

Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices

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Week - 02

Lecture – 10

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in the last installment of the lecture for this week. So, we already have been talking about the relationship between Baluchar Saris and the terracotta temples of Bengal. Now, terracotta temples in Bengal that we find them there extensively in various parts of Bengal and clay being something that is locally available in Bengal that is extensively used in making temples. Now terracotta is something that we do not really just see in this temples which were made during the early modern period or later on. But it is something we find that to be there from the very early surviving artifacts or objects from Bengal. So, for example, this ancient port site of Chandraketugarh or Tamralipta, all of those sites would have the terracotta artifacts or the remains of them on those sites.

So, here on the left side of the screen we have this Charbangla temple and that Charbangla



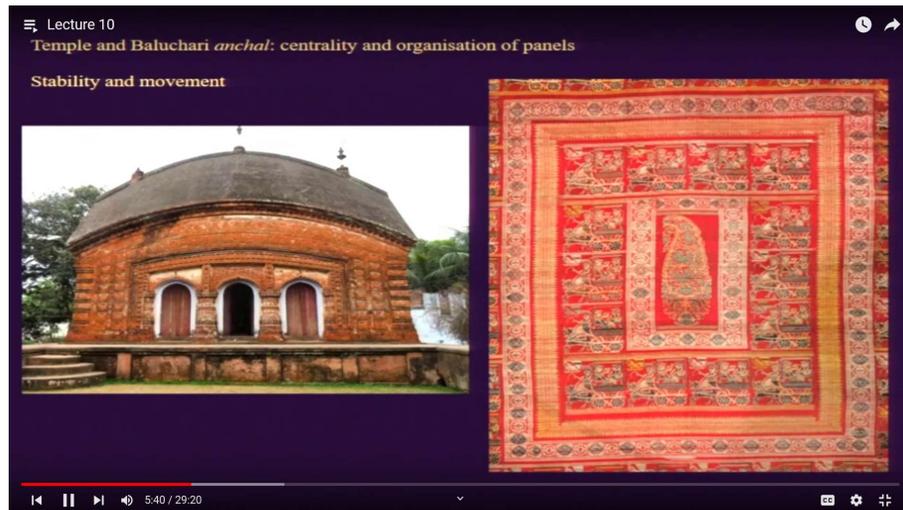
temple complex that we have in Murshidabad and from central Bengal. And in which we see this very characteristic chala roof or this curvilinear roof or a hut like roof that we find

that to be there which is very much there in many of the Bengali temples. And this particular kind of this chala roof we will find that is not just there in the Bengali temples, but then during the Mughal period we find when Bengal was also annexed into the Mughal empire this particular kind of roof was incorporated in the palace architecture as well. And that is how we see this similar kind of chala roof to be incorporated in the Mughal architecture in the Agra fort in the other sites of the Mughal dynasty, eventually in the Rajput court, and then as far as in Lahore in the Naulakha pavilion in the Lahore fort. So, this kind of exchange of architectural knowledge we find that to be already there. And then if we also see the kind of organization of the motifs or the panels on the body of the temple, what we find them to be there is this contrasting to this roof, this fairly sort of plain and simple roof, we have the body of the temple that is extensively decorated. And in this one we also find that I mean there is this central area which is then sort of framed, and then there are doorways to enter the temple. And then on the side of the doorway we find the entire visual space or the entire pictorial space is then divided in this small rectangular mostly rectangular panels. And in these panels we will find them to be there those the narrative motifs or like I mean different kind of depiction of the epics or like I mean the stories from the Hindu epics and so on. And that also would depend on like I mean which deity is enshrined in this temple. Now around this panels we also see band of decorations like I mean band of motifs we will find them to be there. Which would be either geometric or that can also be vegetal or so on..... And then if you think about it like I mean the kind of organization we have [in] each of these panels like I mean the rectangular panels mostly we are talking about, each of those narrative panels we will find them to be sort of framed within this either geometric or vegetal sort of like band of borders. In this one that we have on the right side of the screen there is this terracotta plaque which is made in relief. In this one we find that there is this episode of Krishna. And then perhaps I mean this is killing of Kamsa and in which one we find that I mean Krishna is shown here at the center stage in this very dynamic form who is laying this man who is there in the left side of the screen. Then in the lower register of this panel we find that I mean there are two figures who are also perhaps one a warrior, another one is a woman figure; both of them are there perhaps in praise of Krishna's heroic behavior. So, in this case what we find that in most of these figures that we that would appear in this kind of like I mean this temple

