of Art’ (Frost 2011: 13). By the 1930’s Coomaraswamy adopted an ‘Okakura-like position that “Asia, in all her

diversity, is nevertheless a living spiritual unity” by drawing out common philosophical approaches to art as revealed by learned men in India, Japan and China’ (ibid., 18). The discordant path to progress charted by capitalism and industrialism linked the whole of Asia in a common civilisational struggle against the onslaught of Western materialism. At a speech in Japan, Tagore is known to have declared that ‘Asia is growing ever more eager to defend this life’ and ‘In this we [of India] are not alone; we remain linked to the whole of Asia’ (quoted in Frost 2011: 20–21).

The recasting of craft as aestheticised tradition in India and Japan was predicated upon a disavowal of industrial mass production and the machine-aesthetic it fostered. The emergent notions of craft promoted by elite revivalist groups and literati collectors were often at variance with government-led agendas of industrial reform and growth and drew attention to locally embedded practices of hand-craftsmanship handed down for generations. The Japanese government’s policies of overt westernisation and scientific nationalism during the Meiji period prompted a counter search for non-Western values and aesthetic practices unique to Japan. From the 1920’s craft revivalists sought to resist the national policy of ‘scientification’ and ‘mass production’ of craft making wherein *sangyo* (industry) was attached to *kogei* or craft to emphasise devised for the stimulation of export whilst engendering national pride (Suga 2008:259). In India, the anti-colonial call for *swadeshi* (‘home-made’ and ‘self-reliance’) in the first decade of the twentieth century, inspired the re-discovery of craft as India’s techno-cultural past thriving in its villages, led by Gandhi’s valorisation of hand spun and hand woven cloth or khadi.

Japan-India: ‘Asian’ Modern

With the wave of decolonisation following World War II, the 1950’s saw nationalist imaginaries framing craft producers and their products within an ideology of craft whose imperialist legacy is associated with a politics of ‘othering’ in global modernity. Craft was a means of legitimising nationhood through its material cultural realities imbued with the aura of ‘heritage’ and produced anew in the service of national and international goals realigned in the direction of the newly emergent, globally powerful economies. Local materials, tools, techniques and embodied skill came to be internationally recognised as components of an Asian modernity. Refracted through the optic of an Asian aesthetic and ethic of living in an era of rapid industrialisation, craft soon came to be posited as an *Asian* modern where Japan and India are differentiated from one another but united as ‘Asian’ exemplars of indigenous technologies and skills vis-à-vis the West.

Two events from a set of exhibitions known as the ‘Good Design’ series, held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in the early 1950s, help illustrate this stance. The first of these was the 1951 exhibition titled *Japanese Household Objects* featuring handcrafted ceramic and lacquer bowls, water jugs, vases, cups and plates. Selected in response to the post-War re-evaluation of ‘tradition’ in Japan and ‘an acute awareness of American attention’, the objects of everyday use on display were intended as examples of ‘Japaneseness’, reflecting qualities of ‘directness, simplicity, beauty of form and

appropriateness of materials’ (Kida 2012: 384). The second was an exhibition held four years later in 1955 titled *Textile and Ornamental Arts of India* for which Edgar Kaufmann, Jr, the Director of Industrial Design at MoMA is known to have written to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Chairman of the All-India Handicrafts Board, in a letter the previous year, requesting the loan of objects that were ‘truly Indian in design’ (Mathur 2011: 39).

Both exhibitions showcased their countries—India and Japan—in New York. They signal the ascendance of a new perspective on non-western—specifically Asian³—cultures, mediated by craft, to mark i) the world-wide recognition of ‘tradition’ (of the East) as both superior and forward-looking, and ii) the formal entry and acceptance of ‘craft’ as a modernist project for Asian nations seeking to re-build their national self-hood. But before exploring specific craft conversations between India and Japan it would be useful to delve into the question of how craft came to be enshrined as an ‘Asian’ modern aesthetic in the first place.

The work of two cultural interlocutors, Muneyoshi (Soetsu) Yanagi (1889–1961) and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903–88) is notable in this regard. Both led craft revival in their respective countries by positing craftsmanship as the superior message and ‘soul’ of an Asian modernity. Moreover, both Yanagi and Kamaladevi were responsible for the institutionalisation of craft as national heritage in Japan and India respectively.

