

Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices
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Hello everyone, we are here in the last instalment of our week on embroidered narratives and we have been talking about the use of zardozi and then how zardozi's are used in this way of writing and overwriting narratives.



So, here we'll just start with the discussion on how zardozi's are made. And in this one, we find this particular kind of like this wooden bed frame as used for the base for this zardozi making. So, here we have an image of Aslam who's working on the zardozi, this frame, which is also called Adda. And in this bed frame, the cloth on which like zardozi will be made that is tightly stretched and that the images which would be embroidered, they are then like either printed from block or they're like transferred from like carbon and other kind of like I mean tracing techniques onto the fabric. And then when required, then extra pieces of fabric are then also added on the top of this one fabric.

And here we can see. So, for example, like there are those extra pieces of fabric, then those are added on the top of this fabric onto which like embroidery will be done. And then the embroider sort of sits there and pierces through the fabric surface and sort of like makes the embroidery and on the way, like whatever is extra required. So, for example, those precious or semi-precious stones today, a lot of like I mean those plastic materials are used in zardozi. So, all those things are then like I mean added on the top of this fabric and then like sort of embroidered by the sides and with it. So, that is how like I mean they're put together on the fabric. So, this is a very different way of embroidering from Kantha or like the Rabari embroidery technique that we have seen so far. And there's a reason the kind of like effect it also creates is very different. And so for example, in this image in the left side, we find that I mean how this particular piece of fabric that is we find that to be different from the background fabric, this pale greenish



fabric that is then added here for making this panel. And then on the top of that, this highly ornate peacock image is then created. And in even in this imagery, we can see that I mean it's not just the gold or like I mean the metal wrap thread or zari that is used, but also like I mean the additional materials. So, for example, as I have already mentioned that precious or semi-precious material, they are also then added with it. That is the reason it sort of creates this low relief kind of presence. So, for example, the figures which are created or like all the motifs which are created, they do not really stay on the

same level with the surface, but they are always projected out of the surface. So, it gives this three dimensional quality to them, something we find in the Zardozi fabric as a prime characteristic feature of the Zardozi fabric. So, Zardozi is something we find that to be reserved either for the royalty or for like I mean special occasions as marriage and so on. So, those are definitely not something we find them to be used by people on a day to day basis, but they are only reserved for very special occasions or coronation ceremony and so on.

So, from Zardozi, if we move towards the other forms of embroidery making, we find



that applique is something that is usually added to these techniques. And by applique, I mean that adding extra pieces of fabric. So, something we have already seen in the earlier installments of this week in which like in Ahmedabad and part of Gujarat, how like I mean pieces of fabric like those cut pieces of fabric are added to the already existing fabric surface. Even in Zardozi, we have seen in the earlier example, that we have already looked at in the earlier slide that how pieces of fabric are then added on the layer of the existing fabric and then it is stitched or embroidered with the other material. So, similarly, applique is something that we have seen to be there in use for various different purposes in the Indian subcontinent. So, if we think about like applique that is also there in the quilting technique in which like small, small pieces of used fabric they are put

together and then stitched together for making a quilt, then there are also very specific kind of textiles we have seen them there. So, for example, this one textile that we have on screen is this long, large temple hanging that is there. It is embroidered and at the same time appliqued and it shows seen from Ramayana and at the center stage we have image of the coronation of Rama and then we also have like I mean in the this vertical panels which are around them, they have like I mean the other Vaishnava images in the sides and then there are those continuous narrative panels in the upper border and in the lower border of this image in which we see that I mean the narratives from Ramayana they are depicted there. So, this is something we see that I mean if we consider it that is happening in this particular fabric that the fabric was perhaps dyed in indigo and then like I mean of course like and then pieces were added like I mean small, small pieces were added (like I mean the fabric pieces were added) for making this particular decorations here like the diamond shaped pieces we can see them there in this fabric. ... then also like I mean part of the borders are also then added with like I mean other colors. So, those things we can see that how embroidery and appliqué in both cases that how pieces of fabric and then yarn those two things are added to an existing surface is something that comes up prominently ... in this particular kind of fabric making.