panels they would have this profile or the three-fourth view. The profile view is something we know that I mean that has been associated with narrative progression. Only for very few cases mostly in the depiction of the deities which would have face-to-face conversation of the with the viewers they would be like I mean they would have the frontal view. And mostly apart from that all the other narrative panels would have this profile or three-quarter views of the figures.

So, now if we think about it that I mean what kind of this narrative figures that we see them there in this temples as well as like I mean what kind of narrative figures we see them to be there in the saris, there are clearly relationship between these two. I mean we see that I mean this profile view of the figures and it seems like there is a progression in terms of like

I mean this terracotta panels we find that I mean perhaps like different episodes of the life of Krishna or part of a whatever Hindu epic that sort of



like I mean depicts. All those small small panels would be, all those small small episodes will be like I mean depicted in those separate panels. Now in for the saree we can understand that I mean for making each of these motif is not something as perhaps like I mean it will not be viable as like I mean making in the terracotta panels. And for that reason, we find that there are narrative panels yes in this saree but they are mostly repetitive. That the same block or like I mean this same template would be then like I mean repeated all over in this aachal or this pallu for sort of like I mean giving a sense of movement of this chariot or like I mean this horse carriage. Now if we think about it that I mean if this is the only relationship we can draw between textile and architecture in this case; one is this kind of the narrative elements the narrative the figurative narration that we

have both in this temple plaques and also in the saree. And then the other thing is perhaps the division between these narrative plaques and then, like, I mean, these bands of decorations they also appear there. So, this can certainly be, like, I mean, some of the clear references between how, like, I mean, the temple and this particular kind of saree can be connected. But then there can be other kind of associations as well. And perhaps one of the associations would be like I mean and we are here we are specifically talking about the aachal of the saree and not the entire saree. I mean the organization of the panels is something like I mean it's not just like I mean the decoration and then the figurative narration. But if we compare the organization of what is been there, how it is been there, how it is placed, what is the entire organization, the compositional organization for both this the aachal and also for this the body of the temple. Then we definitely see that I mean there is this the organization is something the compositional organization they seem to have like I mean much more similarity in that sense.

The other thing we also find that I mean the centrality of a particular kind of motif is also something that is exemplified in both cases. Now by centrality what do I mean. I mean in the in the center of this saree in this Baluchar saree we find this very complicated paisley or this mango motif or the kalka motif. So, this is the motif that we find that to be there which is unlike the other motifs that we see around this particular kolka is fairly stable. It is also not a narrative figurative element. For that reason, it does not have the same kind of movement the sense of movement that we have there in the repetitive motifs of this horse carriage. So, there is a kind of stability we find that to be there that is centrally enshrined, almost enshrined in this pallu of this saree, and then we have all the narrative elements kind of encircling it. If we compare that to like I mean what we see here in this temple organization that I mean the doorways which sort of lead us towards the garbhagriha or the sanctum sanctorum is something that we find that to be much more stable, much more devoid of the other kind of narrative details. And then around the temp around this temple doorways we find that extensive sort of like I mean narrative depiction of the deities or like I mean the other kind of narrations they sort of like I mean take over.