The public recognition of ‘folk art’ or ‘art of the people’ in Japan came with Yanagi’s first book *Kogei no Michi* (‘The Way of Crafts’) published in the late 1920’s.⁴ In *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, Yanagi argues that the non-individualism of ‘tradition’ was the true marker of beauty rather than knowledge of the identity of individual genius. Indeed, the anonymity of production of the objects he called *mingei* (a neologism he coined) was ‘both an emblem and a condition of their status’ (Brandt 2007: 40). His paradigm of craft is said to have been moulded with his discovery of wooden Buddhist sculptures carved by the itinerant monk Mokujiki Shonin (d. 1810). In 1923 Yanagi retraced the route travelled by Mokujiki to discover and collect samples of his works found in remote temples. He employed fresh criteria of aesthetic judgement to catalogue them and described them as ‘simple’, ‘natural’ and ‘ego-less’ beauty relying on what he termed the ‘power of tradition’.

Yanagi thus articulated the beauty of handicraft in the accumulated wisdom of generations. His nationalist declaration of Mokujiki as ‘an honour to Japan’ (*nihon no eiyo/meiyo*) and his creations as the most “‘innate and original (*koyu*)” beauty of Japan’ (Kikuchi 1997: 346) underlay his wider ambitions for establishing a uniquely Japanese aesthetic to confront western knowledge hierarchies and categories (Brandt 2007). In fact, Brandt holds that ‘Mokujiki Shonin and *mingei* enabled Yanagi to mobilize powerful networks of provincial elites around objects of local provenance’ (ibid., 44). According to Yanagi, in the work of the ‘unknown craftsman’ was to be found the benefaction of ‘tradition’ which he believed could dissolve the distinction between the ordinary and the genius. For him ‘craft beauty is social beauty’ (quoted in Brandt 2007:52). Throughout his life Yanagi

worked hard to blur the division between *jotemono*, i.e., refined works created by individual artists, and *getemono* or objects of everyday life made by anonymous craftspersons, and later went on to set up the Japan Folk Crafts Museum (*Nihon Mingei-kan*) in Tokyo.⁵

It was only after the first Japan Traditional Handicrafts Exhibition held in 1954, three years after the MoMA exhibition, that the term *dento koge*i (traditional crafts) came into regular use at the behest of the Cultural Properties Protection Committee. It marked the establishment of a system which provided a formal designation and mode of evaluation to individual practitioners as ‘Preservers of Important Intangible Cultural Properties’ (Living National Treasures—Crafts) on the basis of their mastery over ‘traditional’ (as opposed to ‘modern’) materials, tools and techniques that were unique to Japan (Kida 2010). In the search for authenticity, innovation and imitation were discouraged as deviations from ‘original’ principles and standards of practice set by tradition and meticulously adhered to by craft masters in the form of hereditary skill. The ‘traditional’ in *dento koge*i was referred to as embodied technical skill which ‘we possess within us, what is in our life-blood’ and that has the power to sustain and reproduce itself even without conscious efforts at preservation.⁶ The list of individuals and groups certified under these categories by the state since the 1950s is publicly available and represents Japan’s formal recognition of artisans as repositories of local craft knowledge and practice.⁷

In India, the formal edification of craft as a marker of cultural achievement and basis for the unity of Asian nations was realised in the work of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay whose politics centred on instilling pride predicated upon a newly defined aesthetics of craft. For Kamaladevi, all functional objects were significant enough to lay claim to an aesthetic appeal and could imbue one’s daily life with a ‘touch of beauty’. In the early years of the anti-colonial struggle in 1925, during a visit with Gandhi, Kamaladevi is known to have drawn the Mahatama’s attention by quietly replacing the cigar box in which he kept his cotton for spinning with an intricately carved sandal wood box (Nanda 2002: 124). Mundane materials, tools, techniques, and processes involved in the production of objects of everyday use were thus re-aestheticised by her in the idiom of simplicity, attention to detail and quality of workmanship. Reflecting on her life’s work she maintained: ‘We had been made to feel primitive by the British—that we had nothing of modern aesthetic values...we had to build our own sense of appreciation’ (Narasimhan 1999: 77–9).

Inspired by the Japanese state’s patronage of craft and her friendship with the Kenzai family of potters, Kamaladevi acknowledged that her ‘foundation for the development of crafts in India after independence was in truth laid in Japan’ even though she was sceptical of Japan’s emergence as an imperial power in Asia. She was impressed by the Japanese attitude to craft pedagogy, which she saw first-hand at a class led by Shoji Hamada: ‘I was impressed by the Master’s concept of a class...(that) no one can really *teach* a craft.... Students can be advised on quality of clay, point out different *processes* and *techniques* like firing. Sensitivity to aesthetics, finesse in workmanship have to be cultivated by the students themselves.’ She cites Hamada’s approach to aesthetics through craft practice in her memoirs: ‘Quality pots are those that flow out of the creative urge, not *copies* of masterpieces.’ Indeed, Kamaladevi

sought to infuse craft with an aesthetic sensibility whose cultivation, she believed, could be the well spring of an Asian cultural renaissance in modernity (Chattopadhyay 1986: 258–62).

