

## Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices

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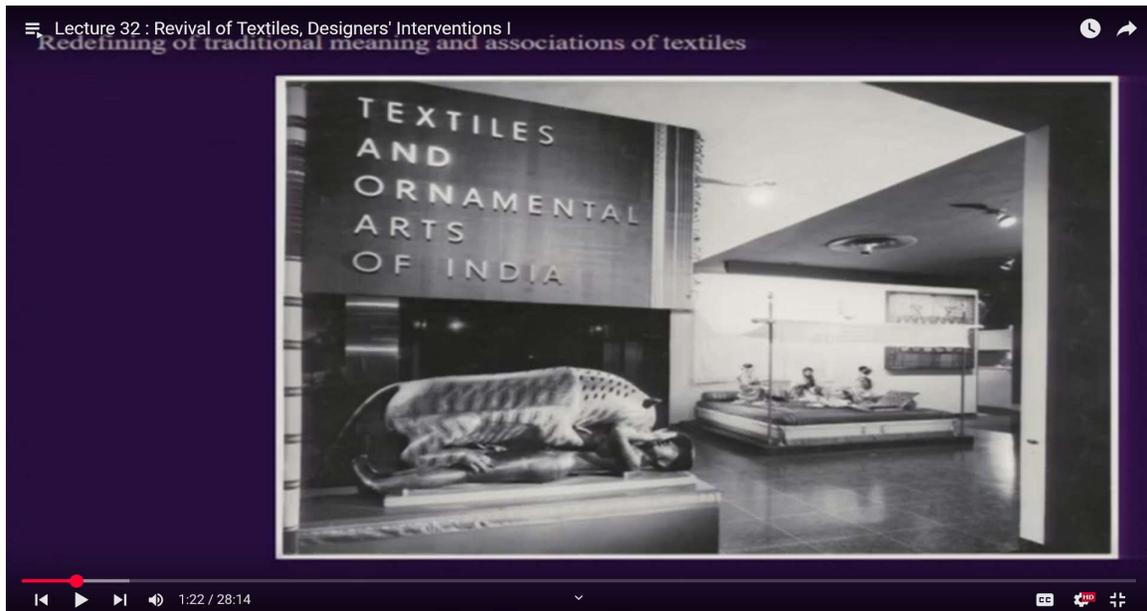
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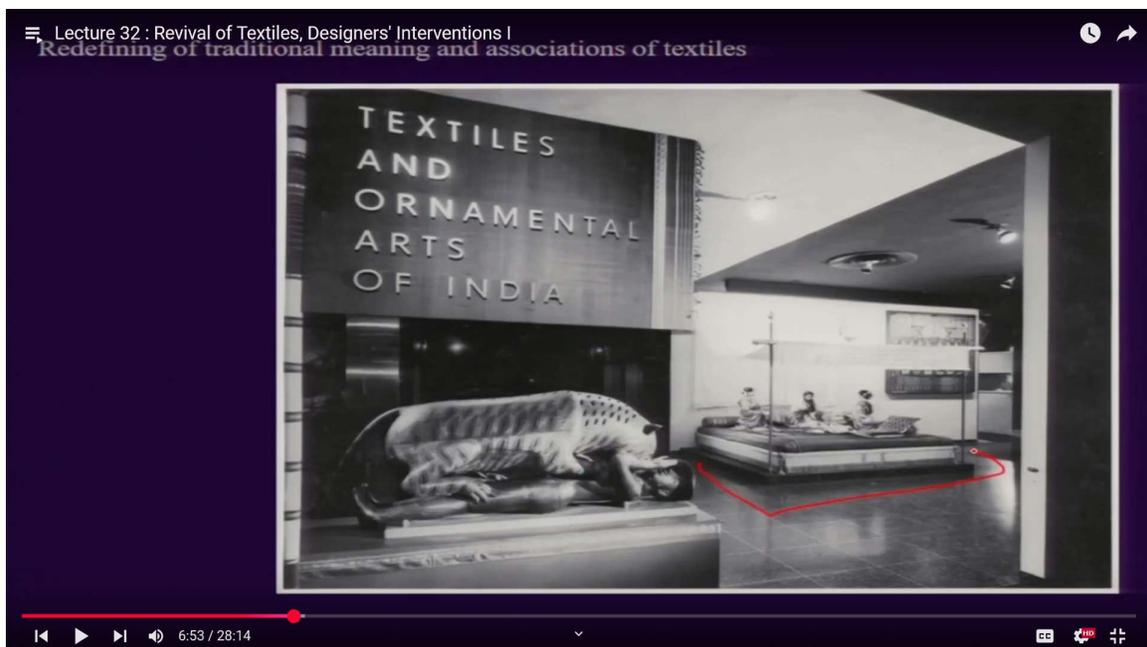
Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in the second instalment of discussing fashion in the post-independence India. Now as I have already mentioned that when we say fashion we are talking in terms of the preferences and of course like I mean the style and taste of a particular time period. So, for that reason we might be sort of expanding this idea of fashion not only in terms of seeing that the runway shows and everything else that we are usually been habituated to understand in terms of fashion. But I am more interested in terms of thinking that how these changes in the preferences which are prevalent in a particular time frame is something that had also made a huge intervention in terms of how textiles are seen, they are studied, they are perceived and they are appreciated.



