

**Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices**  
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**Week - 04**  
**Lecture – 16**

Hello everyone, I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in the week 4 of our course and this week we will be focusing on Kalamkari and allied practices.



So, by Kalamkari what do I mean? So, Kalamkari is this complex set of techniques which are brought together by this term. So, in Kalamkari basically we mean that it is dyed, painted, printed and resist-dyed cotton textiles which are mostly produced in the region of the Coromandel coast in South Eastern India and also parts of Deccan (and that would-be South-Central India). Of course, ... the coast for Deccan is the southeastern coastline of the Indian subcontinent, and that is the Coromandel. So, both in Coromandel and Deccan in these two places there is a very specific kind of textiles (cotton textiles) which have been produced for centuries and those are dyed, painted, resist dyed and of course printed. So, we find that in some of the textiles, there are combinations of ... two or more than two kinds of techniques, and in some textiles, we will find that I mean it is exclusively either painted or dyed or I mean either painted or printed. So, in all these cases what we find that

this specific kind of printing or painting technique and all those techniques, as I have mentioned that I mean all of them are brought together by this term Kalamkari.

Kalam that means that I mean this term some of the early uses of these terms that we find in the Mughal Waqai (or the news reports) and in which we see this term that comes to signify 'Kalam' means pen, then 'Kari' means hand work, mostly. Now, the thing is that I mean this particular term if we consider that Kalankari or Kalamkari this terms we find them to be there in use not only in this particular region but also in the Middle East (today's Iran ...) like I mean in this network [where] ... we find that how this particular kind of technique in which Kalam or pen or some of the tools which are associated with pens or with the sharp tip like this one. So, those kinds of tools are used for making such kind of hand work that can be on textiles, ...metal, and so on. For all of those techniques, we find that Kalamkari or Kalamzani this kind of terms are being used. Now, for our work ..., we will be focusing mostly on the Kalamkari textiles, which are made in the South Eastern coastline and also in mainland India and mostly in South Eastern India. So, we will be looking into those particular kinds of textiles.



Now on screen (in the right corner of the screen) we have this ... printed Kalamkari textile that comes from the recent times. ... this is something in which we find how printing with natural colours is used here. So, for this precision of the printed lines that we find and also

in terms of the arrangement of the forms and then colour distribution and then the tonal variation, all of those things that we find and those things will be synonymous with the Kalamkari making. Now, the other thing we will be looking at in ... this week is the relationship between Kalamkari, architecture and Deccani craft. And so as I have already mentioned that by Deccan I mean this plateau-like land which we find ... almost starting from ... the Vindhya mountain range (...which almost marks the central India ....., the end of the northern India) and from there towards the southern plains which would be .... covering this large area (which is this plateau like area). ... the western end of this plateau like area would be towards Arabian Sea; whereas the eastern end of this region would be towards the Bay of Bengal. And for our study, we will be looking either at the Deccan region, which is there at the centre of this Indian peninsula, and then also towards the coastline of the Coromandel, which is a southeastern coastline.

Now interestingly, even though a lot of these dyestuff and favourable conditions we might consider they have existed on the southwestern coast as well but we do not really see the flourishing of this kind of dyed printed and painted textile making on the southwestern coast but only in the southeastern coast. So, these are some of the aspects we will be looking at. Now then, in this region, we find that with Kalamkari, there are many other craft forms that have flourished over time, and with a number of craft forms, we can see its close correlation with this textile making (with this particular form of textile making). Now, the other aspect we will be seeing is the relationship between textile and architecture, something that we have been discussing, starting with Semper's theory on the relationship between textile architecture, habitable spaces, and our experiences. But then we will also be seeing that, I mean, how does this interrelation between textile and architecture as something that we have also discussed in the last module in terms of this intermedial transmission that how certain kind of knowledge transmission that happens across media is something we will also be touching upon in this week as well. Now, the other aspect of Kalamkari we will be looking at is its relationship to trade networks. Now, in the last module, we have also mentioned that I mean how the Mughal empire and its complex trade networks ... with the various parts of the Indian subcontinent and beyond through the sea routes as well as through the ancient silk route, we find that I mean how those complicated

