

Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices
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Week - 04
Lecture – 18

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in the third lecture for our week on Kalamkari Textiles and Allied Practices. ... in the last lecture we have ended our discussion around the idea of dyes and then what kind of dye stuffs are used and then what are their kind of like I mean result in the final textiles that we see them. Now I will come back to that and just give you a few more information on this process of dyeing. ... as we have already mentioned that ... there is considerable stress on the act of washing ...

I mean properly washing is very much required for the cotton fabric to be absorbent of the dyes, the dye stuff in which ... the textiles are boiled and then processed and so on.



So, if washing and all those things are important then we also see that I mean there is a considerable stress on the act of mordanting. The mordanting happens in various stages in which we see that I mean in the first stage of this dyeing process the unbleached cotton textile (which is washed and boiled in soap and then warm water) ... is dried and then it is dipped into myrobalan solution. Myrobalan is fruit which gives this kind of this pale-yellow tone that we see in the overall textile in Kalamkari mostly. It gives this very characteristic background for the Kalamkari textiles we find it and then on the top of that we see that I mean how the black lines are drawn. Now myrobalan is also tannin rich for

which the iron based black solution it works very well for yielding this black color or any shades of the like I mean brown and so on. Now, after that, we also find that the mordanting technique also continues with a few of the other ingredients. So, for example alum the commonly found alum that we see and that is something that is extensively used in Kalamkari making for mordanting. So, for example after drawing the black if we see that there is traces of red color (for example here) or like brown ... ones are actually drawn with mordant solution and then it is boiled in dye stuff to obtain this color. So, initially



while drawing on the top of this fabric we do not really get this color. So, in that way we can

understand that mordant painting or mordant printing the same way the way like mordant solution is applied on the fabric with the help of a Kalam the same way it also happens with like the wood blocks but in for wood blocks what happens is we see that is also mixed with gum Arabic for that reason it gets slightly thick so that it doesn't spread all over in the fabric. ... in those cases what happens in both for painting and printing mordanting remains very important because that is the one that kind of like I mean binds the dye stuff with the fabric surface and that is the reason we get all the brightness of this other colors except for black. So, for red, the shades of brown, shades of red, for yellow, for like greenish hue and all other colors we do find that mordanting is the way to obtain the shades on the fabric.

Now if one applies the dye stuff directly on fabric [it] ... really does not stay. After washes they tend to like I mean fade or completely wash away and that's the reason the only way to obtain this kind of color at the same time color fastness is by the use of mordanting. Now, for that reason ... this very specific technique of applying mordant on the fabric surface that we see in Kalamkari (So, for example the images that we see in the right side, the stages of Kalamkari drawing) we see that only part of the drawing has been done, ... [also see] that the entire drawing of this flower vase has been done and then in the third one we see that mordant has been perhaps painted or like I mean mordant painted and then like I mean it is developed slightly with the pale reddish tones and then we see that on the reddish tones we have the brownish tones they have also appeared and all of them are happening because of this repeated mordanting and then boiling it in the dye solution bringing it back to the workshop then mordanting again then again boiling it. So, this is how like all this mordanting technique works. ... afterwards we see that [the] bees wax is used for covering the entire fabric except for few areas which would be then dipped in the indigo vat. ... this characteristic indigo that we see in the Coromandel textiles something that we have already discussed that, that is discontinued. So, these kind of issues we find that I mean how the stages of Kalamkari making is there. ... these are some of the samples which were collected by W.S. Hathaway and it was sometime in the late 19th century ... and ... were then ... made part of the collection of Victoria Albert Museum. So, for this reasons what we find in this case that I mean this mordanting technique is something that enables a particular kind of absorption of the dye and then like this selective area of the



fabric surface will obtain the color and not the entire fabric. For that reason we find that the other kind of dyeing technique (so for example yarn dyeing that

