

Video Project
Six Yards of Elegance:
The Indian Saree and How to Drape it

The central objective of my instructional video is to provide a step by step demonstration of how to drape a saree, which is the traditional garment worn by Indian women. The topic is introduced by showing the flowing gracefulness and elegance of the saree. This is followed by a brief introduction which situates the saree in its context with some background information on its evolution, the prevailing Indian regional styles of draping and the cultural significance of the drapes. The scope is then widened and the appeal of the saree is taken beyond the borders of India into the context of the intended audience. A touch of humor and sudden change in pace is added at this stage of the video to completely grab the attention of the audience and also to underline the importance of the ensuing instruction by showing, in a lighter vein, how trying to tie a saree without this information can literally get one into a bind. This is followed by a detailed demonstration of one style of draping the saree, in the course of which, relevant terms and points of importance necessary for a well draped saree are pointed out. The video concludes on a positive note to encourage the audience to try it, followed by the end credits.

Selection of Topic:

The first step in planning an instructional video is to decide on a topic or theme. According to the online resource on the video planning process, the instructional value of a video lies in providing content that is not easily accessible or better provided by other instructional means (<http://eduscapes.com/seeds/production/planit.html>). This basic rule served as a guiding factor that helped me identify the focal theme for my video project and the intended audience.

I began with a very broad vision of making an instructional resource of something not easily accessible to an American audience. Some of the choices I had in mind were: How to play cricket, Basics of Indian classical dance, Basics of Indian cooking and How to wear a saree. Weighing these options in terms of complexity of content matter, completeness of presentation within the time constraint, accessibility of experts in the field, extent of dependency on others in shooting of the video, usefulness, interest and novelty value of the instruction, I chose to work on how to drape a saree. The choice of theme and inclusion of content in the video was aided by an informal survey of audience interest, needs and expectations.

Audience Analysis:

Identifying the audience, their interest and expectation:

This instructional video has been developed for an American audience, which includes those within the Indian diaspora, specially the 2nd generation born and raised in the U.S., who may not have had occasion to learn how to wear a saree, but may be interested in

doing so. With increased economic globalization and changing nature of American society, many Americans now interact socially with Indians and given an opportunity, would like to try on a saree when attending a multicultural or Indian event, but may be hesitant or perceive it as difficult. Although the theme is more pertinent to women (of all ages), a survey of audience interest showed that curiosity about how the saree is draped extends beyond gender boundaries. Experiments with the saree by western fashion designers such as Zandra Rhodes and Gianni Versace have generated a degree of inquisitiveness about this garment. This was confirmed by an informal survey of the audience in which most – including men – evinced an interest in the sari and agreed that it would be interesting to see how it is draped. So while the women were interested in learning how to tie it as a novel article of clothing, the men were curious to know how it is done.

Present awareness and need identification

Given the nature of the target audience, it is possible that while they might have observed the saree worn by someone else, they would probably not have handled the six yards of it themselves and would be clueless as to which end to start. It would be necessary for me to specifically address these needs in the video and familiarize them with some fundamental things such as the total length of the saree, how to identify and differentiate between the two end sections, the requisite accessories, basic terminology and essential procedures.

The above analysis helped me chalk out the content that should be included in the video in order to meet the general and specific expectations of the audience. It also helped me think of new information which may be included to add value and context to the instruction. The aim was not only to demystify the saree drape but also to design an instructional video which would be engaging, informational and pedagogically complete (with background, essential terms and concepts and the instruction itself) with potential for expansion.

Content Outline:

The next step was to visualize the presentation of the content and its arrangement in order to best convey the intended message. This involved decisions on use graphics, props and other techniques, scripting of the shots and narration, camera angle, close ups and music. There was always more than one way in which any content could be communicated (for instance the length of a saree and its segments could be shown by various means), so these different options had to be thought through and shot, leaving the final choice for the post-production editing stage.

The outline I developed at the outset was sketchy: to provide a brief introduction to the saree, an overview of how it evolved and the prevailing styles of draping. The first scene I had in mind was to have a saree stretched out and to pan the camera along it to give the audience a sense of how long it is. I had envisaged a rising crescendo of music as I panned the length, keeping the audience guessing (and interested) as to what it is they are seeing and end in a flourish at the title. The title, which began cryptic (Six Yards of Elegance) and ended specific (The Indian Saree and How to Drape it), would then bring it

all together and set the stage for the rest of the information. To transition into the detailed demonstration from the general information and to emphasize the importance of the instruction to follow by contrasting a good example with a non-example, I envisioned a fast-forwarded kind of scene of a total novice trying to tie a saree and getting thoroughly entangled in the process. For the demonstration itself, my ambition was to show two styles of draping the saree if time permitted, so both had to be scripted in.