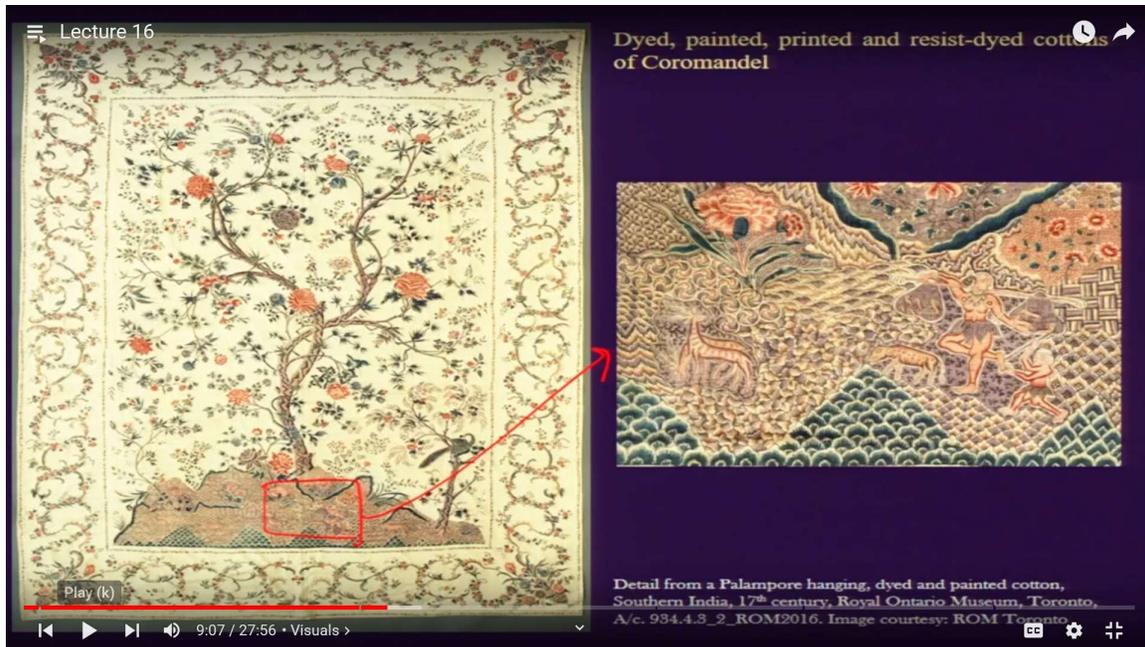
trade networks were very much involved in shaping the visual and material culture of the Mughal era. But then, for Kalamkari, we find a very specific kind of focus on the trade routes, and that would be mostly the oceanic trade routes. In some cases, we definitely also see how the inland trade routes would make a difference in terms of how these textiles were produced or what kind of textiles were produced for that. But the sea networks (... the oceanic networks - the Indian ocean network) we will find that to have been very influential in terms of how this Kalamkari textiles have shaped over centuries.

Now one of the other aspects we will be looking at in this module and that would be the artisanal perspectives into art history. Now, the artisanal perspective is something that we have been talking about in terms of the use of materials use of techniques, and so on. And we will be taking that slightly ... further in terms of understanding that if we are considering some of the interviews with the artisans or like understanding that what are their point of view when we sort of consider the this complex history of this textiles? and is it important for us to recognise the aspects of suppressed histories? and what do we get out of them? So, these are kind of the questions we will be focusing on, and also, we will be sort of going through in this module, and with that, let us get started with the visuals.



So, in the first segment, as you have already seen that we will be talking about the dyed,

painted, printed and resist-dyed cottons of Coromandel. By that what do I mean? So, I will start by looking into the painted and dyed cottons. So, in the right side of the screen we have an image and that is a detail.