Now after some of those aspects that I have discussed so far in terms of how we were service centre, then All India Handloom and Handicrafts Board which was recently scrapped by the government so all those things were made available, all those things

came into being for providing support to the artisanal sectors. So that is something we find that to be there in a parallel process with conducting certain exhibitions and certain displays on the international scale. so that the appreciation for textile from India that grows further. So, this is something we find that I mean one of the major exhibitions that took place during this time was the Textile and Ornamental Arts of India exhibition and that took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. So this exhibition what we see that was a collaboration between the curators in the MoMA and especially Monroe Wheeler and then we also see that how Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Pupul Jayakar they were instrumental for making this kind of collaboration happen. So, what happened in this exhibition we find that a number of historical art objects or craft objects whatever you call it so those were sort of collected from a number of different museum collections and then they were displayed there, alongside a number of craft objects which were made by the Indian artisans after independence or from 1940s and so on. So in this image that we have on screen here we find that in this image this prominent title the Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India and if we see it that how this title like I mean this title is also there it's almost seems like I mean it has been made on a piece of fabric and that sort of like I mean shows how this idea of fabric and then like ornamental arts (of course which is also we have sort of discussed that how ornament, decoration all those ideas are integrally connected to textiles). So, with the use of this textile like material here it also sorts of emphasizes its close correlation and then what the viewers can expect from this exhibition. Now prominently featured here is this one sculpture that we have here and that is popularly known as Tipu's Tiger. Tipu's Tiger is a wooden toy which has machinery inside it and it was a kind of a collaboration we can understand that was made possible in the royal court of Mysore and during the reign of Tipu Sultan and perhaps like the toy makers or the wooden craft makers from Channapatna (near Mysore) were responsible for making this innovative satirical this piece. Which is a large toy like piece in which we see that there is a tiger which is devouring this British soldier. This British soldier (even though it's a black and white photograph) in this actually the soldier we find that to be wearing costume which is red and black which is again a reminder of the colonial attire. So this is something it was made in the late 18th century and inside this tiger the machinery was installed perhaps by the French clock makers and the machinery

that sort of enabled a slight opening and closing of this tiger's mouth and a slight groaning sound that comes out of it. This groaning sound is something we find is a kind of perhaps it's a sign of the soldier dying and then the sound of despair is something that is sort of reimagined by this machinery inside of this tiger. So, this piece which was taken by the British and then it was eventually displayed in Victoria Albert Museum in London. When it was displayed it also received different kind of reaction from people. In one hand people were fascinated by this, but then at the same time people were also scared and disgusted by this in Britain. Because we can see how this tiger is devouring this British soldier is something that would have churned the different kind of emotions inside the people. So this is one of this iconic pieces that we find that to be there, and it's very sort of tricky in terms of an at least in the 1950s we can understand that how it was not really seen as a sculpture but it was kind of seen as something that is a large version of a toy. But then it also has like I mean certain machinery inside it which makes it somewhat like I mean in between a static object and an interactive object. So, all these elements those are there in this sculpture or this large toy is something that was presented prominently in this exhibition.



