

Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices

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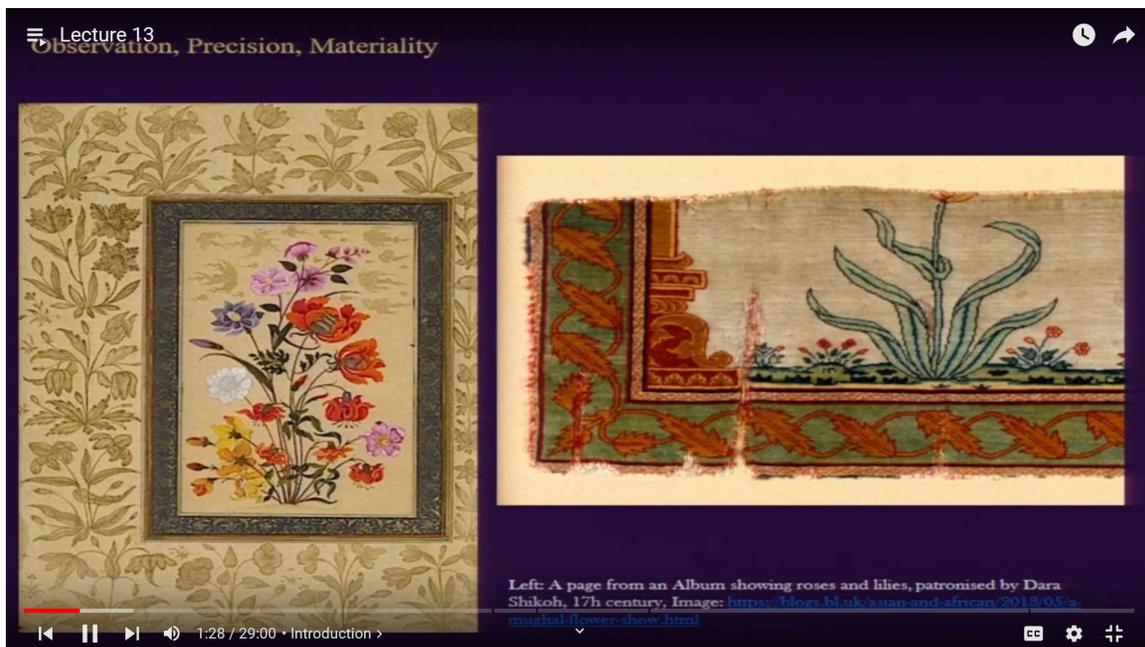
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Week - 03

Lecture – 13

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are in the week 3 of our course and we have been talking about the cloth or the idea of textiles in the Mughal context. So in the last lecture, we have sort of like I mean touched upon some of the similarities, differences and also like I mean some of the technical aspects of making carpets at the same time also like I mean how the carpets and different kind of textiles which were prominently being made and displayed and circulated during the Mughal era. How we can also see them to be connected to the miniature paintings. Now few of the topics we might just want to remember or like I mean few of the keywords we might want to remember in this context that I mean how observation, precision, and materiality, these three things can be interconnected and these three things can also make us think about this close correlation between the miniature paintings and Mughal textiles.



Now in this slide, in the left side of the slide, we have a page from an album that shows like I mean roses and lilies and patronized by Dara Shikoh and then that comes from 17th century. So in this characteristic miniature painting, what we see here is that I mean there is this central frame in which the flowers that we see the roses and the lilies that we see in the center stage and then on the top of that we also have like I mean some suggestion of

this Chinese cloud and this Chinese clouds as we know that I mean they sort of were imbibed in the Persian miniature paintings and then from there we see them to be sort of also incorporated in the Mughal miniature paintings as well as in the Deccani miniature paintings and so on. So, we see that I mean there is this plain background against which these flowers, the roses and the lilies they sort of like I mean shown here almost in form of a shrub but as we know that I mean they cannot grow the same way that they have been shown here. Now what we see around it is also that I mean there is this elaborate sort of a frame which encircles or sort of encompasses this central segment of this work and around that there is this elaborate Hashia or this borders which are much more, this broad borders or this panels in which we find that either what nickel drawings are there or sometimes we also find that figurative drawings are there.