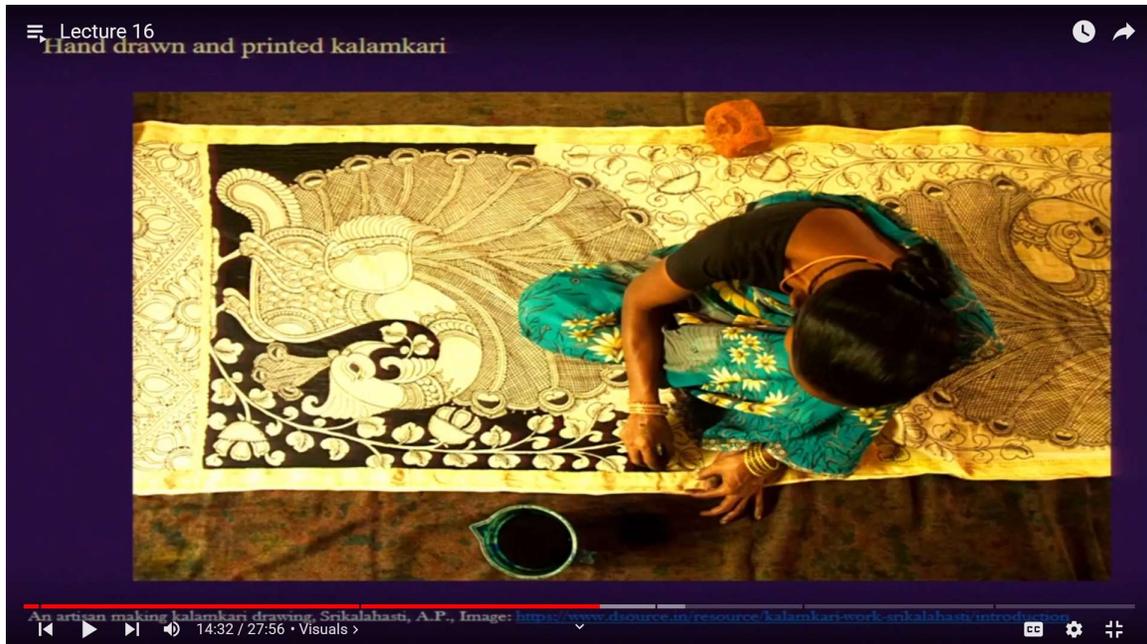


So, as you can see that I mean this is around this area is then magnified into this. So, one can imagine that I mean in this gigantic Palampore and Palangposh that also means a bedspread (So, that is how ... this particular English word came into being from Palangposh or bedspread). In this one (this gigantic Palangposh or which can also be used as a hanging) ... what we see that incredible amount of details have been drawn onto it. ... here what we see that there are those meticulous lines which have been drawn and that sort of like I mean specify the contours of each and every element that is presented here. So, we see that each and every element that is there on this textile ... are very clearly drawn. So that ... the area between one element and the other area (I mean one element with the other) is very clearly distinguished from one another. Now with that what we also see that I mean after drawing this outlines each and every element would have one outline. Then ... we see that there are also colours which are used in there. ... in terms of like, we can see that there are hints of tonal variations, and there [we] also [see] ... what kind of ... colour (the choice of colour) ... has been utilised. So, for example, if we see this figure here (this woman) who is perhaps carrying animals ... and it is a very characteristic figure [as] we also find this pose which is used for depicting Naikas or the heroines in many other

visual forms in the early modern period and so on. And in this one what we see that I mean there is this clear sense of the tonal variation. In the body we see this pale red tone which sort of like ... I mean gives us a sense of what can be the color of the body. But then we find that towards the edges of (where) the contour line, we find that there is also tones of ... slightly darker red; and then the darker red sort of concludes in the outline which is drawn around the body. So, this is how we find that at least three tones are used (to sort of like I mean mark the body) and even though these bodies and then most of the forms that we see here are predominantly two dimensional but this slight hint of this tonal variation also sort of suggest that there is a tendency towards making them three dimensional or bringing them closer to life. So, this kind of activity also shows us that I mean what kinds of colours were very carefully selected and used in this kind of textile. And then if we sort of like, I mean, go into the larger textile (here) and in this one, we find that there are those colours like, I mean this slight variations in red and perhaps in some places we see purple (and purple is achieved by overlapping red and indigo). And then we also see that, I mean, how some of the other colours perhaps have come as an offshoot of mixing this colour. So, on the one hand, we do not really see that a range of colour is used (for example, it is not really too many shades of yellow, too many shades of green, or anything else), but it is for, perhaps, like I mean, red, pale red, blood red, then brown. Then perhaps, like I mean in blue (which is made with indigo), we find that pale blue is used; then like slightly darker blue is used. That is how, like this overall tonal variation, what we see in these images is achieved.