Then if we see in the background then here we find there is this divan and on this divan there are bolsters and pillows and three mannequins are made there and who are draped in expensive saree and jewellery and everything else and then of course it's a kind of this

divan we can sort of associate with a courtly setting. Then on top of that there are those two posts which support this large canopy like fabric which sort of like I mean cover the top of this structure. So, this is something we find that to be there in terms of like I mean almost bringing a slice of an Indian court to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Then right beside that there is this pichwai and pichwais are again a different kind of textiles which are used in temples and in this pichwai what happens we find that those are this large rectangular pieces of fabric in which mostly in the Vaishnava tradition and in some we also find in the tradition of the Shaktas or the believers of the great goddess. So, in this pichwai we see that and of course this one is a Vaishnava pichwai in which we find the sakhis or the female attendants and then the rows of cows, all are awaiting Krishna's presence. So we do not really see that all those objects like I mean all those textiles and everything or the object that we see here to be contextually connected. But then like I mean this idea of India that was created through assimilating different fragments from different sources was something that was prioritized in this exhibition. The curators of this exhibition as we see like I mean some of the background story in Saloni Mathur's writing and the other writings as well the curators of this exhibition from MoMA (the curatorial group) they also sort of made a trip to India for two weeks or so to see different places in India to have a surficial understanding of the different material culture that exists in South Asia, in India. So those things we find and then how their conceptualization of how India might be for the metropolitan audience in USA and then also like I mean how the assimilation of different kind of objects and the fragments from various museum collections how those assimilation can sort of reconstitute this idea of India in this global platform is something that was put forward by this exhibition.

Now in this exhibition catalogue we also find that how people like Pupul Jayakar and Wheeler and so on they have written about Indian art objects or like I mean the Indian



craft objects (I should say). In this case we see that certain ideas so for example, again going back to this idea of timelessness and when they use the word timelessness they definitely do not use it with a caution but they mean it as a way that how certain Indian textiles, the aesthetics of them the basic principles of making them have been timeless and that is something that needs to be celebrated and that's the reason why the world needs to appreciate the kind of textile and craft making in India.