we have in the left side of the screen upper left) in this one except for this one this one except for this two and perhaps this one as well all the other shades are obtained by mordant dyeing. [Either] by the use of ... alum mordant, can be copper based mordant, or more iron based mordant and ... of course we have ... the undyed yarn as well. Now ... for yarn dyeing what we see a lot of times like the entire yarn like I mean all the yarn is dipped in the mordant solution kept there for absorbing the mordant solution in them and then it is boiled in the dye vat and sometimes like I mean it is boiled in the dye vat and then (it's a warm vat of course) ... it is dipped in the mordant solution and then it is brought back. So, this is the way we see that ... (like I mean whatever amount of yarn we have) from yarn dyeing we are dipping the entire thing in the dye and the mordant and that is how we are taking them out. But for this particular kind of Kalamkari making what happens since the mordant is already painted or printed on the top of the fabric then it is washed (thoroughly it is washed) and then it is boiled in the dye solution and that is the reason like the areas which are sort of like I mean marked with mordant will only get the color. So, for that reason one needs to be very careful that one cannot really boil this fabric too much in a dye solution [if dyed] then what happens is that the mordant in particular areas starts spreading and it might also spread to other areas which are not really wanted in a fabric for whatever the compositional balance it requires.

So, those are the things we find that there are differences between yarn dyeing (regular yarn dyeing) and ... the way it happens for Kalamkari dyeing. ... the same thing will also be applicable to any kind of resist dyeing. So, for example for Ekath or for Bandej and Bandhini for all those ones we are tying the yarn and that is how and then it is dipped in the color for Bandhini we and Bandej we do find that I mean the pre-made fabric is also tied with thread and everything and then it is dipped in color. So, in those cases we find that again how this dyeing technique differs from Kalamkari dyeing and that is because the amount of time one can dip it and then sort of like I mean put it away and again if the desired color is not there then like dip it again and then sort of like I mean treat it with mordant and so on. If those things can happen for yarn dyeing for Ekath dyeing and all the same thing cannot be said about Kalamkari dyeing there is a particular time frame in which like this dyeing needs to be completed if that does not happen it has the danger of spreading

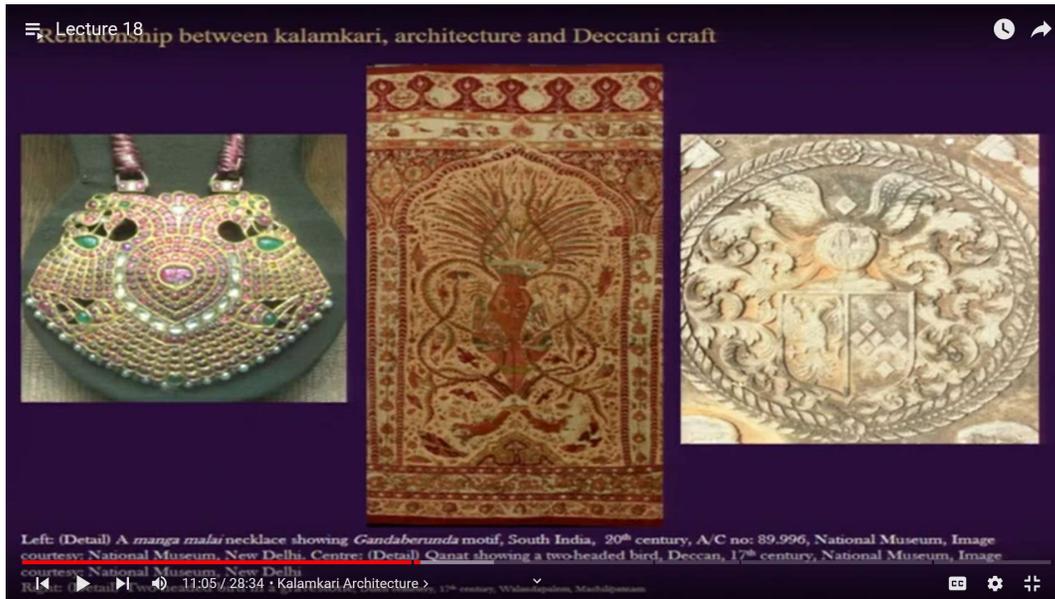
all over. So, those kind of delicate balance need to be sort of like I mean made possible and they need to be maintained when Kalamkari dyeing is on the way.