Now why I wanted to bring this image here within relationship to this fragment of the carpet that we have already discussed earlier and that is to show kind of the depiction of the flora and the vegetal motifs and in the painting one can imagine that I mean how drawing the different kind of leaves and then the movement of the leaves, there are different kind of bends and then like I mean the twist and turns all those things are done with this brush strokes. we know that I mean there were different kind of brushes which were used in the Mughal Atelier for making these paintings that can start with like I mean the goat hair brushes for doing the broader areas or like I mean the thick brushes which would be used for color filling as well as also like I mean for the broad finishings. Now then we also have the squirrel hair brushes and with those we find that those minute lines are drawn, this flowy rhythmic lines those we find them to be there in the mature phase of Mughal miniatures and which have continued for centuries in the Mughal Atelier and of course in the regional Ateliers after the Mughal Empire sort of fell apart. So we find that I mean this characteristic brush strokes which sort of mark this kind of movements within these leaves and then of course in the creepers and then the flower, the flower petals and everything else the movement the sense of movement that we see there in this characteristic brush strokes we find that to be there in this carpet as well and the image that we have in the right side



of the screen it is actually a much of an enlargement of the of this one motif that we have here. in this one we also see this shrub like element here and in this one as we can note that I mean how does this minute knotting are used for executing each and every of these lines. these lines that sort of like I mean

show how this the borders or the contours of these leaves are been drawn and then each and every bend of the leaf those are also been shown with at most care and we know that I

mean when the knotting are done it cannot really like move like a brush but it needs to be done like one knot and then after that another knot so like I mean each and every move that we find that needs to be calculated beforehand for like I mean having this seamless semicircular shape that we find in this in this shrub like motif. So, all this to say that I mean there has to be minute observation for which first to understand that I mean how the natural elements that we see around us the vegetable motifs the animals and many other things whatever we can see that all the animate and the inanimate motifs that we see around us how the function. How the function in the context of in our surrounding on also like I mean when we try to represent them visually then what can be our responsibility. So, those things we certainly see them to be there in in this both kind both this representations. And then we see that I mean there is this precision in terms of that I mean how to draw and what not to do. So, in terms of like I mean also thinking in terms of that how the this these lines those we find them to be there prominently represented; these lines also could have been they could get lost if there were more of this details. So, understanding that I mean what to do also what not to do in a work like this and for that reason we can all we can argue or we can think through this that I mean whether having a plane background with this Persian clouds or the Chinese clouds that we have in this painting whether this is a deliberate choice or this is a deliberate choice for sort of a foregrounding this the floral motifs that we have on screen and then like I mean also removal of the other elements of the landscape whether that is also a deliberate choice. So, we can think through these issues and then precision is something that we can think that I mean it is not just about drawing things precisely but it is also about the thinking process through which like all those elements are brought to life, what to do and what not to do in a work like this. that the same observations can be applied to this fragment of the carpet in which we find that I mean what kind of elements we find them to be there represented in the foreground of this image and then how the background is seemingly a sort of like I mean remained emptied almost like this painting that we see in the left side of this screen. that that is also we can think through it, that I mean if this is a aesthetic I mean if it is a decision that that is to that is to emphasize them in particular elements and also that I mean to understand that I mean what can be a balance between like I mean this this blank areas and then like I mean the areas which have minute intricate work in them.