Following the goals of rural reconstruction set by Gandhi, Kamaladevi was instrumental in framing policies and institutions for artisans in independent India. Gandhi's economic advisor and secretary of the All-India Village Industries Association, J. C. Kumarappa had already begun to situate craft as a cottage industry in the wider economic context of planned development and decentralization.⁸ During her work with partition refugees at Faridabad town near Delhi, Kamaladevi founded the Indian Cooperative Union (ICU) in 1948 which later became the model for the organisation of production for artisans across the country and provided craft objects for urban consumption through its retail outlet, the Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE). The All India Handloom Board implemented under Nehru's First Five Year Plan in 1952 formally initiated the newly emergent Indian state's agenda for shifting artisans' nexus with royal and rural patrons to the burgeoning urban middle class. The National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum, set up in New Delhi in the late 50's was to support this new aesthetic with a mandate to "source material for the revival, reproduction and development of crafts". In 1965, Kamaladevi set up the Crafts Council of India, a non-profit organisation that works in tandem with governmental agencies for crafts advocacy and schemes for artisans, particularly the 'Master Craftsman' awards, mirroring the Japanese enunciation of artisans as 'National Treasures'.

Kamaladevi's re-aestheticisation of craft focused explicitly upon the artisans themselves. She noted that 'there is so much beauty in the simple articles which are used in village homes, but we have forgotten to honour craftspersons' (quoted in Narasimhan 1999: 80). Much later, reflecting upon the role of crafts in the future of India, Kamaladevi's characterisation of craft labour as humanistic work-practice resisting the alienation of mechanical work is unmistakable: 'Let me first of all clarify what I mean by craft as skilled labour in materials, not necessarily mere handwork that is simply manual dexterity as opposed to cultivation of the mind' (Chattopadhyay 1984).

Kamaladevi was aware that the re-signification of craft objects in the everyday life of the user was the only way to recuperate the vanishing traditions of artisanship in India. That Japan had been her inspiration in sacralising craft as a universal ideal of daily living is evident from her enchantment with the tea ceremony: 'The tea ceremony of Japan ... requires a special pavilion offering seclusion from the bustle of everyday life, in its own surroundings, and the use of its own vessels or cups, involving the manufacture of special pottery' (ibid., 6). Kamaladevi exhorted urban elite to use craft objects in their homes as part of a renewed aesthetic of domestic consumption and made the work of unknown artisans accessible through travelling exhibitions-cum-sales. Her craft-based aesthetic was easily appropriated in the home which had been reconceived during the anti-colonial struggle as a site for the creation of women as political subjects.

In drawing attention to a shared discourse of an 'Asian' aesthetic and tracing its afterlife in craft movements in Japan and India in the first half of the twentieth century, my aim has been

to draw scholarly attention toward the ideological lineage of the transnational circulation of craft.

A Transnational Craft-scape⁹

Reading the India-Japan craft-scape as a shared imaginary has meant shifting away from readings of craft in the dominant paradigms of the traditional vs modern, industrialisation/de-industrialisation, colonial/national. The anthology edited by Reillo and Parthasarathi for instance, attempts to redress the Eurocentric bias in the historiography of industrialisation and global trade and, instead, foregrounds case studies of intra-Asian craft exchanges: ‘Batik’s rise from the late seventeenth century owed much to technical innovation and diffusion. Wooden blocks probably reaching Java from India around 1700, were used for cheaper Javanese batik by the 1810’s, and spread to southern Sumatra. The Cham of Cambodia and Vietnam, Austronesian-speaking and largely Muslim, are thought to have adopted batik from their Malay cousins, with whom they had significant links. The canting, employed in Java by the 1810’s, was unusual in being a local invention.... India supplied models for local industries to emulate or surpass’ (Clarence-Smith 2012: 140–1). In an article on the culture of imported textiles in Japan, Kayoko Fujitsa suggests that Japan was ‘Indianised’ in the period between 1550 and 1850 where Indian textiles were not only used and preserved as cultural artefacts but also served as ‘sources of design’ (Kayoko 2012: 202).