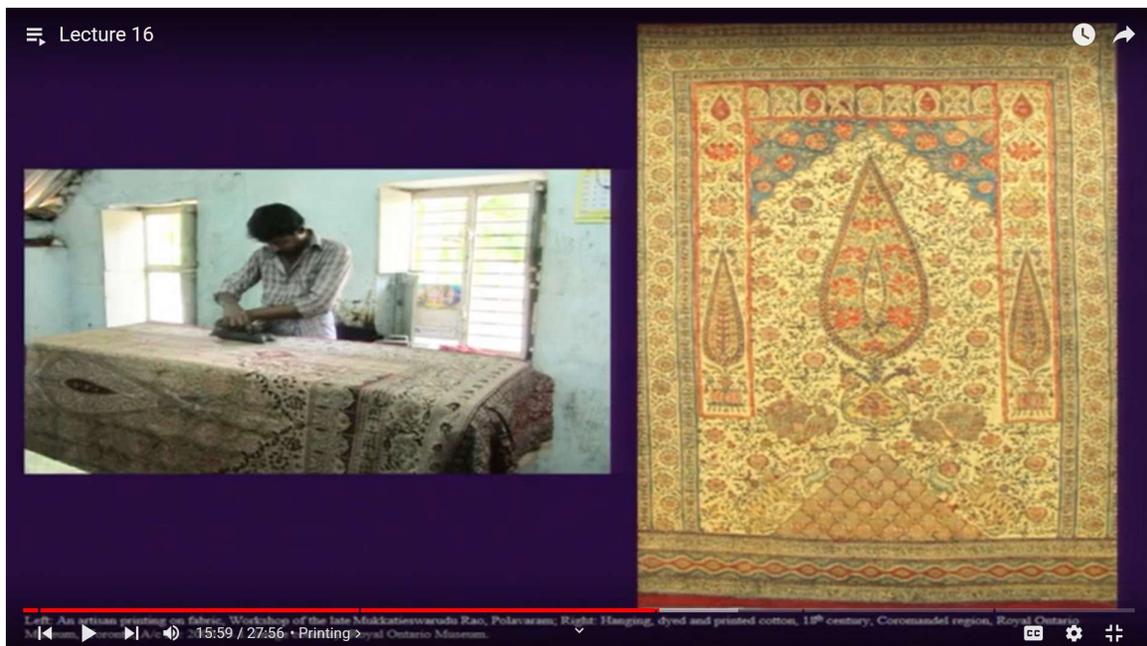
So, this is one of the things that we find (that I mean) why this kind of ... the color scheme is used here. It also sorts of contributes to the overall aesthetic sense of it. I mean, of course, it also comes from ... what kind of natural dyes were obtained by these dyers? However, we will find that (I mean) the dyers also had access to many different natural dyes and ... not just like this particular set of dyes [were available]. But this is a conscious choice either dictated by the patron or also, like I mean, by their [dyers] choice of sort of implementing these colours in this particular way. So, with this what we see that I mean all the color variation, then this linear rhythm, and then of course this linearity all those things they come forward very prominently in this Kalamkari textiles. Now, the other aspect we also

need to remember [is] that I mean all these textiles are predominantly utilitarian. They are not really meant to be displayed as paintings on the wall; but they are meant to be used. So, that is the reason what we see that I mean all these textiles those are there made with dyes (and I will come to the little more detail of the dyeing process later on). But then what happens [with these textile as] ... these textiles are washed multiple times. And that is the reason what we see that I mean how these textiles can be used by people and those are either used as wet spread as I have already mentioned and even if they are as hanging on the wall one can wash them and one can put them up on the wall again. So, these kind of provisions we find these textiles would provide their users or their viewers or audience.