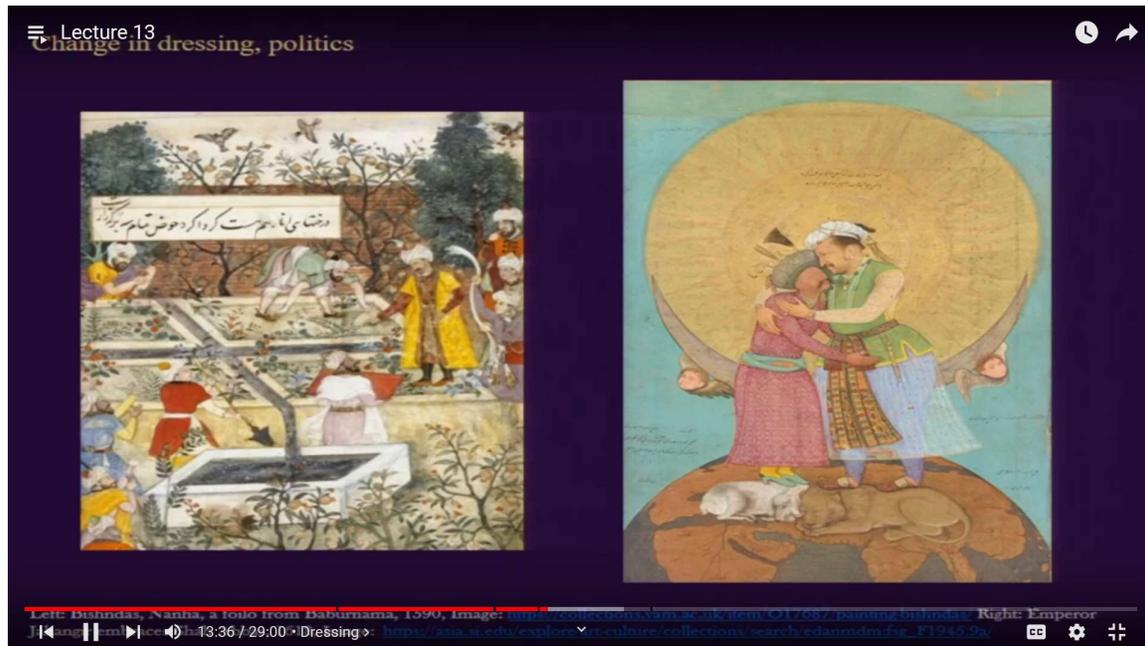
Now the other thing that comes here and that is to do with materiality and this is where I believe that I mean how this ideas about precision observation which are much more abstracted they sort of like I mean come to the material way of executing things. So, in both cases what we find that the materiality I mean of course I mean materiality of the kind of tools and then the materials which are which are which are used there or if I say that the tangibility of the tools and the materials those are used for executing both this works play a very important role. So, if we think through it that I mean how the in this painting that the materiality of this goat hair brushes and squirrel hair brushes and then what they can

offer in terms of like I mean executing this flower motifs, the floral motifs and the vegetal motifs is something that is that is significant. Also, if we think about like I mean what kind of pigment paint has been used there. If the pigment paint is not smooth enough if it is not like I mean fine enough then there can be a grains there can be elements which might disrupt the flow of this kind of lines. So, we need to also think about it that when we think about the concepts of observation, precision, finness and everything else they are very much dependent on the materiality of the paints, pigments, dye stuff tools and everything else. Similarly, when we sort of look into this fragment of the carpet in this one what we find that the materiality of the thread or the yarn that is used for the piling process so for those play a very important role in terms of like I mean how the precision of this lines would eventually appear on the finished carpet. So, if you think about a yarn like I mean as we have mentioned in the first week of this course that have in this idea of the thread count and everything else and it sort of like also show the linear density of the yarn. So, if the linear density is much more thicker then in that case we cannot have like the kind of precision that we see in this work. So, the linear density will be very much important or a defining factor for a place like this where a curved line is made. So, for making this curve we need to have like small small knots and almost invisible and all those small knots would like I mean join up to making this this elegant curve. But if we think about it that I mean if the yarns are like I mean much more thicker then there can be almost the way we see the pixelated way of doing things so that that that can affect the linear flow that we see on the on the top of this carpet here. So, this these are the kind of aspects we need to keep in mind and as I have already mentioned that for this kind of pile carpets usually the pashmina wool or like I mean other fine quality wool are usedon the top of the weft. So, in this case we can imagine like this super fine pashmina wool why this is required for like I mean making this pile and that's exactly for achieving this kind of precision, achieving the kind of finesse, and softness the image offers today. So, this is this is this is something we can see that I mean how materiality is something that is ingrained in making all these visuals possible. So, observation, precision, materiality three things we will we need to consider them to be sort of working hand in hand and it is again a reminder for all of us to understand that how intellectual capabilities and then the material qualities they sort of go hand in hand and that is how this kind of images were made possible.

Now with those things we also find that this idea about textile is something that remains crucial to mark certain kind of differences transformations and so on. So, what happens with that? We find that I mean in the Mughal miniature paintings that but there is this precision for drawing the textiles. ... like I mean there is this meticulous observation we can find that I mean the with which the textiles are drawn. As we have already mentioned that I mean how this muslin fabric is depicted in the miniature paintings with all its detail. ... that that needs that can sort of like I mean tell us that how the Mughal artist or artisan whatever we call them the painters they were very much cognizant of these differences.