In the rest of this section, I hope to draw attention to the shared Asianist (?) aesthetic that focuses on culturally valued textiles, not for their value as commodities of exchange, but for their ‘craft’ basis in sustaining dialogue between Japan and India. Quite a contrast from Japan’s influence in resisting the hegemony of *couture*, body-fitted and constructed clothing in western fashion.¹⁰ Elsewhere I have shown that the interpretation of the kimono as an ‘over-sized’, ‘structured’ and ‘loose-fitting’ garment in western costume and fashion circles has neglected to view the kimono as a garment-textile in the manner of other Asian garments like the sari and the sarong (Kawlra, 2002; 2010). In the western clothing tradition, a garment is either draped on a standard body or dress form, or cut along a *toile* or pre-existing cloth or paper pattern requiring some amount of professional tailoring skill. On the other hand, the sari and the kimono are woven/printed flat without reference to the specific proportions of a real body or a standard body form. It is well known that a sari without a border is considered plain yardage and is never cut or tailored. Similarly, kimonos are rarely ever cut on the bias; they do not require any dressmaking expertise and the seams are rarely concealed or permanent. In fact dry-cleaning the kimono involves opening out the seams to the original fabric width as a means to ensure preservation of every part of the garment-textile.

As garment-textiles, the sari and the kimono invite further analysis, not in opposition to each other, but for their shared differences from stitched garments in general. Not only do saris and kimono’s come in specific lengths, even the internal ordering of their various visual elements or ‘layout’ is in accordance to a specific pattern of differentiation. This structure is

adhered to at every stage in the production of the kimono or sari regardless of whether it is being woven, printed or resist dyed. Cultures of production and consumption of the sari and kimono therefore, support on-going conversations and translations of textile techniques between Japan and India. The on-going production and consumption of Japanese *shibori* in India since the last decade of the twentieth century enunciates a renewed conversation inhabiting the India-Japan craft-scape. In what follows, I discuss the appropriation and transmutation of *shibori*, a Japanese resist-dye technique, in the hands of Indian artisans and designers to interrogate the Asianist lineage of craft in India-Japan linkages related to textiles.

The interpretation of Indian textiles within what we are referring to as an Asianist idiom of craft endures in Japan. The Japan Folk Craft Museum holds regular exhibitions showcasing India and Japan's kinship in handcrafted textiles. The exhibition titled *Textiles: The Soul of India* held at the Japan Folk Crafts Museum (*Mingeikan*) in 2007 comprised Indian fabrics meticulously collected from remote villages in India by Hiroko Iwatate¹¹ since the 1980s. Among the first textiles purchased by her in the desert region of Rajasthan and Gujarat were turban scarves 'because they looked like lengths of tie-dye *shibori*'.¹² Again, in 2014 Iwatate's *kantha* or embroideries from Bengal were showcased at the Japan Folk Crafts Museum alongside *sashiko* needlework from north-eastern Japan at the exhibition '*Kantha and Sashiko*'. Iwatate pronounces her Indian odyssey as one of mutuality and exchange, where the sari and kimono are coeval metaphors of craft and national self-hood—'To India, the land of the sari from Japan, the land of the kimono'—underscoring the existence of a shared textile aesthetic and affinity between the two. See image below of craft patron and Gandhian, Prabha Shah showing Hiroko Iwatate her collection of tie-dyed textiles from Kutch including her father's head scarf or *safa* in February 1987. (Photo Ia and Ib credit: Hiroko Iwatate)



Image 2a and 2b of a girl's cotton kimono, 1940s – 1950s (Photo credit and collection – Haruko Watanabe).

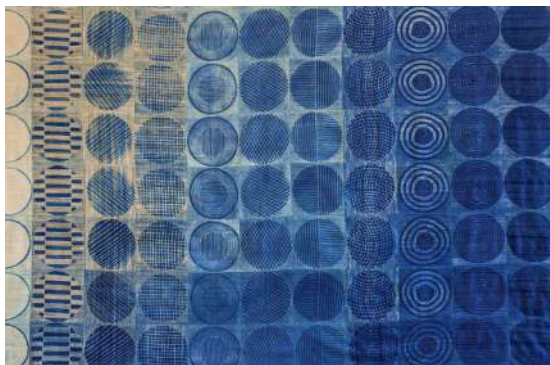


The interventions of Japanese textile designer Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada¹³ via India's National Institute of Design (NID) have been influential in the introduction of *shibori* as an innovative textile technique among artisans and designers in western India. The setting for Wada's exchange is significant. Three years after the 1955 MoMA exhibition, Nehru invited the American designer couple Charles and Ray Eames, producers of a short film for the India installation in New York, to advise the newly-emergent nation with a design-mediated road map for national rejuvenation (Mathur 2011). Their proposal known as the 'Eames India Report' led to the founding of NID with a mandate to address India's changing needs of food, shelter, distribution and population in the idiom of modern design whilst being mindful of its technical and aesthetic foundations exemplified by the handcrafted *lota*. This meant that NID was 'new' India's formal institutional space for the exploration of its living craft traditions within a modernising project. Japan's own experience with its continuing craft traditions made a Japanese designer like Wada, a most welcome intermediary in the Cold War world context.