In this one what we see that this particular kind of fabric is something that comes somewhere between making wearables like a saree or dhoti and then like I mean also



making murals. So, for example that since this is a temple hanging one can imagine that this kind of hangings will not just be there in the temples but would probably be projected at a time of a performance perhaps a night long performance in which like the episodes of Ramayana are sort of played out or depicted and then during this time, this kind of hangings would be spread or like I mean would be put up on the wall. So, this kind of like I mean purposes the temple hangings would serve something we have already considered in terms of like Kalamkari hangings. In this case against a dark background in against this dark indigo background the images are executed with white or undyed threads mostly with white and undyed threads but also like I mean pale yellow and sometimes red is also used for making this embroidery. So, this extensively embroidered fabric piece we see that I mean there are certain kinds of compositional formats.

So, for example this image on the right side of the screen in which we see that coronation



of Rama is there and in this one we see that the Rama's figure is shown in the frontal position whereas the other images are there in the profile something we have already seen in the Kalamkari temple hangings. We also see

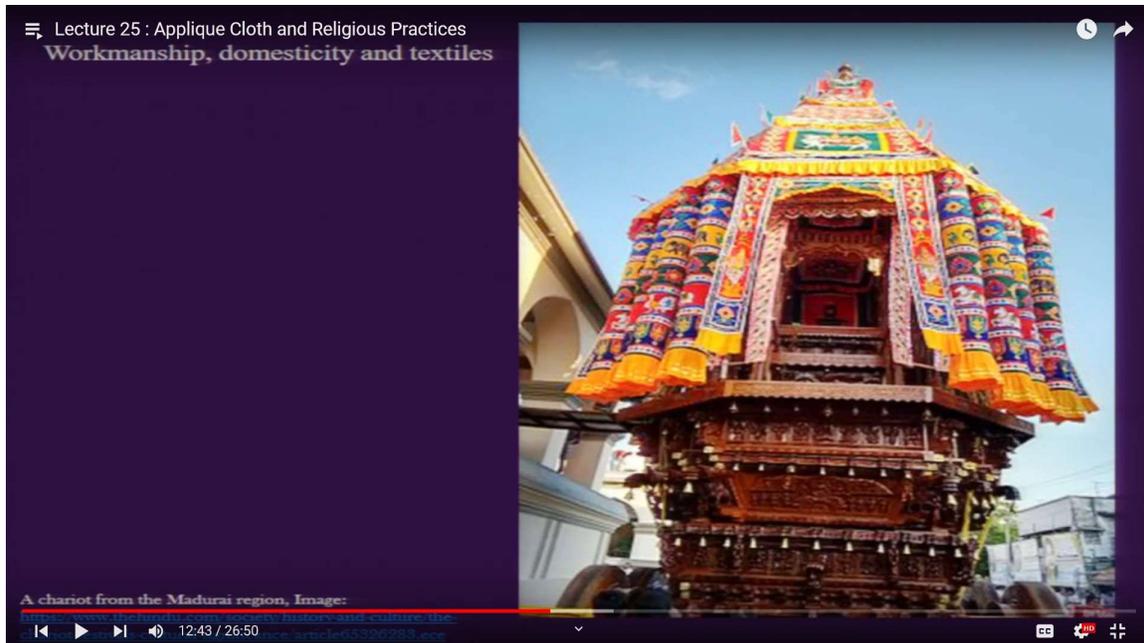
this kind of imagery in the temple murals when we were comparing the temple murals with Kalamkari hangings and we can extend that to this particular embroidered fabric as well. So, this fabric was perhaps made in the Nayaka period in the 18th century (sometime in the 18th century) and we can consider it to be there in part of southern India perhaps in Tamil Nadu. In this case what we see that I mean there is again this close correlation between mural making and this temple hanging making. However, if we go back to the first image we see that there is a clear border on two sides of this fabric it almost sort of reminds us of the wearables in which there are clear borders or pallu and so on (those are there in the sides of the fabric). ... then there is also those running borders which sort of like I mean run lengthwise in the fabric and then the images are created in the center of it. So, in that case we can see that I mean how this kind of fabric they sort of stay between the wearable fabric (like if something that is wrapped around the body) and then the temple murals. ... it is none of them; it is not a temple mural, it is not really a wearable fabric. But the format, the compositional arrangement and then like the overall qualities of this textile that sort of make us think that it is somewhere in between and none of those usual utilitarian purposes are served by this kind of fabric.