So, this is this is something that we see that I mean there is clearly a balance between some

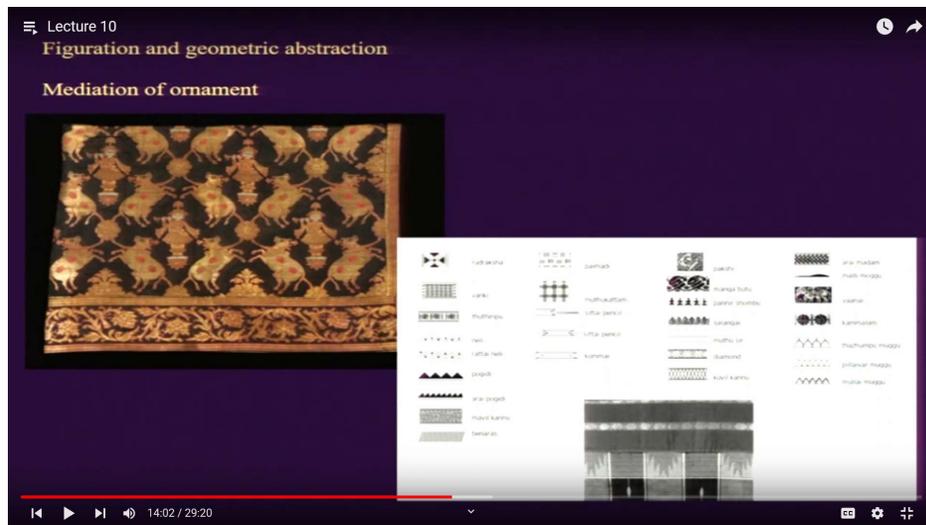
motifs or like I mean some sections of the entire compositional organization or the arrangement something that is stable and then something that has a heightened sense of movement. So, if we think about this narrative panels narrative figurative panels which sort of like I mean symbolizes movement or progression of a story, progression of a repetitive scene; then what we see there in the central location is that there is a particular kind of stability that is there. And if we think about that that I mean the dynamism of that is depicted in the temples body is something that is then also balanced by the stability of this doorways. So, this kind of like I mean centrality, organization, stability, movement this is some of the things we can see that I mean as how the temple and this kind of compositional arrangement of this saris can be connected. However, we do not really have any kind of evidence which might suggest that I mean there is a religious connection between them. It seems that I mean it is much more kind of a design, sort of like I mean that had its reference in the kind of compositional arrangement of this kind of shared visual vocabulary and not really having any anything to do with like I mean a strictly religious principle or anything else.

Now the other thing we also can understand in this case is that I mean how in this case we can see that I mean how this centrality movement all these ideas are something that is again we can see that where it is required, and then where the movement is required. So, making a conscious decision about where to put what and then like I mean then implementing that on this scale is something we can understand to be a part of like I mean in both cases. I mean for making both the ornamentation in the temples as well as in the saris. Now when we sort of compare them we also like I mean in many cases we find that the textile historians art historians would readily jump into this conclusion that how this temples can serve as a point of influence for this saris for the textiles. But in this case, if we consider that I mean this kind of like I mean you know a sense of stability, a sense of movement, a sense of centrality of particular kind of motif and then overall organization of panels are something that was part of the shared visual vocabulary from which the temple makers have also drawn and then like the sari makers also sort of like I mean taken from it. So, in that way we can see that I mean perhaps it was much more like a conversational space and not just something in which like the temple influences the textile and the textile is at the

receiving end. We cannot really say that and those kind of things perhaps would be you know like I mean much more sort of like I mean exemplified when we compare this kind of Baluchar saris to the kind of the lumpus woven textiles from Gujarat, or from Assam and which would definitely predate the some of the Gujarati brocade textiles, they definitely predate that terracotta temples in Bengal. So, this idea about how this figurative motifs the figurative narrations and everything is something that came from this terracotta temples of Bengal cannot be completely justified. So, we need to think about this correlation between architecture and Baluchar sari, like the temple architecture and Baluchar sari to be much more as a conversational process and not something where this hierarchy is set.