Wada's affiliation with NID helped her travel to centres of artisanal textile production across the country and to promote the Japanese technique of *shibori* among its students and the design fraternity in India in general. The 'Second International Shibori Symposium' was held at NID in 1997. In 2001 she was involved with the 'Bandhani Development Project' at NID which sought to bring relief and rebuild the lives of dyers and printers affected by the Gujarat Earthquake, via fund-raising efforts like exhibitions, sales and textile craft advocacy. Wada leads the collaborative natural dyes and *shibori* workshops of the World Shibori Network where she works with local communities and small textile studios in transferring knowledge and skills. She has mentored the natural dyes and dyeing unit run as a welfare project for differently-abled children of tea plantation workers in Munnar, Kerala. She is known to have named a new technique "*aru-shibori*" after its innovator and her trainee, Arumugham¹⁴.

The Japan-India craft-scape is invoked through *shibori*'s resonance with *bandhej*, the tie/bind-resist dyeing technique of western India and reinforced as a craft practice. Textile designers like Baroda-based Neha Puri Dhir who attended Wada's workshop, use *shibori*'s technique of stitch-resist dyeing to articulate a craft aesthetic - "Silk sourced from various weaving clusters across India is finely stitched and dyed multiple times. The nuances of stitch-resist are seen as subtle perforations on the final fabric surface, and they are integrated into the final work. Every pattern is planned meticulously – the colours require precise chemistry. Each step adds complexity to the cloth but even though the entire process is worked out in detail, the work that emerges is an outcome of chance." Her design practice involves creative collaborations with artisans whom she values as bringing "craft wisdom" to her textiles¹⁵.

See image 3 below of textile art executed by her in the *shibori* technique from the exhibition Amoolya, New Delhi, 2014.



For textile designer and co-founder of the Mura Collective (est. 1998), Kusum G. Tiwari, attending to the intricacies of technique and design of *shibori* reflects artisanship as a shared aesthetic ideal between Japan and India. She is said to have chanced upon 'a catalogue from Kyoto National Museum, which enthralled her with images of *shibori* patterned cloth, and proceeded to cement the concept of Mura'. She explains in the craft idiom popularised by Wada that *shibori* means 'to "wring, squeeze, and press". It is a process of manipulating fabric through resist-dyeing, i.e., by folding, crumpling, stitching, plaiting, clamping, or twisting. Common designs according to the method are water-like (loop-binding), spider-like (pleated), and heavy rain-like (clamp). These techniques allow the fabric which is essentially two-dimensional, to visually take a three-dimensional form. The memory of the artist's hands and technique are imprinted on the shape and form of the cloth.'¹⁶ (See image 4 of Prabha Gahtori, co-founder of Mura in their studio in Neb-sarai, Delhi. Photo credit: K Ananthan, The Hindu Sept. 19, 2014)



The work of Japanese textile designer and craft revivalist Ryoko Haraguchi's is yet another example of an India-Japan craft-scape mediating the exchange of textile designs and techniques. Inspired to revive the Japanese *kakishibu* dye technique which is on the verge of extinction in her own country, Haraguchi's experiments in *kakishibu* natural dyeing involve the use of the fermented juice of unripe persimmons, a Japanese fruit which not only imparts deep colours but also acts as a fixing agent. Haraguchi has experimented with different modes of working with Indian dyers: 'Initially, I would take the finished garment/fabric back to Japan and get it over-dyed there, but now I send persimmon tannin powder to my agent who keeps it in workshops and gets it done by the workers here.'¹⁷ The *itajime* technique of board or plank dyeing originally used for kimono's is yet another field of experimentation for Haraguchi which she deploys in combination with Indian fabrics and textile-craft ornamentations (such as hand embroidery, stitching, knitting, crochet, block printing, *batik* and *bandhej*) sourced from artisans in the Delhi and Jaipur area to produce Japan-inspired shawls, scarves, stoles and saris for elite Indian clients .

Haraguchi inhabits the expanding India-Japan craft-scape, already charted by Iwatate and Wada and expresses her relationship in terms of a technical collaboration among equals. In 2009, her first exhibition titled 'Haath Heart' in New Delhi paid homage to the 'hands' of all Indian artisans and their skill: 'My creations come as a result of the partnership with the excellent craftspeople working in India. We behold beauty all around us in the natural world, but there is also a deep beauty in the work that comes from the hands of these craftspeople. Those works are intensely heart-warming and inspirational to us. Each of these craftspersons' hand (*haath*)-work vibrates in our hearts and (they) have a deep influence in my own work' (quoted in Wada 2002).