The other form of applique textile that we find that to be there is this kanduri cloth and



kanduri cloth or the shrine flag that we see there and that is made in part of Uttar Pradesh [or] that used to be made part in Uttar Pradesh. That is near the Bharuch and in Bharuch there is this a particular occasion in which commemoration of the death of a 19-year-old saint (Islamic Saint) Ghazi Mia is celebrated and in a particular time in the year when his death is commemorated during that time we find this applique shrine flags are created. This applique flags in which we find that there are already like I mean this the shape is like a flag or a alum and then on the top of that like I mean various pieces of fabric then they are added to make those figurative narrations. Then we see that the applique flag is also attached to this piece of fabric which would like I mean cover the bamboo pole which would be inserted into this area. That is how ... these flags will be carried by the devotees in the procession which is sort of like I mean taken out during this occasion. So in terms of the devotees we see that I mean both Hindu and Muslims they participate in commemorating this saint's death and Ghazi is a particular word that is used for the warrior saints. In this case we see that I mean Ghazi Mia this 11th century saint was there who was considered to have fought for rights and at the age of 19 and it was the last battle in which he died and so like I mean certain scenes from the last battle and then the other imagery which are associated with them are then sort of like I mean projected on the top of this prayer flags. and these flags are something then those are after fulfillment

of the wishes we see them to be there auctioned and then like I mean the money from there those are used for the particular shrine in Bharuch. So. this description of it comes up in in Rosemary Crill's exploration of this kanduri cloth or the shrine flag. So, some of this flags are there in in part of the collection of Victoria Albert Museum. But also we find them to be there dispersed in some of the other museum collection like Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver and so on. So, in this case what we see that again this applique technique is used for writing a story and then we see that I mean what kind of like I mean specific information they have. So for example here in this case we see that there is a body that is bleeding and this bleeding body is shown by like I mean first by applying this one white piece of fabric to show the body and on the top of that like I mean this extra red piece of fabric that is added on the top of it for showing the blood on the body. Then we see that I mean how this body has fallen here and again like I mean the blood that is sort of draining out of the body is created by using these other two strips of red fabric. This is how like we can see that it is not just depicting a story, but like I mean there is again this idea of overlapping elements by and with the help of this kind of overlapping certain kinds of like imagery are created, certain kinds of narratives are then developed. So those things we find them to be there in this particular way of making this applique fabric. So, with that we again sort of like I mean go back to this idea about how embroidery is related to making and sort of like I mean writing and overwriting narratives.



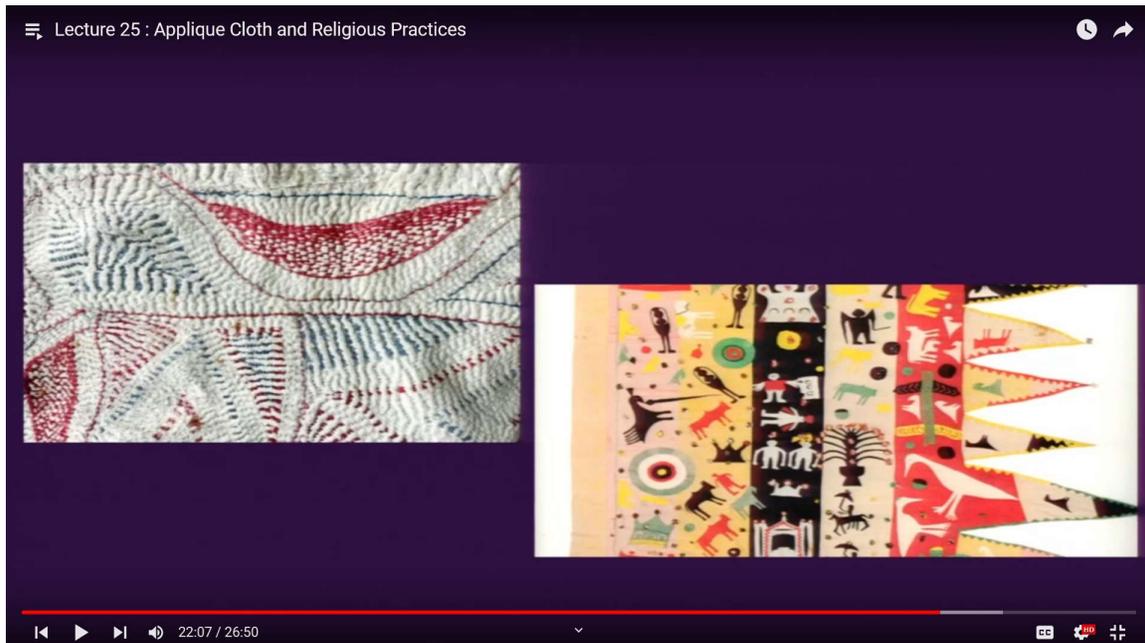
The other form of like I mean this applique fabric we find and those are there which are predominantly used by the temples in Tamil Nadu. Those would be the applique fabric which are used in the temples but also like predominantly during the chariot processions. So, during the chariot festivals what we find them to be there, that in this large wooden chariots which are exclusively made or like sort of like I mean developed during this chariot festivals in which the gods- the presiding gods and goddesses of the temples they would be taken in procession around the neighborhood. That is how like the people would be able to like I mean see the gods who are not visiting the temple; but also it's a way of like I mean to mark the territory of those temple premises. So, a practice in which we find that certain kind of embroidered applique textiles are used for decorating the chariot. But I'd not just say that I mean those are used for decorating them, but also there are other purposes which this kind of textiles they serve. So, we find there are those cloth pillars (so for example these cylindrical pillars) those are created by the this applique and embroidered fabrics those are there. Theses cloth pillars which are called tombai and then there are also those arches those arches they also sort of remind us of the temple gateways. Of course like I mean we can see this how these arches they might also have like I mean influence of the Sultanates and the Mughal architecture. So those arches are also called vasamalai and those are their part of like I mean the decoration for these chariots. Then we also have the toranam or like I mean this the torana that is there not