For shooting the demonstration itself, there were a few technical difficulties I had to be prepared for. The main one was that before the saree is wrapped, the subject is in a petticoat and a short blouse which is quite revealing and most women I know would be reluctant to be seen publicly like that. It may also be improper for an instructional video. A practical solution was to shoot the video with a petticoat and T-shirt and have a picture depicting the petticoat and blouse. Secondly, knowing the work and home commitments of my model, and the voluntary nature of her involvement, I anticipated that it would be very difficult to entirely control the time and setting of the scene and lighting conditions. The shoot would have to take place when it was convenient for the model in the best available light of probably a bedroom, if other people were around in the house. This also meant that there may not be much opportunity to memorize the script. Thus, the script was prepared in a very conversational style, describing the main points I wanted emphasized, keeping room for her personal style and improvisations.

With the above bare outline and constraining conditions in mind, a script was drafted (please see appendix). However, as I did more research on the net to find examples of drapes, history and pictures to support the script, I found material which made me think of new ways of presenting the topic, so the outline and story board changed and developed constantly as I worked on it.

Shooting and Editing

The demonstration sequence of the two styles of draping was shot twice with the subject at two different times. The first shoot was at night in a crammed bedroom and the result reflected not only an overall lack of control over environmental disturbances, camera distance, location and lighting, but also my inexperience. The framing of the subject was inadequate and although the footage was passable with some good close ups, there was a major flaw in that the top of the subject's head was often cut off. So a second shoot was requested and accomplished in the late afternoon. Apart from a square of bright sunlight, this shoot was more satisfactory, both in terms of adherence to points in the script and demonstration. I found that holding the camera steady near the shoulder gave much better leveling with the subject and smoother movement than fixing it on a tripod. The footage of the saree blundering adopted this method and produced satisfactory results.

The editing stage, using iMovie, was key in converting the raw footage into a cohesive whole. Shots from both the recordings were selected for inclusion. For certain sequences, the audio extracted from the first shooting was used over video of second shooting and vice versa. The audio track was also spilt and inserted into another to cover up repetition and mistakes in narration and to shorten the length of the video. At one point (which however is painfully apparent to me) single words were cut and threaded together to form

a complete sentence. For the introduction and background, pictures and information downloaded from the internet were used and coming across this material changed my approach to this section of the video. I decided to depict the draping styles in different regions of India in a more holistic perspective and stress on their wider cultural significance rather than detailing differences in the drapes (as scripted). This section was thus put together as a dynamic power point presentation and with free shareware download from the internet, the .ppt file was converted into an .avi format and inserted into the iMovie storyboard with voice over. Toying with the footage and video effects, I also radically changed the title shot from the scripted version to one which I thought would be a more effective way of generating interest in the topic and also blend well with the title.

Treatment:

As mentioned earlier, the project was envisaged as a complete unit or prototype with potential for expansion. Some of the content is of general interest while some has restricted appeal, but each can be developed at length for a more specific audience. In its completed form, the video could form part of a proposal for an entire instructional series on how to tie different drapes of sarees. This is something that big saree stores, in the US, India and even online would definitely be interested in to increase their sales and clientele. They could sell these videos in the store (or give them complementary with the purchase of sarees) to encourage novices and foreigners to buy from their store. Even Indians typically know just one or two styles of draping and many of the new generation cannot do even one on their own. So access to independent instruction on different styles of draping would help them learn on their own – and also look exclusive in a social event.

Taking a more academic perspective, the video gives a glimpse of diversity information that can be elaborated into a full length documentary on culture and identity symbolism from the perspective of saree drapes, which could form part of a social anthropology or culture studies class. Stressing on the first part of the video and building on the wider potential, research foundations such as Wenner-Gren, Ford Foundation or even National Geographic or Discovery Channels could be approached for funding for a larger project. Personally, this is a study I would find fascinating.

