

Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices

Dr. Rajarshi Sengupta

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK)

Week - 03

Lecture – 14

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are there in the week 3 of this course of threads of visual explorations. So, we are talking about Mughal miniature paintings and textiles, their interrelations and then now we will be talking more about the representational space. The nature of the representational space in textiles and miniatures.

So, we have already started sort of establishing certain ties between what kind of relationship we can find that I mean that is there when we consider textiles as material and then when we also sort of like I mean think about the miniature paintings as like I mean in the tangible form and what are their interrelations.



So, to continue this discussion I will probably go back to like I mean this carpets and then Brocade and so on. In this case and we will sort of like I mean focus more on this figurative textile or the figural textiles. It is something that we also find that was prominently featured in the discussions of art historian Sylvia Houghteling's work and this is something we find that how Sylvia Houghteling had sort of mentioned that this kind of figurative works, this actually form a multi-layered narrative. ...if we see that I mean how this kind of the works in which the figural motifs are depicted and we can see that I mean it is not just about representing particular aspects of nature or like I mean giving us certain symbolic knowledge about whatever the weaver or the patron wants to depict. But, it has also this

sense of movement, it also has the sense of like a narrative progression. So, all those things we find them to be sort of bound together in the works like this in which we see these figural narrations.

So, as I have already mentioned that the figural narrations we cannot really consider them as merely an aesthetic trope or something that is just as space filler. But, we need to see the context of them to understand that I mean in what context they were created and why those were significant. So we find in the Safavid context in Iran and part of the Middle East, we find a lot of this figurative carpets, this large-scale figurative carpets in which we see one of the themes that would be there as like the shikargah or those hunting scenes in which we will find a representation, a stylized representation perhaps of forest landscape, bushes and shrubs and everything else. ... in which we will find that there are various kinds of animals and birds ... to be inhabiting the space of the carpet. So, we see them there, and then there are also certain representations of this kind of figural textiles in the miniature paintings. ...in this ones we find that I mean when the figural textiles are depicted in the miniature paintings, they also sort of like I mean retain a different kind of flavor altogether. Sometimes, they might tell us about the technical mastery of the particular group of artisans who have made those kinds of textiles. But, then more importantly we also see ... there are various kinds of metaphors and symbolic meanings which are associated with them.one of the other thing that also comes out in Houghteling's analysis is that this kind of figural textiles if we consider them that I mean if there are carpet, those large-scale carpets in which we find this kind of animated figures (the ones we have on screen and this one carpet that we have already discussed earlier); so, if we have this kind of figures there, they are not really there in void because the carpets are there to accommodate more people, people would walk on the top of them, or people might be sitting on the top of them. So, in that sense what happens that I mean it kind of like with every viewer, with everyone who sort of walks on the top of them or uses them in whatever possible way, these narratives are animated and they also sort of like I mean become part of the viewers experience. So those aspects of movement that we see in these images are then enlivened with like I mean the viewers interaction in these cases. So, this kind of aspects we definitely see that to be there which is reliant on the viewers interaction and these issues which also are sort of like I mean triggered by the presence of figures in these textiles will be then discussed further. So, this is one of these coat or like which is popularly known as this hunting coat and which was made in the early 17th century, perhaps in the court of Emperor Jahangir,

and it was also claimed that I mean it was perhaps used by Jahangir because the kind of



meticulous work that we see in this coat. And in this coat what we see is that I mean this sleeveless coat that is used and why this is also called as hunting quote is precisely because of its connection to this Shikargah motive. ... in which we find that I mean there is this meticulous depiction of the world around it like the natural world we can think about it that I mean how different kind of like trees, plants, shrubs, flowers and everything else are depicted and then we also find that there are different kind of animals and birds.



So we find that I mean how there are this lion couple, we find that the lion and lioness they are there then there is this flying peacock it seems to be like I mean flying away from the lion but it also becomes part of this repetitive motif. ... then we also have like I mean how this in this hunting scene in which like we find this lioness is killing a deer or an antelope and whereas this other antelope like hastily sort of runs away from the scene. So, all these different kind of things we see in this textile and here there is this one small fragment of a

hillock and then here there is also a small depiction there is a depiction of a small water body in which there are ducks. So, all this minute depiction of the different kind of plants, animals and then like natural elements that we see them there in this hunting coat which is also like I mean build upon the Shikargah motif which was found both in Mughal India, as well as in Iran.