just in this particular case but also we find that the toranams are there in Rabari embroidery and so on. So in all these cases what we see how this the textile made like I mean the cloth pillars or like I mean the arches or the toranams are something that remind us of the architectural elements in a temple. When there is a requirement for the gods to travel outside of the temple..... there is a requirement for a temporary structure (not a permanent structure); then why textile is required in that case and not really a permanent stone pillar is required. So those kind of things we can see how those are context dependent and then why particular kind of like I mean this embroidered and appliqued textiles are used in these. Now making applique and also adding embroidery or like I mean adding dyed images with them is something we have seen in this part of the country (like I mean in the Thanjavur-Kumbakonam region) and then also in the Madurai region for at least for last two three centuries. So this is something that certainly requires like I mean much more research into it that I mean why applique and not any other crafting technique that is involved in it but perhaps one can also see that I mean what applique does with it in terms of like I mean giving stability to this cloth pillars and also like I mean also like adding different kind of colors and flavors and everything else which would otherwise be much more difficult to achieve in perhaps in dyed fabric making or woven fabric making. So these things raises the concern about the use of workmanship, domesticity and textiles. Because once we considered that I mean what is here in this form of textile making we see that in a lot of times that embroidery is something that is usually been considered in a lot of recent scholarship to be relegated towards to the household members. So, for example, if we think about it that how Katnha is created, how Rabari embroidery is created; a lot of times it is the women in the house who would be making this embroidery. But with that can we consider that embroidery to be a craft that is mastered by women or can we consider that embroidery is synonymous with domesticity, can we consider that embroidery is something that is synonymous with a particular gender and nothing else. Now in these cases I believe that ... we need to be much more sort of flexible in terms of when we define particular techniques. Because one needs to understand also that how this particular techniques have been there in with the human civilization for centuries, for millennia and perhaps like I mean framing certain kind of ideologies or like I mean seeing those techniques through a lens of a gender or a

particular concept is something that can be one way of looking at it, but that cannot really define the entire technique. So for example, if we go back to like I mean talk about this particular form of embroidery that is there the tombai, the vasamalai and toranam those are made for this temple chariots in Madurai and also part of like I mean Tamil Nadu. So, this is something we can see that these are made in a workshop setting where both men and women work. It's not really something that is exclusively made by either men or women and then we can also see that I mean there are particular workshops which would be involved in making this kind of (like I mean the cloth pillars and the other decorations) it is not something that is associated with the domestic work. Now if we think about it that how this cloth toranams are used in the rabari context then before it was highly marketized and sort of made into an overseas commodity, we have found that how the rabari toranams were something those are made by the women members in the community. So then we can see that I mean if it is about making toranam so for the temple toranam we find that to have a very different kind of setup for the workshops, workshop members and for the artisans. Whereas in the rabari setting we find that to be very drastically different. Of course, we understand that the purpose for which like I mean these are created and the kind of like the utilitarian purpose they serve are also very different in these two cases. But in both cases we need to understand that how applique and embroidery are used. So, the technique is something that perhaps like I mean transcend certain kind of the framing devices we can think about that what kind of workmanship we can see, what kind of like I mean ideas about gender those are related to them we can see it there. But then like I mean the use of applique the use of embroidery is something that definitely transcend certain of these boundaries and that's the reason there is a requirement for all of us to sort of see beyond particular framing devices. When it comes to talk about the domesticity, domesticity is something we can consider that it is also something that is related to again the role of women in making textiles. But certain kind of examples so for example if we think about how the rabaris (if we go with Judy Frater's) argument that how the rabaris may have also learned the embroidery technique from the mochi community then we cannot really justify that how today if we think about the rabari embroidery to be associated only with the domestic members and like I mean with domesticity and then like with women. Then learning from the mochi community or