So, for those reasons what we also see that I mean there needs to be much stress on this particular dyeing technique that I mean how this fabrics are pre-made. ... a lot of time what happens that I mean when we look at this Kalamkari textiles for their brilliance for the extravagant visuals and everything else we tend to forget that the actual process or like the actual work the hard work that goes behind making this kind of fabric it actually starts when there is no image on the fabric. So, this is another stage for us to sort of like I mean understand that what is the role of this kind of ephemeral practices which are very much ingrained in the artisanal hands and their lives but which are not perhaps reflected to their fullest extent in the finished fabric. So, those are the kind of things we also need to understand and also need to be cognizant about; how certain things in this kind of practices might not be visible on the surface but we always have to sort of like see how the textile or any kind of visual that we are looking at but then we also always have to like go back and see the process the various stages of the process the different kind of engagement that happens with textile making before the textile actually comes to completion. So, those things make us think about this fine balance between tangible dyestuff, tangible material (that we have here in this process) and then the intangible aspects of making this textiles which are much more ingrained embedded in the lives of the artisans and how the artisans

sort of like I mean get involved with this kind of textile making. So, with those things let us move on to like the next topic which we are supposed to discuss as part of this week and that is the relationship between Kalamkari, architecture and Deccani craft.

So, as I have already mentioned that Kalamkari if we think about it that is done mostly



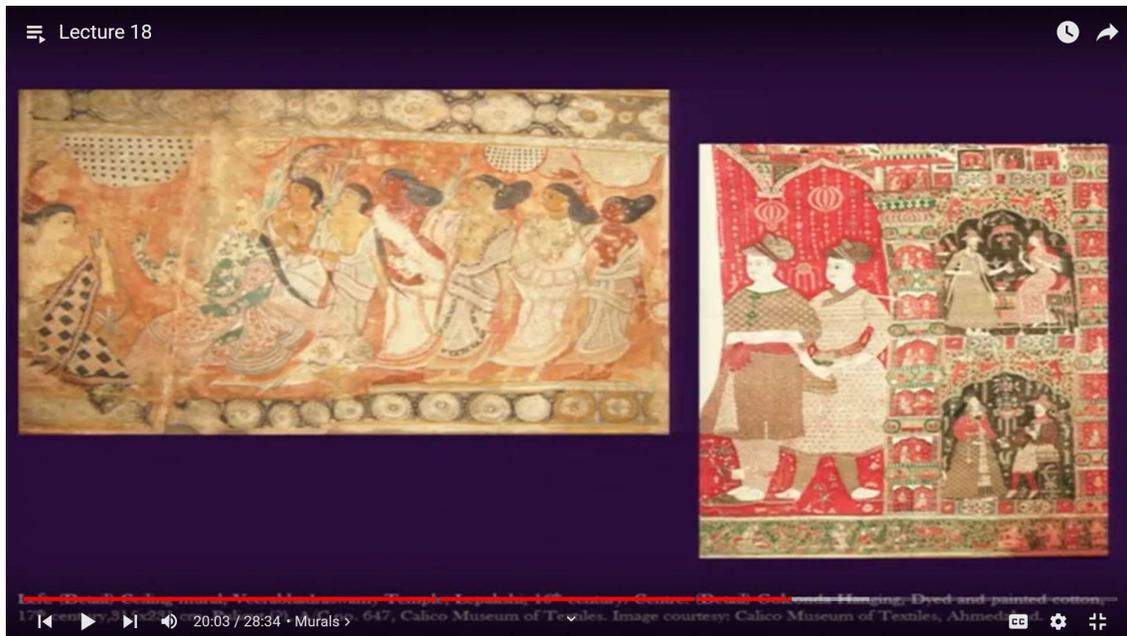
made in the south eastern coastline of Indian peninsular, then we know that the Deccan region is the one which is sort of like guarded by Coromandel and then Konkan and of course like I mean part of the Malabar coastlines. So, this Deccan region ... [is] mostly sort of like dotted with plateau like landscape and dry atmosphere and so on. We see that in this area a lot of varieties of craft making had flourished for centuries and some of them will find those are done on metal, those are done on stone, on wood and so on. There is a close connection between the different kind of craft making that flourished in the region of Deccan, in the same time ... in the coastal Coromandel region. ... so what kind of relationship do we see? So, let us perhaps start with the visual analysis that what kind of visuals we see there and what we can get out of them. So, at the center of this slide we have an image it is a detail from a longer panel and it is a tent hanging or *Qanat* and in this one what we see is this dynamic two headed bird. This double headed bird that we see here and it has this dragon like face and in its beak like I mean even though it is not very clearly visible in this area there are two elephants and then like I mean this bird flies downwards it is very dynamic in its way and its feathers are flying everywhere and it sort of reminds