Conclusion

I have proposed the heuristic of a 'transnational craft-scape' to interrogate past and ongoing circulations of craft between India and Japan in this paper. My aim has been to trace the craft movements led by Soetsu Yanagi and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay as a shared ideological, Asianist lineage, that resulted in state valorization and protection of anonymous artisans and their products in both Japan and India. Inquiring into the afterlife of these movements in contemporary mediations of collectors, designers and consumers inhabiting this transnational craftscape, has drawn attention to a common aesthetic ideal, one of self-conscious consumption of the labour and skill of the Indian/Japanese artisan. The paper is an attempt to read the newly emergent production and consumption of *shibori* textiles in urban India within the context of a shared craft-scape between India and Japan. Yanagi and Coomaraswamy's links with the British arts and crafts movement are arguably implicated in this craftscape and require further research.

My exploration of some textile-craft conversations between India and Japan in this paper has not meant a denial of the labouring underbelly of global fashion. Instead, illuminating the Asianist lineage of these conversations has revealed a specific matrix of exchange guided by a shared ideology of craft operating within a transnational context. Interrogating contemporary craft conversations in India and Japan provokes reflection upon a shared past rapidly being overwritten and erased in the post nationalist age of global capital.¹⁸ The intra-Asian circulation of people, ideas and things in the long global is an emergent field in which the exchange of craft knowledge, designs, techniques and objects between India and Japan is an important area of future research.

Bharucha's re-telling of Tagore and Okakura's friendship, our invocation of an 'Asian' modern, from Okakura and Coomaraswamy to Yanagi and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, summons us to attend to the underlying 'affinities animating Asian differences' (Bharucha 2006: xx) in the quotidian aesthetic (and ethic) of craft. The civilisational critique of the West in Japan and India served as the shared imaginary and peg for situating techno-cultural affinity in the twentieth century. Here craft was not merely a justification of nationalism but a repository of 'Asian' wisdom featuring a distinctive aesthetic of work and living. The contemporary India-Japan craft-scape militates against the appropriation of handmade products as inert commodities within a global marketplace and invalidates the discourse and sanction of 'authenticity' associated with handmade products.

A still wider implication of this research is opening the triangulation of craft through case studies across different geographies and political settings. Material culture studies have turned toward the 'social life' and 'biographies' of objects since the interest sparked in global networks and flows following Appadurai and others. In recent years, transnational mobilities and exchange of things beyond imperialist or nationalist frames

has emerged as a legitimate field of research. There is a growing interest in charting new routes of craft production, consumption and transmission, particularly those that have been marginalized, subordinated or silenced across regions and historical scales. The aim is to shift our lens to transnational trajectories of unknown and often unexceptional people, places, things, techniques and recipes whose histories and ethnographies are yet to be narrativised. Where are the nodes of power that imbricate itineraries of craft? What norms and forces fuel their circulation and how are they regulated? The kimono and the sari conjure appealing stories of mutuality and difference. Only when they are placed within wider discourses of culture, decolonization, capitalism and global consumption can we offer sharper, historically informed analyses of the everyday lives and livelihoods embraced by craft.

References

- Appadurai, A. 1996. 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy', in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bayly, S. 2004. 'Imagining Greater India: French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode', *Modern Asian Studies*, 38(3), 703-744.
- Bharucha, R. 2006. *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Brandt, K. 2007. *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan*. Duke University Press.
- Brown, R. M. and D.S. Hutton. 2011. 'Revisiting "Asian Art"', In R.M. Brown and D.S. Hutton (eds), *A Companion to Asian Art and Architecture*, 3, First Edition. John Wiley & Sons, 1–20.
- Chattopadhyay, K. 1984. 'Crafts and the Future', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 5–14.
- 1986. *Inner recesses, Outer Spaces: Memoirs*. New Delhi: Navrang.
- Clarence-Smith, W. G. 2012. 'The Production of Cotton Textiles in Early Modern South-East Asia', in G. Riello, and P. Parthasarathi (eds), *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles (1200–1850)*. New Delhi: Primus Books, 127–42.
- Clark, J. 2012. 'Okakura Tenshin [Kakuzô] and Aesthetic Nationalism', *Arts: The Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association*, 25, 64–89
- De la Paz, C. S. 2004. 'Imagining Nations and Communities through Museums: The Politics and Aesthetics of Identity Construction in Japan and the Philippines', in Ricardo G. Abad (ed.), *The Asian Face of Globalisation: Reconstructing Identities, Institutions, and Resources*. Tokyo: The Nippon Foundation, 178–189.
- Deshingkar, G. 1999. 'The construction of Asia in India', *Asian Studies Review*, 23(2), 173–180.
- Francks, P. 2012. 'Kimono Fashion: The Consumer and the Growth of the Textile Industry in Pre-War Japan', in *The Historical Consumer: Consumption and Everyday Life in Japan, 1850–2000*. 151.
- Frost, M. R. 2011. 'That Great Ocean of Idealism: Calcutta, the Tagore Circle and the Idea of Asia (1900–1920)', Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, Working Paper Series No. 3 June. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, http://nsc.iseas.edu.sg/documents/working_papers/nscwps003.pdf.