.....what all different kind of textiles they appear in front of us and then what are their relevance and that is the reason they also paid minute attention to depict them in these paintings.

Now we also find that I mean dressing and like the use of textile is not something that is

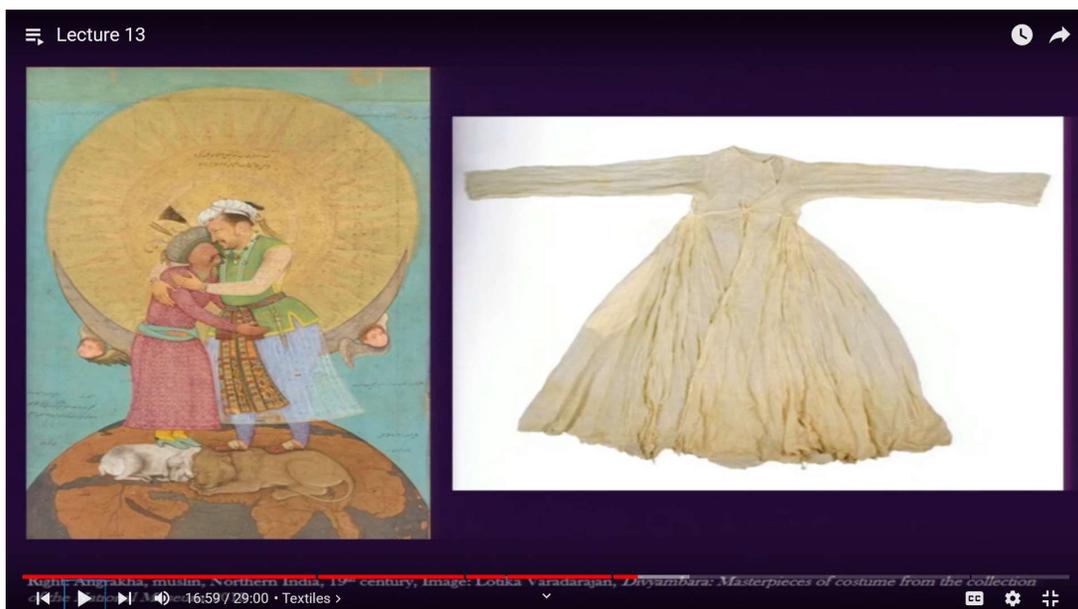


just there for the aesthetic value but they are repeatedly being used for talking about political issues. For example, what we find that I mean here in early Mughal paintings as well as like I mean whatever the written documents we find including Babar Nama, autobiography of Babur or Padshah Babur so in this case is what we find that I mean Babur since he was a Central Asian descent. So, we see that I mean he was someone who would wear this heavy leather coats. So, something we will find that I mean how this kind of coats or like I mean something in which this leather coats will be there in the Central Asian landscape which were much more and you required which is called Poshteen. Then we also see like the long coat made of wool, silk and leather. So those also we find them to be there which is extensively used by Padshah Babur. Even after that we even some of the paintings of Humayun we can find those kind of long leather,those long coats are used in which ...leather is used. Sometime leather and fur would be used in the borders and silk and wool is used for the body of it. So, this is something that is called Chapan and this kind of particular fabrics that we find or like I mean this kind of particular dressing I mean this kind of attire that we see in the early Mughal paintings we find that to have changed during Akbar's time period. after Akbar's reign we find that I mean there is this extensive use of muslin that came into being.

So, for example the image that we see in the right side of the screen in which we see that Emperor Jahangir is shown here who's embracing this the Safavid Emperor Shah Abbas and here we find that Jahangir and how he is dressed in this fine muslin. fine muslin with a jacket on the top of in his upper body and then like I mean the this fine muslin also shows its character by its daffiness quality. Whereas we find that I mean how that is different when it comes to Shah Abbas his dressing style in which we find this highly brocaded Jama he is wearing. So, this kind of differences when we see that there it is not just a difference that is coming in terms of like I mean textiles. Of course, when we see that I mean Padshah Babur he arrives in India and then he sort of like I mean writes in his memoir about the different kind of customs and climatic condition, geography and everything else. There he also mentions this this warm and humid climate in Hindustan.this is something we find that I mean how this warm and humid climate was not inviting of the silk and woolen and leather jackets that that we can find in the Central Asian landscape. that is the reason one of the pragmatic aspects of using cotton that we find in Akbar's time period and but there are also like I mean some of the other issues we can find them there.



