

MATERIAL MEMORIES



“A catalogue of fabrics and designs conveys nothing of the anxiety and careful thought involved in selecting what we wear, the sense it brings us of our own bodies, of who we are and who we might become” (Banerjee and Miller).

Welcome to the Anand Mangal and MMPI fashion show!

Anand Mangal will show different styles and regional dress from India to uncover the memories retained in these garments.

Anand Mangal and the MMPI team have explored memories of migration and change over time by focusing on fashion, textiles and other objects of sentimental value as a way to consider identity, belonging and heritage. Through fashion timeline, mapping and 'show and tell' workshops, we have discussed how textiles, stitching and fashion triggers memories and reveals change over time and space. We have visited New Walk Museum's Gujarati textile collection, the Leicestershire County Council's fashion collections and have partnered with the Council's Heritage Service to explore heritage through our own meaningful objects and stories, leading to the co-curation of an exhibition at Charnwood Museum from September 2019.

Clothing, textiles and fashions are significant vehicles of memory. From imitating the sari styles of Bollywood stars in 1960s East Africa to traditional sari wearing to please in-laws in Loughborough, and from memories of the Gandhian khadi handloom during the Indian independence movement to buying wedding clothes for family members, the group have reflected on the personal and collective memories triggered by their own wardrobes. While trends and materials have changed, the group have noted that fashions come back again and again. A major shift has been from the group's own decoration of saris and making of blouses to purchasing readymade outfits in Surat, Mumbai, London and Leicester. Changing gender roles, the availability of Indian clothes in the UK and the ease of travel between to India are significant in this change over time.

“The print is bandhini [small tie dye patterns] and the fashion will never, never vanish. It is always there. It is a very, very common fashion” The chaniya choli is the regional dress of Gujarat and continues to be popular through the generations in Gujarat and in the UK. This chaniya choli (lit. skirt blouse) was repurposed from a sari by a tailor in India. The blue and white sari, which was bought approximately 20 years ago, is decorated with the distinctive bandhini tie-dye design, popular in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The bandhini design is considered timeless and a traditional method associated with Gujarat; “I love that pattern, it’s traditional, it’s very traditional”. The silver jewellery from Ahmedabad emphasises the silver sequins stitched onto the fabric – creativity and colour co-ordination are key!





“My brother gave this to me as a present for Raksha Bhandan, the brother-sister day”
Clothes, such as chaniya cholis and saris, and textiles are frequently given as gifts and as family heirlooms. This chaniya choli was given on Raksha Bhandan, the ceremony that reinstates the bond of care and protection between sisters and brothers. This chaniya choli is designed with mirror work, embroidery and appliqué. The group agree that the chaniya choli is a significant form of dress for them. The chaniya choli is associated with the Gujarati dances that are performed during Navaratri – the nine nights that celebrate Shakti, the goddess of the universe, by performing the circular garba dance around the deity.



“If you live in the village near Porbandar, Gujarat, you wear this type of dress.” This is the traditional village dress often worn in in Porbandar district in Gujarat. People do not tend to wear this dress in the UK, only in the villages in India. The skirt is pleated and wrapped with a printed chunni. The chunni is placed over the head as daughters-in-law, in particular, were expected to cover their heads out of respect for family elders and parents-in-law. Having been born in Uganda, Sunri wore saris in the Indian village she visited rather than this dress, although “our [traditional] dress is this one”.

“This is the first [chaniya choli I bought] from London when we were shopping in Wembley ... I love it” Purchased in a sari shop on Alperton Road, London, in the 1970s, this chaniya choli demonstrates the traditional wedding colours of Gujarat – red and white. “People wear all different colours now”, but “when I got married, and everyone before [me], they have to wear a white sari, [with] a red border ... and also a red chunni”. The chaniya skirt is highly decorated with gold sequins and patterns embroidered with gold thread. The chunni - long scarf - is draped in the Gujarati style, with its loose end placed over the left shoulder and fanned over the blouse. Usha wears the chunni in the Gujarati style specifically when she attends occasions such as weddings and pooja worship rituals “because it’s traditional”.



“Blouses change with the fashion”

Sari blouses are often designed based on the latest fashions from Bollywood or by Indian celebrities and are quickly replicated in the diaspora. The sari blouses can place the decade of the whole outfit and show the biggest changes in the fashions. Hansa’s blouse was made by a tailor in India when she bought the sari, who created a simple and classic design. This deep blue chiffon sari is primarily worn for family weddings and such pan-Indian designs are more popular than the regional handloom designs as a result of the sari becoming the quintessential Indian garment. Hansa wears this sari in the Dakshini, or nivi ‘national’, style which was popularised by Bollywood actresses and Indian celebrities during the twentieth century.