us of this Chinese Phoenix motif. Now the thing is that I mean, we also see that this particular kind of bird that we have here it is not really completely this Phoenix motif ([though] its dragon like face); but also the iconography of this bird that we do not really see this kind of double headed bird holding elephants in its beak is something that is found in China. But that is found in southern India and that is considered as Gandaberunda one of the forms of Lord Vishnu. What we see in this case that I mean in one hand there is this Chinese influence of this Chinese Phoenix motif, on the other hand we have this deeply religious relevance of this particular icon and that is Gandaberunda a form of Lord Vishnu. ... then this bird is then framed within this cussed arch gateway and that is something we have already spoken about that how this is a characteristic Mughal arch that we find it there. On the top of that we also see battlement which is also seen in the Bahamani architecture as well as in the Mughal architecture. So, these are the some of the things we find that there are Islamic architectural references, at the same time then we have like some Hindu iconography in this one, and at the same time we also see this Chinese influence of the Phoenix bird on the same bird motif. So, it's not really we see that there is one thing and then the other thing distinguishably from one another but all of those things are sort of mixed and put in this situation in which it takes a different form altogether. ... if we compare this (that I mean if this is one kind of image making that we see it there and that is happening on the textile) then we also see ... this motif of Gandaberunda which has its high relevance in South Indian Hindu customs and belief we find that this kind of pendants were also made in which this double-headed bird Gandaberunda is seen in this pendant and like I mean its wings and the body and everything then we find it being bejeweled. So, on the other hand we see that I mean if this is a pendant which we can understand that a woman presumably a Hindu woman will wear this and perhaps for sacred occasions and so on and then we see that I mean how there is a transference of this sacred imagery to something that becomes much more ambiguous, ambivalent. For example, the one we see here in this Kalamkari textile. Now taking this further we find that this double-headed bird (even though it might not be connected) ... is also something that is used in this Dutch heraldic symbols and in this case what happens we find that I mean double-headed bird is something that is sort of like I mean been used in many heraldic symbols as a symbol of like royalty, valor and so on high prestige. So, and this particular this low relief carving that we have

on screen in the right side of the slide this comes from a tombstone in Valandapalem or the Dutch settlement in Machilipatnam and this tombstone was made in the 17th century. Now this textile that we have on screen is also from 17th century and this necklace I mean this pendant even though this comes from 19th century we can imagine that similar kind of practices might have been there in place even before 19th century. So, in one hand we see that I mean there are ... different kind of practices those are there in various parts of Deccan, southern India and beyond that. In which we see that similar kind of motifs are in transaction. So, what does that tell us about it? So, we start with our visual analysis to understand that I mean this kind of aspects are there and that perhaps should alert us about that I mean this idea of the shared visual vocabulary in which we see that there are certain kind of experiments that goes on in one medium but then it is not really always restricted to this one medium and then the meaning, the context and everything else they also changes even though sometimes like I mean the motif remains fairly similar with one another. So, for example for this pendant we definitely can assume that I mean this is not really worn by any other community member but perhaps a Hindu woman but then like I mean when we see this bird motif with this very distinguishable this elephants in its beak we know that this is bird motif has been drawn from the image of Gandaberunda but then we cannot really completely pin it down and say that this is the image of Gandaberunda. We can say that the reference has been taken from there but then there are other references there as well. So, it becomes much more kind of complex and this also tells us about that how it is not just about how this cultural assimilation or different sources of culture are coming together in the textile; but it also tells us about how the people in this Kalamkari workshops they might have absorbed this different kind of cultural influences or ... their ... exposure to different culture because perhaps a lot of these artisans haven't really travelled outside of the region and let alone you know seafaring or going somewhere else in the 17th or 18th century but then we see that I mean how meticulously they have sort of attempted to imbibe the essence of different form of craft which are perhaps not present always in their region but still they have managed to sort of imbibe the essence from the different craft or material or like different objects and then sort of implant it in the Kalamkari textiles that they have made successfully. So, this kind of issues we find that there are many examples like that in which we see that Kalamkari textiles are not just something that is in which we see that the