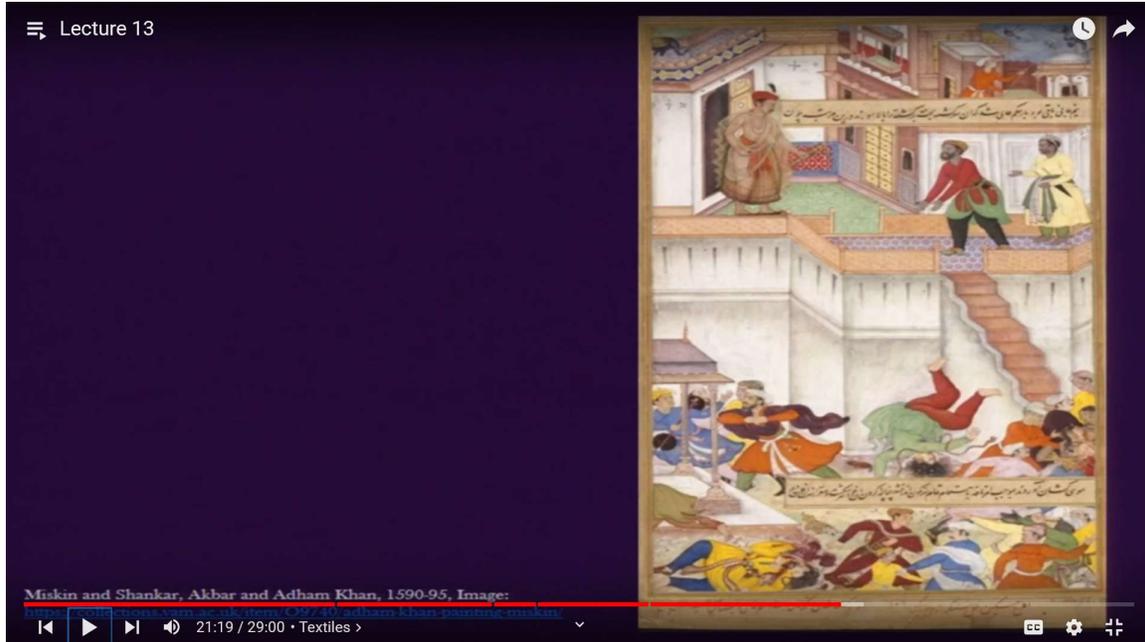
For example, this is actually it's a Angrakha and that means it's a kind of a Jama we can we can think about and in which like I mean this Jama is worn by men and it is made of muslin



and perhaps it was made in northern India in the 19th century. Even though this Jama comes much later from the Mughal time period I mean that that we are talking about however what we can see here is this transparent quality of the Jama in which the layers underneath are somewhat visible. But then like I mean this Jama is not as fine as the ones that we are talking about in the Mughal context. This is just to give us a sense about that I mean what kind of material we are talking about in terms of this fine muslin in which like I mean the layers underneath are seen very prominently. And also like I mean this character of the Jama in which like I mean all the pleats are done underneath the chest and for which all the pleats and all the folds and everything that we have in the flare that that we sort of like I mean see in this miniature paintings even in this case what we see all the flare the pleats and everything else in Jhangir's Jama that is also possible for this particular way of tailoring so this kind of like I mean this material aspects of this Jamas we also need to consider them as part of like I mean viewing this paintings to understand that what had happened differently. Now this is also something for us to remember that I mean why this this embracing of the cotton was not just something that was important for the climatic condition, but it was also something that was politically relevant. So during Akbar's reign we find that I mean he had made several attempts to claim that he is not someone who came from the central I mean he is not someone who is a foreign invader but someone who was very much in tune with the land that he was ruling and that is the northern part of Indian subcontinent, northern and northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent and then slowly like I mean the Mughal Empire it grew further. Now the thing is in this case what we find that I mean the Indian subcontinent was primarily using cotton as like I mean any kind of attire many ...of the attire that we see that that can come from like I mean people who are working in the field the agricultural labors to the ones who would be also there in the courts. So, like I mean silk or wool is something that we have them to have limited use whereas cotton was used extensively. So, for Akbar to claim his closeness to the land and being ...also close to the people they're using cotton is something that we can find to have something that ...should have like I mean much more relevance than ...just having a material which is suited for the summer climate. So it is something we can we can see the use of the cotton if we sort of like I mean go back to these paintings in the use of cotton in this paintings it's not something it is just a aesthetic decision about using this particular kind of cotton; but it is also somethingit shows thispolitical transformation that happened during Akbar's time period. And of course we have already mentioned that I mean there is also this contradiction that I mean when we see that the use of cotton is there and this is not something that we can see that the cotton that is made for the everyday life or cotton that is manufactured the commoners in the country are also like I mean used by the Royals. So, the muslin is something we have already mentioned that I mean how this highly prized textiles were exclusively made in part of Dhaka in Bangladesh and then those were sort of like I mean brought to the Mughal court. So, there is already this contradiction