Appendix:

Script for Instructional Video : How to Wear a Saree.

Shot 1: Title shot and Text: (Medium to Close Shot)

A stretched out saree. Pan camera along length and end in title. **Music** : Begins slow, picks up speed, ends in triumphant crescendo at title.

(Editing stage - Introduce parts of saree here? Text overlay on the inner end, body and palav sections?)

OR

Begin with title and narrate introduction to saree during slow pan. **Narration:** The saree is a single untailored length of cloth usually 5-6 yards long and one yard wide. It evolved

around the 17th century from the two piece skirt and veil of ancient times, as a response to Islamic and European influences and sense of modesty.

Scene 2: Transition to draping styles.

Download pictures of different drapes (3-4) and insert in storyboard with ken-burns effect. **Narration:** There are many distinct styles of draping practiced in different regions of India. The Gujarati style shows off the palav in the front, while the Bengali style does not pleat at all. Some sarees like the Maharashtrian are almost 9 yards long and follow the style of men's garments called dhotis.

Scene 3: Transition to Sari Blundering (Ask Michelle?!)

Today, we are going to demonstrate the most popular style of draping prevalent in India. If you are new to the saree, pay close attention, as it could prove to be a daunting task....

Camera: Subject fully framed to begin with – then move (tilt) camera to waist, and lower to tangled length of saree. Move camera back and forth between these angles to show struggle.

Scene 4: Transition to Demonstration: Introduction to Sari : Full length shot

This is a saree, which the traditional wear for Indian women. It is about 5-6 yards long and 1 yard wide. If you look at a saree, you will see that one end is plainer with less work or embroidery. This is the part which will be tucked in and form the inner fold. The other end of the saree is more ornate. This is called the Palav and is the part which will drape loose over the shoulder. (**Demonstrate**). Cut.

Petticoat and Blouse: (insert graphic). Narration: (record as part of shoot to sound natural)

To wear a sari, you need to have a petticoat and a blouse. The petticoat is a long skirt from the waist to the ankle, into which the saree will be tucked. Usually has to be the matching colour of the saree. The blouse is the upper garment which ends just below the bust.

Draping:

To put on a saree, start with the plainer end of the saree in your right hand. Make sure the saree is just touching the floor. (**Zoom in gradually from full shot to waist-down**)

It should be long enough to cover the petticoat and shoes. If it is too short, the petticoat will show as you walk (**pull up saree and demonstrate**) – which is not good - and if it is too long, you will trip over the saree with every step (**walk a few steps to demonstrate**).

Make point about wearing heels: Before you drape a saree, you have to decide if you are going to wear high heels and if you choose to do so, make sure you put your shoes on before you wear the saree, because how much you tuck will depend on the height.

Transition to Tucking: (Camera – titled and zoomed to show tucking).

Then you start tucking in the saree. Take it around over the left side and bring it back in front. Make sure that it is even all around.

Draping the palav: Zoom out camera again to frame subject.

Then you move closer to the Palav end of the saree (the more embroidered part), take it around the left side, bring it to the front and drape it across your chest to your left shoulder.

Pleating : Zoom in again gradually to show pleating procedure. (shoot also from closer angle?)

Then you take the middle part of the saree in your left hand and tuck in the extra bit and start making the pleats - make small folds. Once the pleats are done, turn them so that the folds face the left. Remember, that the folds of the pleats should face the shoulder over which the palav is draped. Now tuck it in.

Zoom out to full length:

You can take the palav and drape it over your hand to make it look elegant – like in a cocktail party (turn around, walk around, show the back). Or if you need your hands free to help the host clean up, then you can tuck it in.

Instruction Two:

Gujarati Saree: (Camera position and angles similar to above for different stages)

Another style of draping is called the Gujarati saree where the palav comes over your right shoulder and drapes in front. (Full frame)

Begin wearing the saree in the same way – tuck it in and take it around the left side. (Close low shot)

Take the palav end and pleat it also, take it around the left and instead of across the chest, just hang it over the right shoulder. (Full frame) This will form a fold at the back. (turn and show)

Now pleat the rest of the saree (zoom) and this time, turn the folds of the pleat to the right and tuck it in.

(Zoom out to full frame of subject) Take the inside pleat of the palav and take it across the front and tuck it in or pin it up at the back. This style leaves your hands free and shows off the ornate border to best effect.