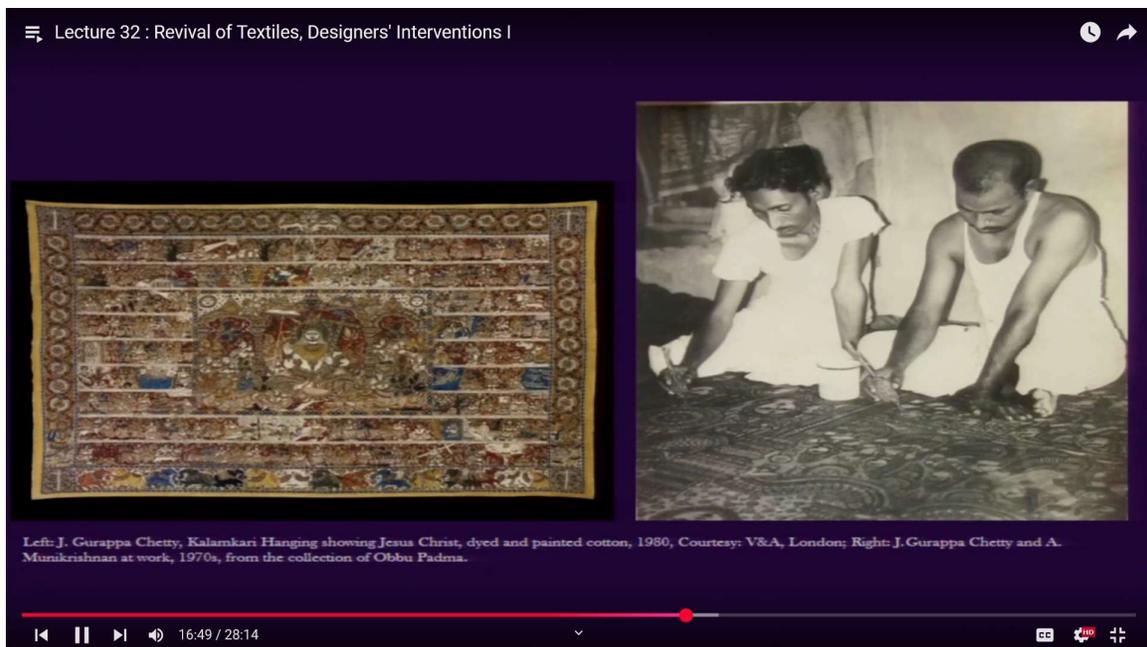
So with that we also see that I mean if that is one of the ideas that was prioritized then like I mean this transcendental ideas about like I mean how many of the craft making has this meditative quality which is certainly undeniable, but then like I mean prioritizing that over the socio-political situations of the craft people who were struggling on ground is something that was definitely not been sort of emphasized.

Now one of the agendas for Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Pupul Jayakar for displaying all those historical art objects, craft objects with the contemporary craft objects was to sort of gain the world's attention to the artisanal sectors in India. Because at a time when we see that technology and then so called development is something that was prioritized

by the Indian government after 1947 and then people like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was vocal about the relevance of craft. So, for her it was a responsibility to sort of gain the world's attention towards the craft sector, so that the craft sector can have patronage from different sort of like I mean communities and at the same time she was very much involved in writing about craft. So that like I mean the relevance of craft can also be discussed in the scholarly community and of course like I mean the writings can also be disseminated in a group of people who are not just confined in India but all across the world. So those are the different ways in which we find that why this exhibition was such an important one and then of course like I mean some of the display strategies we can see that I mean using pedestal for sort of like I mean displaying this different kind of ornamental items and craft objects which are utilitarian but at the same time they can also be considered of high skill. So those things were something we find that to be there as part of this exhibition.

In terms of like I mean the display strategy some of those ideas like for example how certain craft objects are then brought to the museum space and displayed something we can also sort of relate it back to like some of the colonial exhibitions that took place at least since 1851 and that is the great exhibition in Britain and then like I mean of course in like I mean 1886 and later on some of the exhibitions there as well not only just in Britain but in Paris and then like the world expositions in Chicago and other places. So those exhibitions we definitely see in which like I mean certain kind of display strategies are employed in which like I mean the craft objects the historical craft objects and the contemporary craft objects are sort of put together in terms of like I mean showing how the historical objects are can seamlessly blend into like the contemporary craft objects. Telling people about like I mean how the craft is innately timeless and it's not like fine art practice which changes over time. So this is again for us to understand that I mean how this idea of timelessness, that was prioritized in this kind of exhibitions is something that is also part of understanding fashion. It's not really like this crafts are actually timeless but it is the fashion that tries to sort of establish it as timeless. Even like I mean in the colonial exhibition set up if we see like I mean there is this seamless merging of like I mean the historical art or craft objects with like I mean the contemporary craft objects

and something that we also see in this exhibitions as well. But then perhaps like I mean one of the major differences between them would be that the colonial exhibitions that it was the British government they were sort of involved or like I mean they were in charge of making this exhibition happen and their motivation was definitely not to support the artisanal sectors in India, but to sort of like I mean show the world that I mean what they are ruling upon. But then in terms of like when we see this Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India exhibition at the MoMA even though some of the display strategy might go back to the colonial period we see that it's a deliberate choice in terms of how the curators, the collaborators were actually from both these countries and the collaborators they sort of consciously made decision about this kind of display strategy. So this is something we find that even though the visuals might sort of like I mean make us think about this correlation between the colonial exhibitions and the exhibitions that took place after the colonial period but then if we think about like I mean who all are involved in this exhibition what kind of decisions were made before this displays then we see that clearly there are differences how these exhibitions were put up.