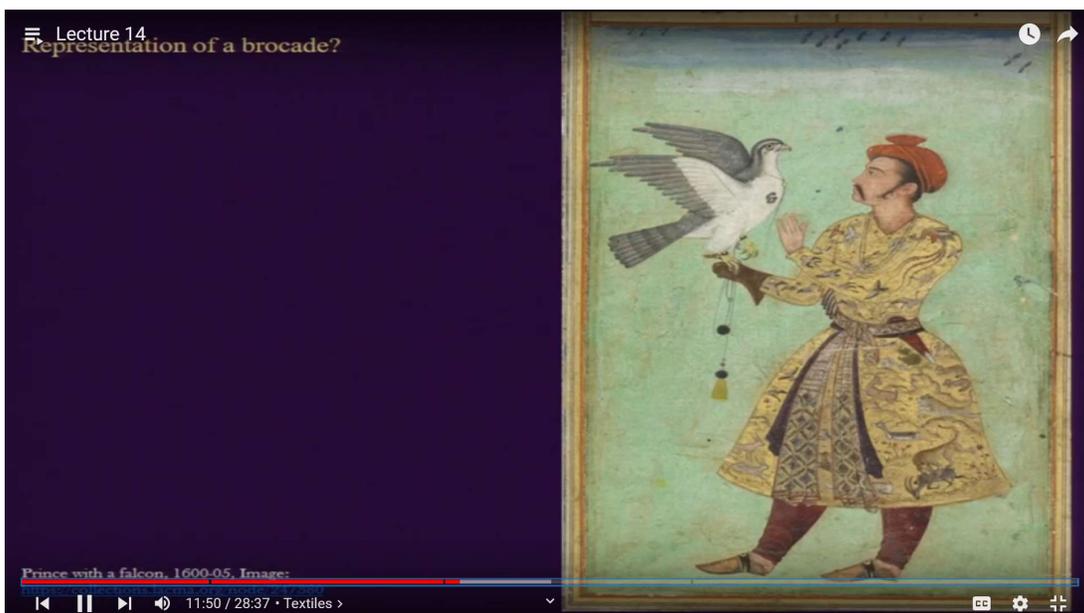
So, in this coat what we see that I mean a particular kind of embroidery was used. So in this embroidery that we find that to be there it's a kind of a chain stitch that is made by a particular community, mochi community in Gujarat and mostly the male members of the community would work on this kind of embroidery and in which this chain stitches are used for sort of like I mean making this figures almost in a low relief format. So, in this one what happens we see that the directional stitches are sort of used for particular way in which the lines in the body of this animals of the birds would sort of work. So, the directional stitches are very much important in terms of understanding the life vitality of each and every form that we see there. The kind of like the linear growth and the flow that we see within this forms, as well as the in the in the relationship between this different forms as something that is achieved by this kind of directional chain stitches.

The other thing we also find in this textile is this use of color. The subdued color scheme is used here. ... then like I mean different kind of colors are used; but, ... not really any kind of contrasting colors we can find it here. So, the tonal variation we find it to be much more subdued and this is something we can see it here in the use of like I mean how the body of different animals are executed. There is almost like this tendency towards giving it a 3D illusion something we also see it here in this woven carpet as well. But in this case it is much more exemplified. And then of course that I mean this subtle tonality that we see here is something we have already discussed; that I mean how it was something that was achieved in South Asia but perhaps not in many other parts of the world. ... that is the reason like I mean the dyeing of these yarns in this particular color so that sort of like I mean made this kind of tonal variation possible.

Now the other interesting part about this hunting coat is that we find that in the writing of textile scholar Rosemary Crill that this jacket somehow it arrived in Yorkshire in England and it was there with Mrs. W. A. Blake. ... [she] was trying to sell this jacket to the Victoria and Albert Museum in around like 1929 and then repeatedly her appeal was cancelled. This jacket was sent to the museum and then the museum sent it back. ... finally, someone recognized that this jacket is ... almost a priceless jacket because it came from early 17th century; perhaps, from the court of Emperor Jahangir. Then the museum finally acquired it. And then what we see in this case that I mean how this kind of stories which are associated with the Mughal emperor and something that had happened in the 17th century the story of this kind of textiles they do not really stop just there in the Mughal time period