So, from there we sort of like I mean come to the last segment of this lecture. In which what we see there is that I mean how there are figuration and geometric obstruction that

we kind of like I mean see that there. So, this theme had been lingering all across in this entire discussion on



brocade making and the kind of like I mean the motifs that we find and its associated issues. So, in this case what we see that I mean figurative figuration, if we think about it like I mean any kind of figurative motifs and if there are like I mean geometric motifs or like I mean much more abstracted motifs they are usually seen as something distinct. They are not really seen as something that is closely interconnected. And a lot of times we find that I mean one of the lenses of looking into the preference for geometric motifs is sort of punctuated by the religious affiliations. That a number of times the scholars have suggested that how certain kind of prohibitions in particular religions for example in Islam towards

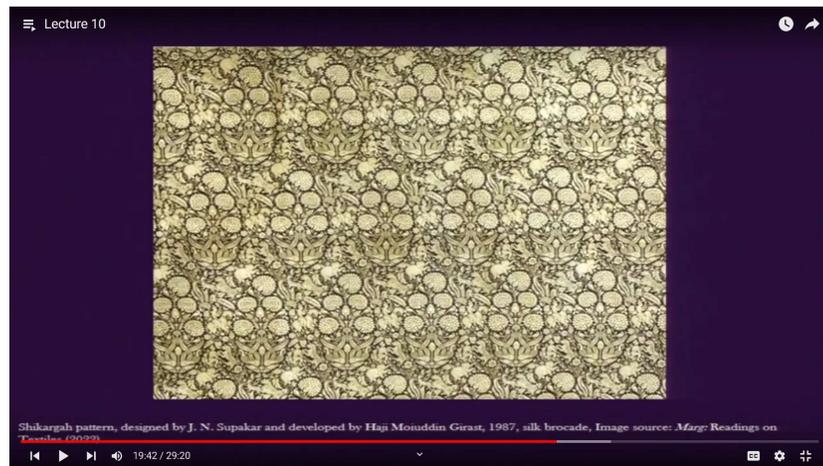
figuration might have a sort of like I mean led towards preference on the geometric motifs. Which to certain extent we can think about like I mean the Islamic architecture in the Middle East and also like I mean part of South Asia and so on which might come to close to truth. But then if we think about like I mean how there are those extensively narrative carpets or the rugs and then like I mean we also have the Islamic manuscripts and miniatures which would have extensive depiction of figuration. We cannot really justify the claim that one religion completely despises figurative depiction and the other religions they sort of like I mean are okay with it. So, this kind of like a simplistic division might not really work for us to understand that I mean how figuration, geometric abstraction are there or like I mean how those need to be understood.

Now to sort of like I mean get into the details of it we see that I mean there was a discussion by Oleg Greber, art historian who sort of like I mean specialized in the field of Islamic art history and had extensively spoken about the role of ornamentation and then also this idea of mediation. So, in this case what Oleg Greber sort of like I mean talks about is this the ornamentation if we think about it and since like I mean as I have also mentioned in the very early on in this course that how a lot of times like textiles are considered as decorative items. So, in this case, that I mean, ornamentation is something that is closely connected to the motifs on textiles. However, like with Greber's theory, what we see that mean ornamentation is not really something as a space filler. Ornamentation is also not something that is just a mere process of representing something. But it is something that stays almost at the middle or like in the in-between stage between representation and non-representation or abstraction. And that is the reason what we find in the ornamental motifs that there are certain elements of it which is recognizable but also there are many of the things which are not clearly recognized.

So, that is the reason we can see like I mean there are symbolic relationship of this motifs to perhaps like I mean many of the natural elements. So, for example, if we go back to like I mean some of those design lexicon of the Korvai sarees of Kanchipuram, this Malli moggu jasmine bud is something that can also come as a reference that I mean how the bud looks like this and then how that sort of like I mean gets much more sort of abstracted when

this motif is then sort of like implemented on the sarees. So, similarly if we think about that, I mean the journey from figuration to abstraction is something that we find in this Korvai sarees, the sarees woven in this Korvai technique. Then if we go back to like I mean this particular this panel, this canopy panel from Gujarat from Surat, in this one we find that I mean how this Jala pattern which is much more geometric, [is] then it is sort of like I mean translated into the figures of cows. So, like I mean it starts with abstraction and then it also sort of like I mean touches upon the figurative motifs. So, there is not really like one particular way in which we can say that I mean there is a journey from just figuration to abstraction or representation to non-representation, but it can also happen multiple different ways. So, this is not something we can understand to be a very clear straightforward process of just ornamenting the surface of a saree or a fabric or any kind of utilitarian textile, but there are much more thought processes which are involved in making this kind of decisions. And with these observations what Oleg Greber does, he sort of like I mean draws our attention to the socio-cultural aspects of the ornamentation. That in what context this kind of ornamentation was done, and if that says something about like I mean what kind of like I mean outcome it yields.