but at the same time we can also see that the acknowledgement of cotton was very much significant for Akbar to sort of claim his alliance with the land he was ruling.

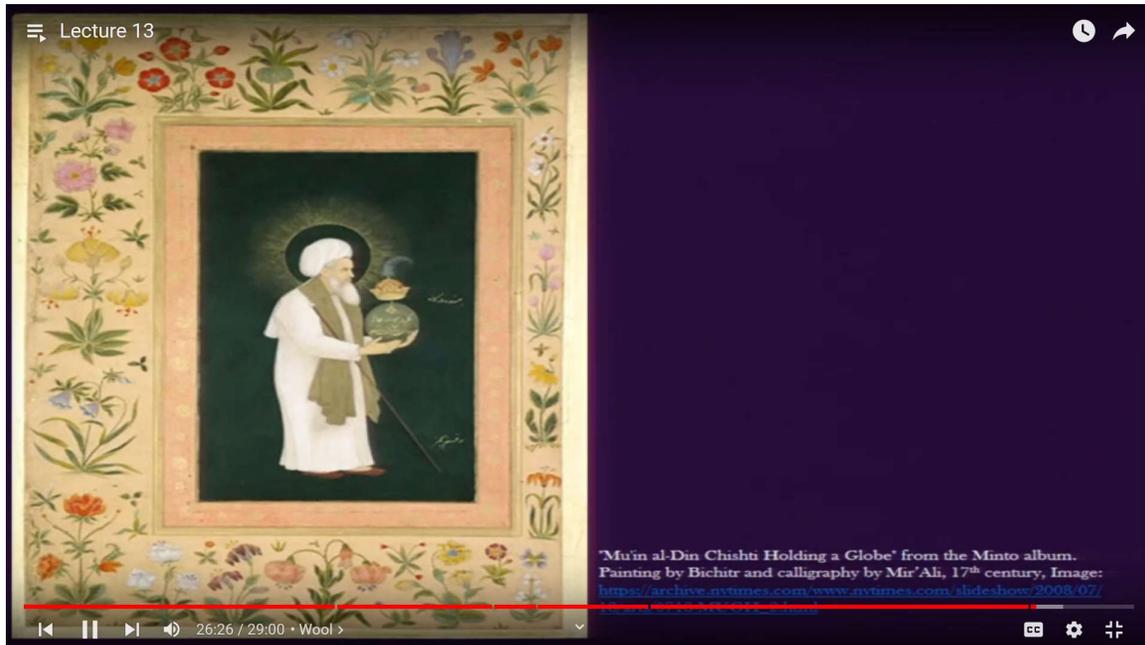
Now this is another painting that we find and it made by Miskin and Shankar and in this