whatever the kind of exchanges they had from with the mochi community cannot really completely satisfy that this is something that needs to be only relegated to the concept of domesticity and not the workshop space. So, there is always this kind of tension and overlapping between something we understand in terms of private and public. Those things we also see them to be very much contextual in terms of like what is created, for what purpose they are created. So for example, if we come back to this temple cloths and if we think about them that why this kind of like embroidered and appliqued fabrics are used in decorating the temple chariot, it is also about visibility, and it is also about like I mean making things possible perhaps within a given point in time which might not be possible in the other forms of textile making like brocading and also like I mean perhaps making them through this complex process of kalamkari dyeing. So this is this is some of the aspects we need to understand when we consider workmanship, domesticity, and textiles all these concepts together so we need to understand that the technique can be a bridge between all these different concepts. However, we cannot really define technique by only one lens, but we need to be open enough to accommodate as many interpretations as possible.

So, with that we come to the conclusion of this week and in this one if we think about it



that I mean what all different kind of like I mean aspects we have studied in terms of like

I mean of making of embroidered fabrics and the embroidered narratives. One of the things that perhaps comes up again and again and that is about writing and overwriting narratives. That is also something we understand as a palimpsest and palimpsest by that we mean, that if there are certain kind of narratives which are written and then overwriting on the top of it or perhaps removing certain parts of it and then adding on the top of it. Sometimes it is about erasing and also at the same time like I mean how overlapping, adding layers to it is something that is encouraged. So this palimpsest in this idea something we have already seen perhaps in the making of various kinds of manuscripts in which the manuscripts in the early modern period, in the Mughal court and in the other courts we see how images were created, then text were added on the top of it or text was there but then images were added on the top of it. Then after a century or so the borders were also added. So, those kind of acts in which we see that I mean there is already a tendency towards reworking, is something that has been exemplified in the making of embroidered fabrics. In which we can see that, when there are particular kind of embroidered fabrics which are created so for example if we go back to the reference or like the example of kantha in which the used fabric, used yarn or like the used threads all of them they already carry certain narratives, they already carry certain kind of significances, then they are sort of overlapped with each other and by doing that we see that there is a particular kind of overwriting or like writing narratives and then layering that sort of like I mean takes place one after another. So, all these things they become possible only by the technique of this edition. At the same time if we think about like I mean the kind of writing and overwriting narratives that happens in the shrine flags or like I mean the other kind of applique fabric we see that how there are stories which have been there in the mind or in the oral narratives of people and then with different kind of like I mean colors which are then like which carry particular narratives in either in the specific religious context or in the regional context or in the cultural context then they are sort of used in this playful way for depicting a story in the most effective way possible. So, with that what happens we see that I mean there is again this overlapping, overwriting of the stories they sort of like I mean continuously take place. So, this this idea of the palimpsest in which we see that how addition of a narrative perhaps sometimes an intentional or an unintentional removal of a narrative all these things simultaneously take

place in the making and unmaking of the embroidered fabrics. So embroidered and appliqued fabric in both cases we find as I have already mentioned in the early part of this week that there is already a constructed surface that sort of like I mean gives us the base upon which the narratives will play out very similar to the act of writing and painting perhaps. So, in this case what happens, with addition of these additional pieces of fabric or like I mean this embroidered lines ... with that what happens we see that there is the narrative sort of progresses further. Something we see with like I mean the making and unmaking of a written narrative or perhaps a painted narrative. So, in those respects we see that there are much similarities in writing, drawing and making embroidery. But we also need to consider that the technique of doing embroidery and applique and this idea of the addition is something that is distinctive. So, there are both like similarities and dissimilarities between like I mean this shared visual practices. Thank you.