textile motifs are coming from textile but then there are many different ways in which we can see how the tombstone something that is can consider it as part of an architecture and then also like I mean different kind of craft objects like jewellery, metal craft and other things and so on in all those different kind of items or objects this knowledge is disseminated and we cannot really say that how this thing started. Like I mean, how does this translation of the motif started? Did it start from textile? Did it start from stone? Did it start from jewellery? We do not know. But all we can say is that, they were all in conversation with each other and that is how this richness of the material, the richness of the imagery had developed over time.

Now the other important aspect of this relationship between Kalamkari textile and architectural form that comes from the murals. Now this is something, this is an area we find in which lot of work has been done and then like I mean the scholars like Anna

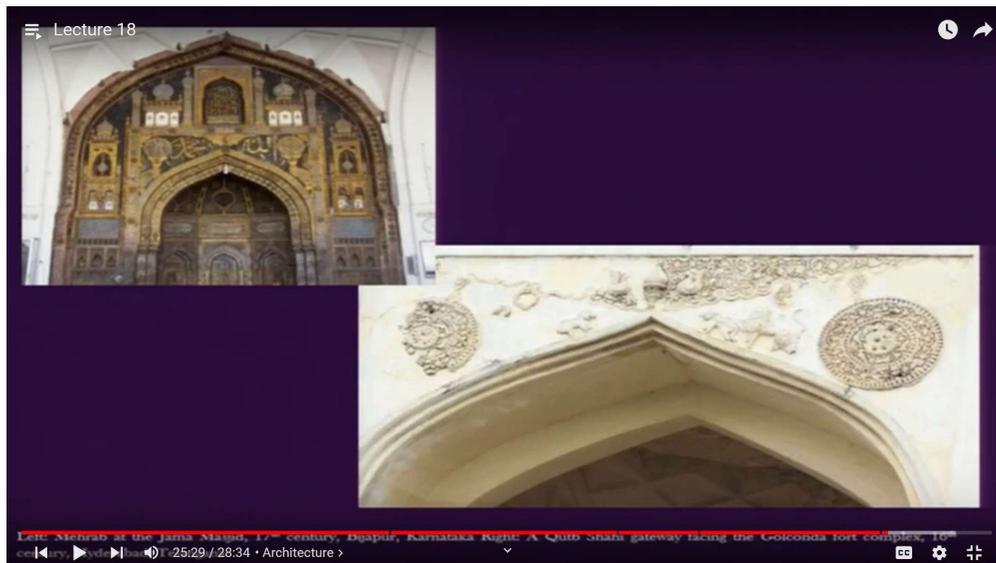


Dallapiccola and then of course the scholars who have worked on Vijayanagara sculpture and painting and so on have extensively sort of noted this the correlation between Deccani textiles and the Coromandel textiles and then like the murals which were made in many of the temples that we find in the Deccan region as well as in southern India. Now this is a ceiling mural that we have in the left side of the screen and that comes from Veerabhadra Swami temple from Lepakshi and that is there in the southern tip of Andhra Pradesh. ...