So, thinking about the socio-cultural situation of ornamentation, I wanted to show this another brocade piece and this is a Shikargahh pattern, which means a



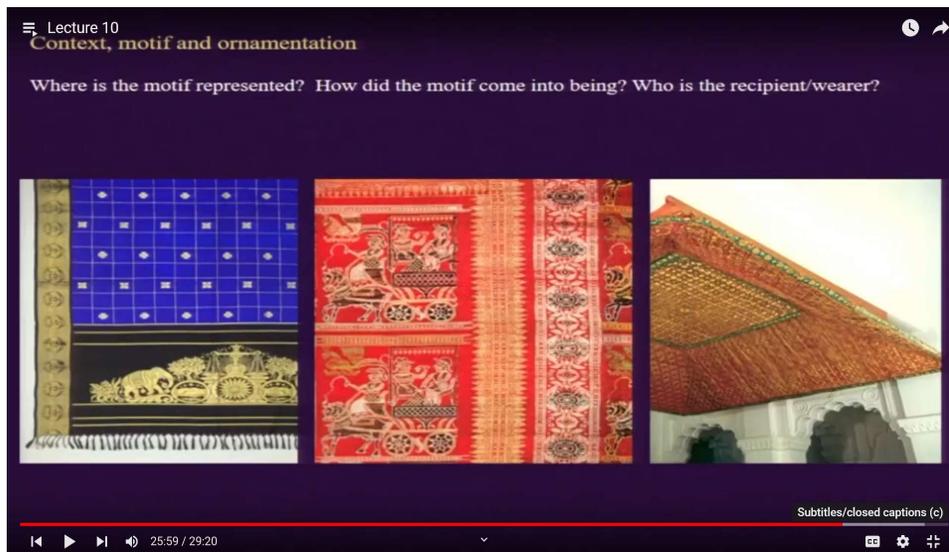
hunting ground. This particular term, Shikargah, is something that is used in Farsi, Urdu and so on, and we find that to be there in many of the textiles as well as miniature paintings and so on, during the Mughal period and in the later Mughal period as well. Now Shikargah is also something we find that to be as a celebrated motif which is used in the brocades and alongside like I mean the Konia or like I mean the corner paisley motifs, and then like I

mean the Jali motifs. and so on. And in this case what happens we find that I mean there is a story associated with this particular the Shikargah pattern. So, this pattern was designed by J. N. Supakar and who was in charge of the weaver service center in Varanasi from the late 1950s, and was also attributed to many of the innovations and changes which happened in the late 20th century of course with the help of Pupul Jayakar and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Now this particular Shikargah pattern that we find that was developed by J. N. Subakar, and then it was developed or woven by master weaver Haji Moiuddin Girast and it was made in 1987, and it's a silk brocade as we can see, it. But story perhaps goes some as I mean hundred years back. Now what happened that I mean we find that in Varanasi there are at least two three groups of weavers at least what art historian Anjan Chakravorty suggests. And in this case we find that there is this one predominant group who migrated from Gujarat, from the families of the Gujarati brocade weavers and they have sort of settled in part of Varanasi. And we find that I mean this weaver Naqshbandhs. And Naqshbandhs means the ones who would make the naksha or like the Jala. So, the weaver Naqshbandhs of Gujarat we find them to have travelled who had specialized in brocade making they have travelled to London during 1895-1896 during the exhibition empire of India. And during this time we find that in many of these colonial exhibitions that the weavers would be like I mean carried from India. And I use the word carried because we do not really know that whether they were taken with their will or not, and they were displayed alongside the exhibits. So, they were almost like the human exhibits in these exhibitions. So, in this exhibition what happened that we find that these weaver Naqshbandi they went there, and they have also studied, they also got chance to sort of like I mean study some of those European wallpapers and tapestries. And perhaps they have also seen the William Morris wallpapers. Those were there very popular in the late 19th century in Europe, especially in London in the UK. So, what we see there that I mean this that kind of like I mean the studying of those kinds of wallpapers this very crisscrossing of the motifs I mean even though they are repetitive motifs but then like it seems that the repetitive motifs one motif is almost flowing into another then much more the subdued color scheme and everything else. So, those things we find that I mean this weavers they have sort of implemented in their weaving once they got back to India. And then those kind of some of the descendants of the weavers who were then in Varanasi they had those khaka,