but their legacy or like I mean the different kind of associations we create around them or the different kind of interpretations we make about them so those things they continue even today. ... that is something which we can also imagine that as I have mentioned this aspect of movement and live vitality within this motifs and within this with within like I mean the interrelation between these motifs is something that is then also enlivened with this kind of associations that we see in the 20th century. So this idea about how these motifs get animated with human interaction is something that we are not just thinking in terms of what happened during the Mughal period but we are also kind of considering these aspects as part of the life today whether it is in the museum or elsewhere but then like I mean how people have also interacted with them. then the movement that we see that is very much embedded in this jacket is then heightened and then like taken further by the human interactions those were created later on.

Now, the other aspect we find that to be there in this figurative or this figural textiles is the use that like I mean what kind of textiles we are talking about... right. So, that if some textile they sort of survive for example the jacket that we have discussed just now and that jacket that survived from early 17th century for those reasons we know that I mean what kind of technique was used for making this figurative textile as well as the carpet that we have already seen. But for this jacket for having this heavily embroidered jacket it is something we can find that to have like I mean this kind of embroidery can be featured in a jacket but not really in the brocades. ... is the same thing we can imagine that I mean when we are talking about all those figurative motifs in a carpet then like I mean the carpet is something that cannot be worn by people. So, it is not wearable, it is utilitarian it is certainly not for wearing in the body. Then when we see that there are different kind of ... figurative textiles those we see in the miniature paintings? Then what kind of textile are we talking about there.



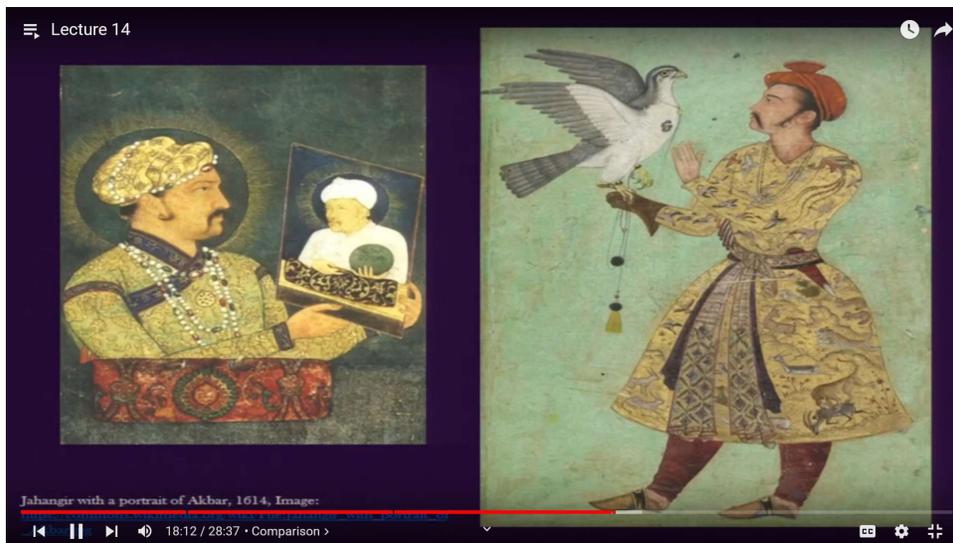
So, to start this discussion I just wanted to like I mean get to this one image and that is to do with this prince and the falcon. ... this also came from early 17th century 1600 to 1605 around the same time perhaps when this jacket was made. ... in this case what we see here, this prince that we see ... in this image is sort of ... holding a falcon in his right hand. ... then we see this leather covering on his hand, and then on the top of that there is this falcon that is seated. ... we see that the prince has a calm expression in his eyes and in his face and it seems that ... he is not really bothered or he is completely in control of this ... bird that has just like I mean arrived and sat on his hand. So, we see that I mean there is this symbolic meaning which is also associated with it. Falcon is something that is used in terms of like I mean its association with warfare, with its heroic nature and everything else; and here when we see that I mean this prince holds the falcon in his hand is also a sign of what the prince is capable of doing. It's not just about like taming a wild beast; but it's also about like I mean having a peaceful sort of coexistence with it. So, it also perhaps that it's a reminder of the prince's inner strength. Now what we see in the prince's body is that there is this elaborately ornate Jhama that is in the prince's body. ... what we see in this elaborate Jhama that again there are many of this figural motifs. Some of the motifs we can readily recognize. So, for example, this lioness and that is hunting this antelope figure and that is something we can see it here that the running antelopes we can also see them here and then there are those lions and lionesses we can see them here they are sort of running after them. ... then there are some of the other animals we find them here. They are almost like waiting, or almost like I mean been eager to see ... what is happening in the other part of this garment.