- Iwatate, H. 2007. *Textiles: The Soul of India*. Japan: Kyuryudo Art Publishing Company.
- Kawtra, A. 2002. 'The Kimono Body', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*. Vol. 6, Issue 3, September. New York: FIT and UK: Berg Publishers.
- 2010. 'Snapshot: The Sari and the Kimono', in Jasleen Dhamija (ed.), *Berg Encyclopaedia of World Dress and Fashion: South Asia and South East Asia*, Volume 4. UK: Berg Publishers and USA: OUP.
- 2013. 'Overwritten and/or Erased: Rereading Biographies of Cloth in the Global Ecumene', Report on the ICAS 8 Macau Roundtable *Cloth, Identity and Power in The IIAS Newsletter* 65, p. 45, Leiden: The Netherlands, Autumn <http://www.ias.nl/the-newsletter/article/overwritten-andor-erased-rereading-biographies-cloth-global-ecumene>
- Kayoko, F. 2012. 'Japan Indianised', in G. Riello and P. Parthasarathi (eds), *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles (1200-1850)*. New Delhi: Primus Books, 181–204.
- Kida, T. 2010. 'Traditional Art Crafts (Dentō Kōgei)', *The Journal of Modern Craft: Japan: From Reproductions to Original Works*, 3(1), 19–35.
- Kikuchi, Y. 1997. 'Hybridity and the Oriental Orientalism of Mingei Theory', *Journal of Design History*, 10(4), 343–54.
- Koyano, S. 1979. *Technology of Traditional Industry and the Role of Craftsmen*. Tokyo: The United Nations University.
- Mark, E. 2006. "'Asia's' Transwar Lineage: Nationalism, Marxism, and "Greater Asia" in an Indonesian Inflection', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 65(03), 461–93.
- Mathur, S. 2007. *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- McGowan, A. 2009. *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Moeran, B. 1989. 'Bernard Leach and the Japanese Folk Craft Movement: The Formative Years', *Journal of Design History*, 139–44.
- Nanda, R. 2002. *Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay: A Biography*. New Delhi: OUP.
- Narasimhan, S. 1999. *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: The Romantic Rebel*. Sterling Publishers.

Stolte, C., and H. Fischer-Tiné. 2012. 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905–1940)', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 54(01), 65–92.

Suga, Y. 2008. 'Modernism, Nationalism and Gender: Crafting Modern Japonisme', *Journal of Design History*, 21(3), 259–75.

Tankha, B. 2011. 'Asian Circuits: India and Japan's Modern Encounter' (日本語・日本学研究/東京外国語大学国際日本研究センター [編]), *Journal for Japanese Studies*, (1), <http://scholar.google.co.in/scholar?hl=en&q=brij+tankha+asian+circuits&btnG>, 33–43.

Trivedi, L. N. 2003. 'Visually Mapping the "Nation": Swadeshi Politics in Nationalist India (1920–1930)', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 62(01), 11–41.

Vasudev, S. 2015. 'Japanese Interventions', in *Live Mint*. 7 February. <http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/VD1uMx1wtsIfMrFLCqCqjO/Japanese-interventions.html>.

Wada, Y.I., M.K. Rice and J. Barton. 1999. *Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing: Tradition, Techniques, Innovation*. New York and Tokyo: Kodansha International, fourteenth printing, 2008.

Wada, Y. 2002. *Memory on Cloth: Shibori Now*. Kodansha International.

Washbrook, D. 1997. 'From Comparative Sociology to Global History: Britain and India in the Pre-History of Modernity', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 40 (4): 410–43.