And now this kind of exhibitions were also very important in terms of gaining the world's attention towards Indian textiles and craft sectors. As I have mentioned that if we see this exhibition that taking place in 1955 and then by 1956, 1957 during this time the Weaver Service Center is coming up in India and then by the late 1950s around 1959 and so like a

number of pilot training centers would also come up in India. That is how we see that I mean one after another different kind of activities are coming up and they really revitalized the textile sectors that we have today in India. Now some of those pilot training and production centers those were set up in various places across the country one of them was there in Srikalahasti in southern Andhra Pradesh. In Srikalahasti as I have mentioned earlier in the module when we spoke about Kalamkari. So Srikalahasti is this place which is well known for this Kalamkari temple hanging and in this site what we see that I mean there are some of the traditional textile practitioners like Jonnalagadda, Lakshmaiah and so on. What happened during this time there was a change in the community roles. Of course it also comes up in Coomaraswamy's writing and some of the colonial documentation as well, that it's not really that the craft makers did not cross their caste boundaries to sort of like I mean learn new things or to participate in new kind of activities and one of the cases might also be of Dubraj who came from the Chamar community the leather workers community and then excelled the skill of Baluchari making in Murshidabad in Bengal. So during this time we see that there is this deliberate measure that was taken by the Indian government and of course like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was instrumental in this. In which we find this kind of pilot training come production centres they invited master crafts people for example, like Lakshmaiah and then Lakshmaiah was in charge of running this centre and teaching the young people about the craft of making Kalamkari hangings like I mean drawing with Kalam and then what kind of aesthetics, what kind of requirement and everything that goes in making this Kalamkari hangings. That is how we find that people like a Gurappa Chetty garu like Jonnalagadda Gurappa Chetty garu who is a son of Jonnalagadda Lakshmaiah so he would receive the training under his father's patronage but his father was also his guru. Then people like Aythur Muni Krishnan (on the right side of this image) in the right side we find that Aythur Muni Krishnan is here and so people who are not directly related to (I mean the kin of particular master crafts people) can also come and join these places. If they have interest they can excel and then they can practice this particular kind of craft making. During this time there was also a need for sort of disseminating the knowledge of particular craft making to a larger audience perhaps for the sustainment of craft. As we also see that I mean from late 1950s the census, the 1961 census which was then

published in 1962-1964 around that time the work was underway in the late 1950s and during this time extensive documentation of crafts people were done. This documentation also shows that in particular textile sectors only a few members were existing. Today if we see in particular textile sectors are thriving perhaps, the history goes back to like I mean that particular moment in 1950s when Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and some of the other documentators they made this kind of like I mean efforts to sustain this craft making or else they might not have sustained the way we see them today. So with these things we see that I mean when the census records also sort of emphasize that there are people who would practice this particular kind of craft making and they might require the intervention or participation of the young generation so those things were sort of taken care of by establishing this pilot training and production centers. During the training the trainees were given particular fellowship and then they were also given like a certificate and recognition so that they can work in the field if they like to. So, this is how like we see that I mean the small incentives were given and then they were made encouraged to continue this form of craft making. So later on, we definitely see that both Gurappa Chetty garu and Ayathur Muni Krishnan both of them they became prolific Kalamkari makers in Srikalahasti. Gurappa Chetty garu he became an international figure and one of the Kalamkari hangings we find by Gurappa Chetty garu is here in the left side of the screen in which we see this extensively worked Kalamkari which is minutely painted. It shows Jesus Christ at the center stage. So, this Kalamkari hanging which was made in 1980 (it was perhaps before the festival of India in Britain exhibition) and in this large Kalamkari hanging what we see that it sort of follows the format and compositional arrangement of the temple hangings in southern India (in southern Andhra Pradesh and part of Tamil Nadu), but then the subject matter is completely different. So, in the center stage where we find that the Hindu deities are presented here, we find that prominently Jesus Christ is presented and this white figure who sits at the center of this hanging holding a cross in his hand is Jesus Christ. Then there is an attendant figure who holds an umbrella on top of his head to show his divine status. But then we also see that Jesus Christ and other figures all of them are then enshrined in this arch like setting which is also very prominent in a number of this Kalamkari hangings, which may remind us of the Vijayanagara architecture or the Nayaka architecture. Then of course like I mean apart

