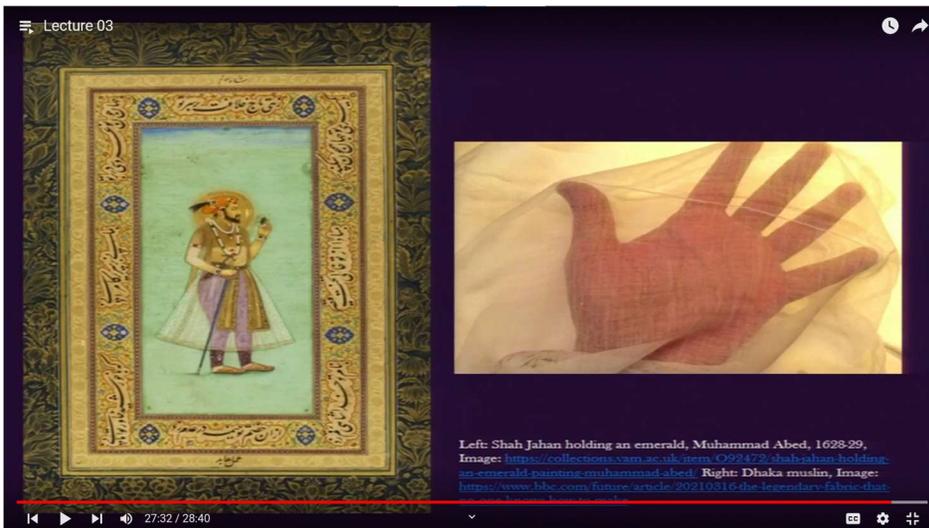


Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices
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Week - 01
Lecture – 04

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta, and we are talking about Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices. Now, here in the last lecture, we have ended our discussion on this particular kind of cotton fabric, which is called Muslin, in which the thread count can go up to 1000 and for that reason which is also this fabric has also been known as woven air. Now, what we find that I mean how this kind of fabric is then sort of implemented back on the paintings or in the visual representations.

On the left side of the screen, we have an image of Shah Jahan and this is an image which



was drawn in the Mughal court and by Muhammad Abid, who was a son of Aqa Riza and then this painting is done in the early 17th

century and in this one, what we find here is that Shah Jahan is wearing an Angarkha or a Jama which is this long which is which starts from the shoulder and then like I mean it sort of like I mean flows until the knees or like beneath the knees and where we find that I mean he is shown here wearing this Jama, but this Jama is almost transparent. In the upper body, we can almost see part of his body, this tone of his skin and everything else, but still, like, I mean, he is wearing the Jama and then in the lower body, we can very well see the Pajama which is there this slightly this purplish tone of the Pajama is also revealed through this Jama which is there on the top layer of it. So, the sheer quality this daffiness quality of the fabric is something that we find that is there in this portrait was achievable only because

of this kind of Muslin. So, the Muslin that we have on screen in the right side in which we can see that I mean if a hand is passed through this layer of Muslin cloth, then the hand with its color and everything is revealed through its layer and similar kind of character we can also find that to be there in this miniature painting which was made more than 300 years from today and in which one we find that I mean how in this one how the sheer quality this diaphanous nature of the fabric is exemplified.

Now, we also need to understand that I mean if we are talking about this particular kind of cotton, it does not mean that I mean this kind of cotton was available to everyone. So, this is a very specific kind of cotton which was only made in part of the eastern India, mostly in Bengal. So, that means that I mean it is not something that was easily available to most of the people in the Bengal. So, this is this very specialized mean of cotton production this Muslin production went side by side with many other production of coarse cotton, and that is the reason what we find here is this very specialized this this cotton production Muslin production was reserved for the highest of the authority, and that is the reason we do not really see this kind of Muslin cloth is been worn by the people who will be working in the agricultural field or like I mean even the local zamindars or the landlords and people like them.