Now, getting [a] little more into this technique (that I mean what we mean by ... this hand-drawn technique of Kalamkari) right; for example, if we see this entire image and as I have mentioned that all the contour lines that we see in this image and how the contour lines ... separate one element from the other; all of them are hand drawn. This is one of the images from the contemporary Kalamkari workshop in Srikalahasti. ... in this one, what we see (that I mean) [is] the artisan literally sits on the top of this saree which is being made in this Kalamkari technique and draws on the top of it, and then there is no problem about it because we know that I mean this saree after this black color or kasim (this color is applied on the top of it), it will eventually be then sort of washed and boiled in other dye stuff. So,

there is no problem in terms of like sitting on the top of it, or like I mean putting it on the ground and work on it. So, it does not really require certain kind of precautions that we see perhaps in making paintings. Even though the use of lines or (like I mean) the overall aesthetics that we see in these images that might come very close to painted images but this is the difference ... Since it is made in dyes they can be washed and then ... of course that the way of making it, the way of using it, that becomes very different in these cases.



Now, the other aspect of Kalamkari making we will find ... [is] to do with printing. As I have mentioned ... with Kalamkari ... we see [that] there are already some of those aspects in terms of how it is painted, (how it is) printed? and so on. But even before painting and printing, we also need to understand that there are ... other aspects of making that are associated with it. For example, weavers would be making these kinds of fabrics that are used in the Kalamkari technique. So, today, I predominantly find that I mean the kind of coarse cotton that is used, and of course like I mean finer cotton is also used for printing. But the coarse cotton that is used that is called Gada (and then in this one we do not really see that much details have been drawn); it is just plain woven cotton in which like the warp and the weft are just unbleached cotton yarn that is used for making this plain woven cotton. Once this cotton textiles are made ... they also go through a lot of processes. In some of them would be like I mean, the engagement of the washer people would be very important;

even though like we do not really acknowledge them as part of ... understanding this complex history of this textiles. But then washing is a very important part of making these dyed textiles (like not only just this Kalamkari textiles but any kind of dyed textiles like washing remains very crucial) and the washing can also include not only just washing and washing with soap, or soap nut in a riverbank or in the local water body. But it might also include (like) several stages of boiling, and boiling with like I mean calcium carbonate or similar kind of stuff (which are also called as soda ash) for taking out all the impurities from the fabric. ... this kind of issues we will find. I mean why these are important is because if the impurities stay on the textile then it might also affect the kind of the dye absorption that the textile would sort of be used for. Now, this is also something we need to understand that this is a very different kind of technique that we are addressing here in this module and which is different from the textiles that we have discussed so far. In the other modules (like I mean in the earlier modules), we find that how some of the textiles (like, for example, the brocades, the carpets and so on) ... have the dyed yarn (already there) or dyed or undyed yarn. ... those yarns would be used with either like warp, ... if there is already like warp and weft, then like, I mean the extra weft would be used with this dyed yarn. ... even for warp and weft we find ... how dyed yarn is used. In those cases, we do not have a plain fabric, and on top of that, one is applying the dyes, but it is already dyed the yarn, and then it is incorporated in the process of weaving. So, in this case, what happens is that we already have this plain fabric which is almost like a surface (on which, like, I mean, one can start painting). So, it is a very different way of ... approaching the textile. It is a very different way of (perhaps) executing this kind of work.

Now what happens with the woodblock printing? In this one we find that it is not just about the engagement of the printers; but we need to also consider that for printing there is a requirement for wooden blocks. These wooden blocks are also something that we find those are made by this professional block makers. So we see ... that in the Deccan region and also part of northern Coromandel extensively wooden blocks are made. I mean, of course, in history, we find that I mean in southern Coromandel as well (that I mean these wood blocks were produced). And mostly we find that the season wood block (like I mean season wood) like I mean teak and similar sort of woods are used for making this wood

blocks. And then they are meticulously carved by this professional block carvers; and once those are carved we find that to have been used by the printers and dyers for printing on the top of textiles. Now here we also find this notion of a template (that's something I have already mentioned when we are talking about the brocade in terms of ... jala or a template). Or like I mean when there is a use of punch cards in a brocade making we find that I mean how one particular motif is created and then that is repeated all across in the textiles (something if you remember that I mean how the baluchari or like the baluchari saree those are being made) that I mean each and those figurative motifs we will see them within a particular image area and then that image area is repeated multiple times in the saree in mostly in the achal or pallu and that is how like I mean the use of template is sort of like put forward in this making of these textiles.