Yanagi, Soetsu. 1972, 1989. *The Unknown Craftsman. A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, Adapted by Bernard Leach. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

1 This paper was first presented at the ‘Mobilities of Craft since 1900: Economics, Politics, Aesthetics’ panel organised by Rebecca Brown and Jennifer Way at Association of Asian Studies conference held in March 2014 in Philadelphia USA. The research on going past nationalist readings of craft towards a transnational, ‘Asianist’ perspective on craft was initiated during my stay at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi as a Fellow from 2013-2015. I am grateful to the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi University and Japan Foundation, New Delhi for organising the international conference *India and Japan: Roads to the Modern* in September 2014 where I had the chance to present an earlier version of this paper.

2 According to Washbrook ‘Britain's modernisation is inconceivable except in a broader global context of which India already comprised a vital part. And, reciprocally, that India's role in the construction of Britain's Modernity, so far from opening up possibilities of it following the same course itself, conveyed imperatives which took its society towards a reverse process of “Traditionalisation”’.

3 Africa was seen to be different from Asia in being articulated as ‘tribal’ rather than having a civilizational base.

4 The art historian and mingei critic, Mizuo Hiroshi, for example, admits that Yanagi probably heard something about Morris from Leach at this time, but says that Yanagi's first detailed knowledge of the work of Ruskin and Morris came only with the publication of an article by Okuma Nobuyuki in 1927, the year after Yanagi published his first major work on crafts (Moeran, 1989:141).

5 Yanagi and his collaborators founded the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in 1936 as a modest roof-tiled Japanese house in self-conscious resistance to prevailing museum architecture to offer visitors an experience of the quiet beauty and humility of quotidian life prior to modernization (De la Paz 2004).

6 These are the words of influential potter Shoji Hamada (1894–1978) also known as the founder of *mingei* movement together with potter Kawai Kanjiro and Yanagi. Hamada’s ideas on tradition are from his article ‘Dento no uketorikata’ (Understanding Tradition) in *Gekkan bunkazai*, January 1966 (as quoted in Koyano 1979: 3).

7 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Living_National_Treasures_of_Japan_\(crafts\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Living_National_Treasures_of_Japan_(crafts)). Shoji Hamada was among the first beneficiaries of this state-sponsored honour in 1955.

8 Radhakamal Mukerjee’s *The Foundations of Indian Economics* with an introduction by Patrick Geddes (1916) is testimony to the then extant view that the revitalisation of India’s cottage and village industries was essential for its future economic and urban renewal.

9 The term craft-scape draws from Appadurai’s (1996) formulation of five dimensions of global cultural flows characterised by the shifting landscape of people, ideas, technologies, finance and

media.

10 Japan has been influential to western fashion not only for its ‘understatement’ but also for its ethos of ‘anti-fit’ following the deconstruction of tailored clothing by Japanese fashion designers like Kenzo, Kawakubo, Miyake. “Wilful scorn of tailoring is also indicative of a nonchalance and preference for the irregular and unconstrained with clothing ... but also a function of the kimono mind as it has been introduced to the West” (Martin, 1995:215). In the 1980’s, Issey Miyake’s creation of a skirt from a circular *kalamkari* table cloth popularised the textile technique in clothing fashion via design elites like Asha Sarabhai and Rakesh Thakore who collaborated with him (Vasudev, 2015).

11 The Iwatate Folk Textile Museum in Tokyo housing her large collection of textiles sourced from India and other Asian countries was established in 2009 and continues to expand the awareness of this transnational craftscape for its Japanese patrons.

12 *Japan Times*, 24 November 2007

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2007/11/24/general/textiles-whispering-soul-of-india/#.VY73dfmqkko>.

13 Founder of the World Shibori Network (est. 1992) and named ‘Distinguished Craft Educator—Master of Medium’ by the James Renwick Alliance, Wada first came to India via a grant from the ‘Indo-US Sub-commission for Education and Culture’ in 1983 at the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad.

14 Aranya Naturals is the welfare project of Tata Global Beverages Ltd

<http://www.aranyanatural.com/our-skills.html>

15 Her exhibition titled ‘Amoolya’ held at New Delhi in August 2014 showcased her interpretations of Japanese *shibori* as textile art: <http://e-she.in/2014/08/26/art-on-textiles/>

16 *The Hindu*, 24 May 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/fashion/the-adventures-of-mura/article6041355.ece>.

17 *The Hindu*, 2 December 2009, <http://www.thehindu.com/arts/crafts/something-to-dye-for/article58884.ece>.

18 See Kawlra (2013) on the ‘need to recover eclipsed claims of culture and identity to be found in past, present and future biographies of cloth’ traversing the world’s craft-scape that includes Asia but also Africa and other parts of the globe.