

Audio 2 Transcript

Arnika: "A dress is a forest of memory. It's damask skin,
It's armpits of toil and wonder. Even the holes
Are altars to fairy tales, reminding you how once
You were so small. Once your waist was a secret nation."

-A poem by Tishani Doshi, called 'A dress is like a field'

Vaishnavi: The holes remind us of worn out saris that exist within the memories of whoever gave it up - eventually most of our textiles are dowry clothing, and people must've given it up because of necessity or death. If you think of it, no one would willingly give up clothing that was given to them as dowry because women sometimes weave the clothing themselves to take it with them to a new house.

Arnika: Yes, I noticed that a blouse in this exhibition has remnants of one or more bodies, perhaps of women with different body types. When a tight fitted garment is passed on from one generation to another, every body type will leave their marks on the stitching of the garment, imposing tension where it sits tightly. So if you look at a blouse like this, it carries the imprint of multiple bodies.

Vaishnavi: We assume that most of the clothes that people wore were stitched but this collection shows us that we can wear unstitched clothing too. We can broadly categorise clothes into stitched and unstitched garments, and unstitched garments often appear in non western societies. That completely changes the value of the single piece, the idea of time bound fashion, and durability of clothes, but makes us think of cloth as a carrier of stories, relationships, belonging and identity. There are no size issues with shawls or saris. Also, tie-dyed cloth was used to protect hands and feet. In Ladakh, thigma, a tie-dying process on wool, is used to decorate shoes.

Arnika: I hear you tell me about terms like bandhani and thigma. Since they have shapes like circles or dots which look very similar to each other, what do they mean and are they made in a similar way?

Vaishnavi: These dots or circles are called bund in Rajasthan and are meant to be knotted, it also translates to a drop, like, drop of water - in Gujarat, it's called a bindi, a round bandhani with a dark center.

Arnika: That makes sense, we also see multi-colored ties called ladoo jalebi. The names of the patterns are based on nature and some are even named after food. The spirals are called jalebi because they spiral into circles, the ladoo pattern looks like round dots, the bundi pattern are even smaller dots.

Vaishnavi: Yes, and if we think about how the dots are made... women who wrap, unwrap and rewrap new threads in between dyes are precise at following the patterns. They start with an unbleached cotton cloth and work up from the lightest to darkest colours. The light to dark colour process is mainly practiced by people of Saurashtra and Kutch, the ones from Rajasthan might do a reverse process. The makers could also use a thimble or a tool to pinch the cloth before wrapping the thread around it. Women tie and dye cloth most of their day and spend moments between taking care of their children, talking to other women while they also practice tie and dye.

Arnika: Yes, this aspect of tie and dye being part of their everyday life, the making, the material, but also what it shows, was important to highlight. We have two leheriyas in the collection that made us think of the natural resources that are used in making tie and dye textiles, the harsh sunlight, the water used in the dying process, and the resources used to produce natural dye and ultimately the question of how pollution and climate change might impact the making and the future of these textiles.

But we also thought about the waves in the pattern: Leheriya translates to waves. How and where are the waves formed? They could be seen on a water body, like a lake, in Rajasthan, or it imitates the pattern on the desert sand. They could also be the ripples that the dyer sees in their dye bath while soaking the cloth and threads in water.

Vaishnavi; Similarly through talking about bandhani we are telling the story of how the body, or parts of the body are being used in making textiles, how makers embody the multiple histories of their communities and textiles become a visualisation of the same. Some dyers indicate that the sun's rays intensify the dye colour of the cloth.

Arnika: We hope you enjoyed our conversation. Scroll below to view Raisa Kabir's video work.