“I bought it [this sari] at the time of my daughter’s wedding, it’s 16 years old and I’ve never worn it.”

This turquoise nylon sari was bought 16 years ago in Surat, Gujarat, the textile hub of India, where Usha and many others go to buy their saris. Today’s fashion show will be the first time the sari has worn in 16 years. The main decoration of this sari is in the pallu, the loose end of the sari, and along the highly sequined border. Usha has draped it in the Gujarati style with the pallu draped over her right shoulder to show this intricate floral detail. The pallu is now elaborately decorated, but it used to have a more practical purpose to wipe children’s faces and to tie housekeys.





“Saris are for special occasions now.”

Saris like this pink stain sari covered with sequin and beadwork are only worn for special occasions now, like weddings, parties and receptions. Many of the ladies wore saris every day when they were first married, even during snowy winters, but now they opt for “English clothes” for comfort. Bought close to her house in Navsari, Gujarat, Daxa’s sari is 22 years old and is shared by Daxa and her daughters. The sari is over 20 years old, however, the pink colour is currently in fashion in 2019 - fashions are based on the styles seen in Bollywood films.



“You can get it in Leicester now”

Saris are frequently given between friends, spouses and siblings - handed down through the generations. This navy and pink sari was brought back from India by a friend and features heavy embroidery work in metallic thread along its borders. Pankaj recalls how she used to wear saris in Birmingham, but not in Kenya. Having not been to India, she often gets saris from Leicester, where the latest fashions can be found along the Golden Mile. This dakshini sari style is “elegant” and “easy to wear” but it also has a significant history in stylistically uniting India’s regions during the Indian independence movement. The dakshini style remains one of the most popular styles of sari wearing in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and in South Asian diasporas.

“The things you see on my saris, I have decorated myself”

Tara is wearing a light green nylon sari in the Gujarati style with the sequined pallu draped in front. She bought this sari in Navsari, the town closest to her village in Gujarat, during a visit two or three years ago. This is the first time she has worn this sari as it is too fancy for everyday socialising. Like the other saris in this fashion show, this is a readymade sari.

However, Tara continues to decorate most of her saris herself. During her annual visits to India, she buys lace and decorated borders to add to her saris upon her return to Loughborough.



“I love my Punjabi suit, it’s easy to put on, it fits, it’s modest and you can’t make too many mistakes”

Suella is wearing a shalwar kameez, or a ‘Punjabi’ suit, made up of a tunic top, trousers and long dupatta scarf. The maroon-coloured suit is decorated with gold-coloured thread and sequin detail. This shalwar kameez was bought during a trip to the Golden Mile in Leicester to celebrate Diwali with the Anand Mangal group. Suella enjoys wearing this Punjabi suit as it is comfortable, it is easier to wear than a sari and it is a way to honour South Asian culture. Originally a regional dress in Punjab, the Punjabi suit became the national dress for Pakistan but it is also very popular in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.



The Anand Mangal Group

Anand Mangal came into being in 2015. This award-winning group was founded by Anila Sisodia and a group of other women from the Shree Ram Krishna Centre, a Hindu temple and community centre in Loughborough. The group meets regularly at Fearon Hall to socialise and to take part in a varied programme of activities. This has included listening to talks, doing exercise classes, photography workshops, producing a recipe book and contributing to the Charnwood Great War Centenary Project. Over the last three years, the group has been getting bigger and bigger; they now have 25 registered members! Anila says that she enjoys serving the community and the main goal of the group is pleasing people. As she puts it, “We don’t turn anyone away!”







Migrant Memory and the Postcolonial Imagination: British Asian Memory, Identity and Community after Partition (MMPI).

MMPI is a five-year research project based at Loughborough University funded by The Leverhulme Trust. The project explores memories of the 1947 Partition of India and the ways in which memory works for South Asian people who have migrated to the UK since then. Memories of the Partition continue to shape contemporary community relations for people of South Asian Heritage in the UK. They shape feelings of belonging over time. This research investigates how community identities and relationships, including a sense of local and national identity, are produced and articulated by South Asian people in the UK through cultural practices and social processes of remembering the 1947 Partition of India. The project focuses on two key communities in the UK: Loughborough and Tower Hamlets. The Loughborough research is conducted in partnership with Charnwood Arts and Equality Action and in Tower Hamlets we are working with the local council.

We use lots of different arts-based community activities such as photography workshops, film screenings and cooking activities to explore people's memories and we follow up these group activities with one-to-one interviews and family interviews.

Get Involved!

Were you or your family affected by Partition?

Have memories of Partition been handed down across the generations?

Would you like to tell us your story of migration?

If so, we'd love to hear your story!

If you'd like to participate in the project, please contact the team at

memoriesofpartition@lboro.ac.uk

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