one we find that I mean Akbar is seen here in this image in here and then this is a particular episode in which we find that Akbar's half-brother Adam Khan was thrown from the from the terrace. So here we see this fallen figure of Adam Khan and we can see that I mean how he was thrown from the terrace and then he was again brought on the top of the terrace and then he was thrown again until he died. So, this was this episode we find that I mean that that also was noted by the biographers of Emperor Akbar. Now what I wanted to show here or what I wanted to sort of emphasize here that also comes from art historian Sylvia Houghteling's work and in terms of like I mean understanding some of this salient features of this miniature paintings. In this case what happens we see that Akbar here if we see the detail that Akbar here is seen in this in almost like this cotton lungi. I mean of course the lungi or this dhoti whatever we call it, it is not something that is a commoners cotton. So for example, if we compare it to like I mean the kind of like I mean this opaque cotton that we find in the other people like the attendance figure and then we see this diaphanous super fine soft supple quality of the cotton then we readily understand that I mean this is again it's muslin it is not some regular cotton. But then what happens is we find that he is wearing this cotton lungi or dhoti and then he is wearing this one shoulder cloth which is covering one of his shoulder his left shoulder keeping the right part of his body bare and this is if we also like I mean pay attention to it the shoulder cloth that we have which is sort of like I mean running from the waist and then reaching his shoulder and then like I mean it's fringes are there we can find the fringes here. So, this again shows it's a muslin made shoulder

cloth and the details also reveal that there is use of gold pigment in it. Which might suggest that I mean there is either gold colored silk yarn or like I mean there is zari that is used with this muslin for making this kind of fabric. Now what again if we go back to the significance of cotton in this political context then what is it? that I mean if it is about like I mean showing the use of muslin or like I mean and why the use of muslin here is significant in terms of what has happened. So we find that I mean in this case that Akbar has sort of self-fashioned himself almost like a Hindu king in which we find that I mean the Hindu kings would find them to wear this lungi or dhoti in this kind of fashion and not really wearing a trouser or a pajama which we usually find that to have its presence in the Mughal attire and many other Islamic attire. So is this again this untailed pieces of fabric that we usually sort of associate them with the Hindu or Buddhist kingship and this things we find that to have been embraced by Akbar here. ...then also like I mean using this one shoulder cloth it is also a sign of the way we see that I mean how the kings in the in the Hindu context or in the Buddhist context we will find them to have like I mean one shoulder cloth that will cover one of their shoulder living part of their body bear. So, this is this is something we find that to have been there as well. So, Akbar self-fashioning himself as a Hindu king is something that is also significant in terms of understanding that his own political agenda and his own aspirations in terms of sort of like I mean having coexistence of different kind of religious communities and also at the same time his tolerant nature towards the religious communities who are not Muslims. So, this is this is we can we can find it there and when like I mean this discussion was brought up by Sylvia Houghteling we also are reminded of Philip Wagoner's discussion about the Vijayanagara kings in southern India. In which we find that the Vijayanagara Hindu kings would self-fashion themselves as the Islamic rulers while using this tall Conical cap named "kullayi" and then kabayi those long tunics as those Islamic rulers. So, this kind of like this intercultural exchanges we find them to be there in this images that we have.

The other significance we will see there in in terms of like I mean how this images are drawn is the use of this wool or pashmina. So, what we find that that here is an image of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti he is shown here in this white robe and also with a shawl that



is there on his shoulders.so in this painting that we find which is which is there from 17th century that there's this use of this shawl that is made of wool is something very significant because the word Sufi I mean as Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti was also a Sufi saint that the Sufi this word Sufi that also comes from the word şūf which means a woolen shawl or wool. So, it kind of like I mean it suggests that I mean people who would use coarse woolen shawls or blankets to cover their body and not really something that is refined and that shows that their reluctance in the material pleasures and everything else. So, in this painting what we find that I mean of course this woolen shawl is used here but the wool if we get into the details of this image, we find that it is not some coarse wool but it is perhaps a pashmina woolen shawl. So, this contradiction or the paradox that we find that that in one hand this is wool but on the other hand this is also super fine so the materiality and royalty and divinity all those things seem to be juxtaposing with one another. It's again like I mean thinking in terms of like how cotton is used. ...on one hand cotton is something that we find that is that many of the people in the Indian subcontinent can associate themselves with but also at the same time we find that the cotton that was used in the Mughal Empire I mean in the Mughal court is not just a regular kind of cotton but the muslin cotton. So, this contradictions in the materials that we find those are also then depicted in the paintings so this is how the relationship between paintings and textiles are established and sort of taken further thank you.