this is a temple that was made during the Vijayanagara period and in this temple what we see in the ceiling we have this extensive murals and which would reflect on the stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata, different Hindu epics but also sometimes they would depict the courtiers of the Vijayanagara kings and royals. In which we see this kabayi and kullayi, these two dressing items which we have also mentioned in the earlier module like I mean this cross dressing and in which like the Hindu kings would try to dress up like the Islamic rulers something that comes up strongly in Phillip Wagoner and then Finbarr Berry Flood's argument. So, those things we find that I mean how that had been there in the depiction of kabai and kullayi has been there in the Lepakshi murals as well. Now certain other things that we find in this Lepakshi murals is that, there are those registers forms, in which we see these broad borders and then in the middle of the border there are like the narrative scenes which sort of continue. It's almost like a scroll but also one can argue that I mean this is also very much like the temple hangings that we have in Kalamkari in which we have the entire piece of Kalamkari textile (the temple hanging) that is divided in this horizontal registers and with a central panel. So those kind of compositional arrangement that we see them very much there in this temple mural of Veerabhadra Swamy. For both Kalamkari and these murals we also find that there is this high stress on linearity. The lines are the life of all those images. This very spontaneous sometime free-flowing lines they are the ones that those would depict the different body parts and then the expressions, the movement, the gestures of hand and body and everything else. ... it will be essential for conveying a story through like I mean the this figurative narrations. Now at the same time we see that how the lines are used for depicting this varied range of patterns that those are there in this Lepakshi murals. So, for example if we have this Lotus motifs in the border and then like those stylized flower motifs here in the border then there are also those minute details that we have on the sarees or like the other forms of wearables that we see or in this dhoti and sash and everything else and all those motifs we will find that they are not really monotonous but there are varied range of those motifs we do see them there. Now if we compare them to perhaps how that happens for the Kalamkari textiles, we find that there are many motifs and there is that perhaps also tells us that all those motifs were already been experimented in textiles and then like I mean perhaps something also came back to murals or some people can argue that I mean this kind of activity started with the murals

and came back to textile. But except for those kind of like those references that we have there directly on between these two visuals like in the right side we have a fragment of a tent hanging from the collection of Calico museum and this is a tent textile and for these things what we see that it's not really perhaps just a visual reference that there is pattern, there is pattern and then perhaps one copied from the other, perhaps the other influenced someone else and all these things but we one thing one perhaps need to understand that sometimes those murals are something those are more permanent sources for keeping the references than the textiles which are meant for utilitarian purpose and that makes us wonder something that I also sometimes wonder that I mean if this kind of murals were not just made as representing textile but perhaps also as made as a catalogue of different kind of patterns which are kept for the next generation artisans who can look at these murals and also can refer to their own practices they can enrich that. So it's not just about drawing visual similarities between two kind of practices but one may also think about this as part of this larger scope of knowledge generation and made by the artisans for the artisans.

The other form of like I mean this reference is that we see there in the between like textile and architecture that comes from like I mean perhaps this arch motif, this very simplified arch motif that that find which is predominant in the Deccan region. ... this comes from



the Golconda fort complex in Hyderabad. Then we also have this mihrabs which are there featured in the mosque which direct us towards the direction of Qibla to Kaaba this holy abode of Allah that we understand is based in Makkah. So this mihrab wall which is the

foremost important architectural element in the mosque architecture so in this one what we have there is this arched, this niche like area and then like I mean in places we see that I mean how this is sort of framed by elaborate motifs. Now this particular mihrab that comes from this Jama Majjid from Bijapur was made in the 17th century and we see that the kind of intricacy the architectural details and then like the arrangement of the composition all of them they are highly similar to many of the textiles that we see that can be the Janamaz that can be the mihrab textiles at the same time those huge narrative textile panels that we have in those tent textiles. Now one can see that I mean if this is again if it is just a reference that I mean there is a meharab motif or like this arched motif that is there in the architecture and then we see in the textile is that all that we have here? Perhaps not, perhaps the kind of connection we can also see ... for a Janamaz on which like people would sit and offer their namaz is something that is also related to praying whereas this meharab is also something that is part of like praying and the Friday gathering. So those things we can understand that this kind of references if we see them it's not just for the wish for making this visual similarities but this is very much ingrained in the practice of offering namaz. Or like I mean how this this relates to like the Islamic practice around like religiosity, spirituality and so on. So the visual references should not just tell us about their aesthetic choice but also like some of those deep-rooted ideas that can relate them to not just about the world around them but to the world beyond. So this is the way we see that how architecture textile they can be connected beyond the visual scope. Thank you.