Now in this case what happens the wood block itself that becomes a template. Then it is sort of ... pressed against a printing pad, and then from there, it sort of absorbs ... a limited amount of dye, and then it is pressed onto the fabric surface for printing on the top of it. So in the left side of the screen we have an image from the workshop of the late master dyer Mukkateswarudu Rao from Polavaram. In this one what we see ... a printer is making use of a wood block (that we see here) and using it for printing on the top of a textile. This particular kind of textile that we see it there is called mihrab textiles one very celebrated textile from the region of Machilipatnam. Now in the right side of the screen what we see this is a hanging which is called as a hanging but I mean it also has the same kind of compositional arrangement of this mihrab textiles (if you see it here). So in this one what we have that there again like I mean we find that the central image area if we consider it here it is sort of like I mean framed within this elaborate set of borders and the borders they run in beneath the image area and also by the sides. Now, what we see ... here, there seems to be a continuous border ... beneath this image area (here the bottom border) and then ... the rest of the border seems to be sort of ... encompassing the image area within it. And that some suggest that (I mean this whatever this hanging that we have on screen) [it] is not something that is just an individual piece of hanging but there is a continuation of similar kind of images in this one piece of fabric. So within one piece of fabric if we put it like lengthwise ... one after another such units would come on it and so this is how this

hangings are made. But more importantly perhaps ... we can think that these are not primarily made as hangings; but such kind of textiles were actually made as Janamaz or like prayer mat. ... on which like we find that these mats would be made in the size of one person to sit on the top of it and pray (...the pious Muslims would be praying five times a day) and for that reason we find that this particular kind of carpet like textiles were produced. So, either it is woven (I mean the jhanavas) or this very specific kind that we find in Machilipatnam and part of Northern Koramangala ... we find those are predominantly woodblock printed.



Now the other issue that comes here is that I mean why there is a requirement for perhaps like woodblock printing. So in this case what we see that I mean there are particular kind of very complex motifs which are used here and then particular kind of motifs which are also very significant in Islam. So for example that we have in the center stage of this image we have this stylized cypress motif. I mean this motif ... in some ways we have encountered it

before in terms of like the Kanchipuram sarees. We find it like, how this particular motif is called manga butu or Butu (... I mean it is a butta that looks like a mango) and then ... similar kind of motif we have also seen in Baluchari sarees which is called Kalka. Now this kind of motifs



we will see that I mean how it becomes almost like I mean, the upper edge which is lightly curvilinear, is sort of removed; and then ... this pointedness (...almost like a droplet structure) is sort of exemplified in it. This is something we find in the Islamic context, a stylised representation of cypress motif. So the cypress motif (cypress tree) is something

that has high significance in Islam and that's because [of multiple reasons] like I mean how it sort of points to the sky [therefore] in the other word, it ... stays tall, stays unnerved during ... many events and then ... also how that sort of ... points to the sky or to the heavens. That's the reason we find that ... there are many philosophical associations with this cypress motif. Now with that what we see that I mean this particular kind of motifs, which are used in this textile and of course like I mean a textile which is used for prayer purpose in those ones this kind of a cypress motif comes very significantly. Now the other thing we also find it here is this cusped arch gateway (something that we have already seen in the Mughal context) and this ... arch gateway ... had also been recognized in the mihrabs of the mosques which also marks the direction of Qibla. So, ... these are the reasons why we see that ... certain motifs are gathered on these textiles. Something we also find that I mean why repeating all this set of complex motifs in any other textile making would might have been much harder than doing it in woodblock. And that's the reason there is a relevance for particular kind of textiles like this one to be printed by woodblocks and not hand painted. We will continue on this discussion on the use of woodblock and hand painting and resist dyeing in the next lecture. Thank you.