It seems like I mean with the depiction of this kind of animals that entire narrative is created within the Jhama. ... then we see that I mean there are also motifs of the hillock formations, rock formations like here and then like I mean suggestions of trees and shrubs and everything else. ... then on the upper part of the body what we see that there are various birds. So, there are no animals that we see here some of the birds are depicted here as well. But in the upper part of the body we clearly do not see any animal represented; and then very significantly we also find this Chinese Phoenix bird that is there on the shoulder of this Prince. So that that is also something we can see that it's a sign of it's not just we are talking about the animals and the birds that we observe from our surrounding; but there are also animals and birds perhaps we are thinking in terms of how these are not just the actual birds but there are also mythical birds and so on we see them there. ... having a Phoenix on the shoulder perhaps it also sort of like I mean signifies certain kind of mystical quality, or perhaps like I mean you know a symbolic quality within the Phoenix. So this kind of elements that certainly make us think about that I mean what is the role of a figurative textile here. So, in one hand we definitely see in the lower part of this Jama that then entire narrative about this Shikargah or this hunting scene is depicted. ... then on the top part of this Jama we see that there are various bird motifs and no animal motif is depicted. So with

this things we certainly see that I mean clearly some kind of narrative conventions are made use here to depict this extraordinary Jama.

Now the question is that I mean since we have already mentioned that how embroidery for an entire Jama will probably not be the most viable option. Because, [the] embroidery can make this Jama much more weighty. it does not really become the most viable option for the wearer to sort of like ... wear this heavily embroidered Jama and go for any of this kind of work which requires ... physical labor. So ... then what is happening here; is this a representation of a brocade? Then in the brocade silk we definitely see that I mean how there are figurative motifs they sort of like I mean come being represented and that is also something that is suggested by many of the art historians and then in Hautling's work that is also been suggested whether it is a brocade textile. Because in the brocade textile at least from Gujarat and then some of the other places we do see that how figurative narrations can come there.

Now when we also sort of like I mean compare this image with like I mean the other



brocaded Jamas that we find in the Mughal paintings so for example this is another image that we have from early 17th century. ...

in which we see that Jahangir is shown here and he is holding a portrait of Emperor Akbar and by that time Akbar has already died. So, what we see here in this image that I mean Jahangir is shown here in this elaborate brocaded Jama and in which we see that the characteristic brocade the motifs that the creeper motifs the floral designs and everything else they are depicted there with all possible details. So, what we see here that I mean the and then like I mean when we sort of compare it with like I mean this part of this rug that we also see here being hanging so we can imagine ... how this the quality of the rug (this material quality of the rug) is sort of ... made as a contrast from this silk brocade that is there in Jahangir's body. This material qualities are then very minutely executed and then this also gives us a sense that I mean the painters must have known very well that what kind of textile they are depicting, where. So, it is not really something we can imagine that

I mean whether the painters you know were aware of like I mean what is possible what not but then we can also think about that I mean what is possible in a brocade textile and what not. So, considering that the painters knew that I mean what is possible in the brocade and that is how like I mean this 1614 portrait of Jahangir is presented here with all the details. Then can we also think that the painters knew how to represent a brocade and that is how like I mean this extraordinary portrait of the prince with the falcon is depicted and this exactly represent perhaps a brocaded Jama which was existing there in the Mughal court. So, the question comes here about like I mean the materiality of the brocaded Jama's or the brocaded fabric that we see here.