from this central area we find that the entire textile is then divided in this horizontal bands in which the narratives from Jesus Christ's life is depicted. Then we see that I mean there are those elaborate borders which sort of frame the entire narrative within this given space. So this kind of strategy we find that it's a new kind of intervention that took place and with like I mean the new kind of training, new kind of exposure and of course like I mean how the museums and then like this display spaces they became interested to house or to like collect the work of this Kalamkari painters or the other artisans from various parts of India. With these new forms of exchanges, we see that I mean this new visuality that came into being. These are some of the examples, in which we can understand that how this kind of textiles even though they are not meant to be utilitarian textile but how they also sort of like I mean talk about certain kind of preferences taste or the style of a particular time period. And how this idea of fashion that can be applicable not only in terms of understanding that the wearables, but then like in the larger textile sector.



Then if we think about it that I mean how this textile sectors would benefit from the interventions like this, then there are also some of the individual designers who we find to be also very important in terms of how textiles were produced and then how those were sort of taken further. One of them would be Riten Majumdar who was trained in Santiniketan and in the in Tgaore's university in the field of like painting, sculpture and craft making. We see that Riten Majumdar had taken fellowship and gone to the

Scandinavian countries and then of course part of Western Europe as part of his study, training, internship and collaborations. Eventually he came back to India around late 1950s and when he came back to India, he sorts of established his design studio in Delhi, and there he started working on different kinds of textiles. We see that symmetrical textiles (so for example this textile that we see here or like here), or how rugs are created with symmetry is something we find prominently presented in the traditional Indian textiles. Not only just Indian but mostly how the woven textiles would have a particular kind of symmetry. We see that asymmetry is something that was associated with the development of the urban elite class people or the middle class people. And then how the break from the traditional aesthetics is something that was also associated with the break from the colonial rule and going towards new kind of development is something those were reflected in the incorporation of asymmetry in Riten Majumdar's work.



Then we see that he had also collaborated with Fab India, with John Bissell in 1960s and not only experimented with textile forms but also in terms of like I mean furniture and so on. In the left side of the screen we see this jali furniture in which the architectural motifs from the Mughal tombs and palace complexes (the jalis or the perforated screens) are something that is then sort of exported from the architecture to portable furniture forms. We see that I mean how this new kind of interventions took place. There is this other textile that we see in the right side of the screen, it's a bedspread which was designed for

Fab India. The part of this bedspread that goes with these parallel lines and then there is a breakage and these diagonal lines had been introduced with the parallel lines. So this is something we can understand as that how Riten Majumdar was sort of thinking in terms of the break from the tradition but then he was also not denying tradition what he was thinking in terms of how to build hit this asymmetry or the break on the top of the traditional practices. So this is something we find this idea of the duality in which like I mean tradition is acknowledged, it is recognized, it is respected but then also like certain new interventions or transformations had introduced or infused in the textiles is something those were done by the designers during this time. So these are different kind of interventions we find that to be there in the textile sectors in 1950s and 1960s and we'll continue on this discussion more in the next lecture. Thank you