or like I mean the drawings, or like I mean this particular drawings from which the designs would be then transferred to graph and then eventually be made into this woven fabrics. [These] are the khakas [that] were there, and when J.N. Supakar and Haji Moiuddin Girast studied these old khakas and they sort of also came up with their own plans of making the shikargh this design. And in this case what we find that I mean even though this shikargh pattern was made in 1987 almost 100 years after the perhaps like I mean those weavers journey to Europe, we find that clearly there is a kind of a relationship we can find with this very much intertwined motifs that we find in this William Morris like wallpapers, which were there in the 19th century Europe. There is also a possibility that Supakar had studied this or like I mean sort of you know referenced it back to the European tapestries and William Morris's design to sort of confirm ... what kind of relationship it might have. But this brocade that we see here the ornamentation that we have on screen is something that did not really come from like I mean this the tradition of making the shikargh motifs that we find in the Mughal context and so on but it definitely has sort of like I mean references from the European wallpapers, perhaps William Morris's wallpapers. ... then sort of like I mean this long history of how these motifs perhaps travelled and with like I mean the group of weavers and then perhaps was implanted in Varanasi. And then like I mean later sort of experimentations sort of led towards making this highly complicated brocade motif here.

So, this also shows that I mean even if we see this ornamentation here we can sort of like I mean see its curvilinear motifs, then see that I mean what kind of figuration is there, which motif is sort of like I mean made out of proportion, or like I mean blown in a proportion, then like I mean the animal motifs and so on but that would probably not explain everything about how this motif came into being in 1987. So, for those reasons even for understanding like figuration, geometric abstraction, everything the socio-cultural context of every of this motifs ornamentation is very important for us to understand. So, that is also something we can see that I mean how this kind of motif when we are seeing that I mean this context is very much important in terms of understanding the role of this motifs. So, we need to ask ourselves some of this question that where this motif is represented? Whether this motif is represented in the pallu of a saree, if it is in the border,

if it is on a canopy. Then how do these motifs change. Then like also we need to understand that how one motif come into being. Perhaps that question we have sort of like



I mean also looked into in detail of the last image that we discussed. So, we can understand that I mean this

process of how this motif came into being. And then also we need to understand who is the recipient or wearer. So, that also depends a lot in terms of what kind of motifs, selection of motifs, selection of ornamentation can be there, when all these issues are working out. So, this kind of context also makes us think that ornamentation is not something just a mere process of representation, or just a mere process of filling a space, or making something visually pleasurable, but there are much deeper histories into them. And going with this I just wanted to end this discussion with a quote that comes from Supakar's text called Music of the Weave and which was reproduced in Anjan Chakravorty's essay for Marg and it says in quotes, the musician improvises on the basic grammar. Similarly, the loom has a basic background..... He, the weaver, manipulates the different strands in the same way as a musician links the notes in the elucidation of a *raga*. The weaver is the designer, he selects and arranges the patterns on his loom according to the basic weaving principles. Vibrations enter with the use of color and yarn as he links the patterns step by step..... When a wrong note is stressed and timing is incorrect, a discordance enters the *raga*. In the same way, weaving has its own *tala, svara*, movement..... An unexperienced weaver given all the facilities cannot infuse his weave with feeling.

So, this kind of like I mean understanding of like I mean the entire activity of weaving

perhaps it also makes us think about like I mean this kind of brocade weaving even though it is usually understood in highly technical terms when to associate that with human experiences, with our bodies, with the life. And like I mean we need to understand that I mean how our lives also breathe into the making of textiles also like I mean how the textiles also become part of our lives. Thank you.