Now if we compare that and if we sort of like I mean think that I mean what is this quality of the brocade that we have there and perhaps like I mean thinking about like I mean some of the other brocades those were there during the 17th century, we see that one of the highly figurative brocade textiles (that brocaded textiles) that we find in the 17th century, in the 18th century would be this Vrindavani vastra (that we have already sort of addressed in the earlier lectures) in which we find these tremendous figurative motifs, these figurative narrations that we find. ... they come from the Bhagavata Purana and then like also from various episodes of Krishna's life, then the Dashavatara and many of the other episodes. In which we see that ... how this one particular motif if it is about like I mean here or like I mean this motif here all those motifs would be like I mean repeating side by side and that is how like I mean the figurative textiles are being made. ... this the same thing can be also applied to some of the early surviving Gujarati lampas weave textiles in which we also see those meticulously made figurative brocades. There are those repetitive figures or like the repetitive narrative scenes which would be like I mean, sort of encompassing the entire textile surface. If we also compare that to the Baluchari sarees in which we also see that I

mean there are figurative patterns figurative motifs; but then they are also sort of like I mean shown in this repetitive format. ... that also something that comes from the formation of a Jala. So, if we know that I mean if we remember that I mean how the draw loom is usually made and in the draw loom we have the Jala formation in which like I mean that sort of manages or sort of like I mean controls the flow of the entire motif. that is sort of like I mean would be being woven on the brocaded textiles. So for the Jala, it cannot be possible always to have like the Jala for an entire fabric. But ... Jala's are usually made and then they're repeated after a particular point. So, that is how like we find that the repeated motifs are sort of like I mean made and that is ... one of the characteristics of the brocade textiles that we find them to be there.

This is a choga that we find from 19th century and it is made of Banarasi brocade and in this one we definitely do not see figurative motifs but there are those large floral motifs or this Vase like motifs that we see them there and that says something about how this the brocaded textiles would work in terms of if that is made into a wearable cloth, I mean wearable. So in this case what we see that I mean this repetition of the motif is something that is central to making of these brocades and not really having this open field in which a narrative completely unfolds and then that is made into wearable. So, this kind of issues we can see when we consider the technical aspects of making brocade.

Now considering all of these things then let us go back to this painting where we see this



extraordinary
Jhama is there in the
body of this Prince.
So considering all
these things that I
mean what is
possible in a
brocade and then
we have already
discussed that I
mean perhaps doing
in extensive

embroidery in a Jhama is not the most viable option for the wearer so if that is the case and then we see that I mean for the brocade textiles that we do not really see that I mean an entire narrative can be made. Because of this Jala that is that is been sort of made and then how the motifs even if there are like I mean figurative motifs that needs to be repeated all across and that is how the brocaded fabric will be woven. So, if it is not embroidery, if the possibility of being this as a brocade both these possibilities we cannot really consider for this painting, then what is this painting? what kind of textile we are talking about here?

Now here is the issue that we need to consider, that I mean this is perhaps not a representation of a textile but this is actually it can be a reconstruction of a textile. So what is it that I mean ... we have already seen that how in this kind of textiles we have that the figurative motifs which are featured in this carpets and then like we also see that I mean in those embroidered textiles how those narrations are created and in which we do not really see repetitive motifs because those are hand embroidered. So, if those kind of possibilities we see them to be there in other forms of textiles, perhaps those knowledges are then accumulated and then sort of brought together to symbolize something else in this particular Jhama. So, we should not be thinking that I mean this has to be a brocade and this is a particular way of making a brocade. But it perhaps carries a symbolic meaning and this is not something we can see ... just as a representation. But perhaps, it's a reconstruction of a textile that has been borrowed and the resources for this reconstructions reconstruction is borrowed from several sources. So, for example, this carpet, this embroidered piece, or many other forms of textiles. then why this reconstruction here is important, is to show that I mean perhaps this who's then like I mean is taming this wild bird is a way of showing how this princes perhaps related to this land and landscape. ... then we also know that I mean how kingship is something that is very much intertwined with the idea of land. Whether it's forest land, whether it's cultivated land, agricultural land and so on. So, in this case, having the idea of this land, the symbolic representation of the land and its inhabitants within the body of this prince is something that comes as a metaphorical understanding of kingship. then that is sort of like implemented on this Jama and we should not think that this is strictly representational but this can be a representation, this can also be a reconstruction. Mostly I'll argue that I mean this is perhaps a reconstruction than representation. So this is this is some of the aspects which make us think that I mean the relationship between textile and miniature painting is definitely not a straightforward one in which we see textile we see the miniature paintings and we see the precision observation and materiality of them and then we represent one into another. But then there are also the possibilities that they open up that also gives space for the artisans to sort of experiment further to sort of unearth certain kind of aspects which might not be very easily expressed through words. Thank you.