So, if this is one of the things we find, we also see that I mean Bengal, in the 16th and 17th century, was one of the highest revenue generating state for the Mughals. So, for that reason, like I mean flaunting their dominance over Bengal is something that is also implied through, like I mean, having this very expensive and super-specialized Muslin cloth on their body and being featured in this miniature painting. So, having this particular kind of fabric in this painting is not coincidental it is not something that we can consider to be just a choice, but it was a very conscious choice for the emperors, also for the artist to proclaim certain this political aspects of the Mughal rule that how Bengal was under the dominance of the Mughals during that time and then like I mean the most precious perhaps the most precious textile that came from Bengal is then we find that to be reserved for the highest of the authority of the Mughal rule. So, in this way, we find that how this material we are talking about if we go with the thread count which can go between like 500 to 1000 and

how that kind of material quality and then the technique of spinning and weaving and then making Muslin or woven air is something that is it has its one aspect that is related to the technicalities, materiality and everything else. On the other hand, we find that to be like, I mean, how the skill of like, I mean particularly making this kind of yarn is there. It is a very specialized kind of skill we are talking about the local knowledge but then the local knowledge and then the material technique all of them are then connected to the state politics and then how all those things kind of like I mean come up in the visual representation or the visual representation where certain indication towards all these complicated relationships and in which we find that the cotton fabric is there present but then like I mean the cotton fabric is present here as a reminder of all these different kind of relationships between material, technique, skill, knowledge system, politics, culture and so on. So, that is how we can also see that how textile like, I mean starting with like I tell the materiality of the textile, can lead us to understanding the larger patterns of societal and cultural flow.

So, after cotton, we talk about silk fiber and in silk fiber we as I have already mentioned that silk is something that is extracted from animals it is a protein-based fiber, unlike cellulose-based fiber, so cellulose-based fiber as cotton is something that is one of the hardest fibers to dye and then like I mean silk and wool will find that to be much more receptive to dyes. So, what happens with silk production? So, silk production, we find that



the northeastern region in India had been active in making silk as Stephen Cohen textile scholar he, argues or he

proposes that I mean how for the at least for the last three millennia or even more than that,

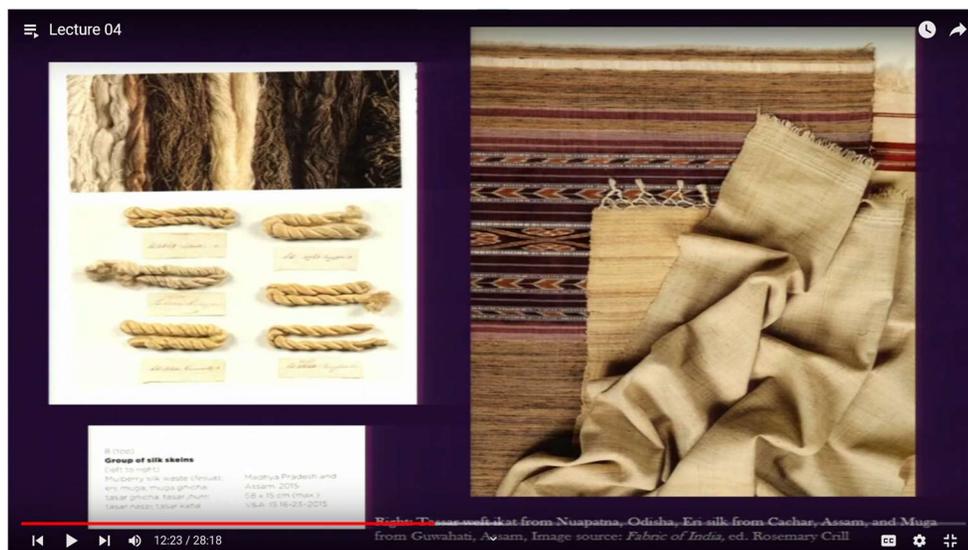
there were silk production in northeastern parts of India. Now, in terms of silk production, what we find that to be there is that the broad generalization is that the mulberry silk that was mostly cultivated in China that showed the path to the other Asian countries for making a silk and, including the Indian subcontinent. However, some of the early specimens which were found from northeastern India that had shown that I mean it is not the mulberry silk which was primarily found from the northeastern regions, but it was much more kind of the wild silk like the Airy, Muga and so on. So, those kind of silk what we find that to be there in the northeastern states.

Now, after that there are also some of the other specimens which are found from the Indus valley sites as well. So, it is not quite clear if the Indus valley sites they had silk production units there or the silk arrived from somewhere else in the Indian subcontinent. However, it also shows that I mean how the silk production was active in various parts of the Indian subcontinent even in the third millennium BC. And so like, I mean so, if this is something, we find that to be there, and mostly what happens in terms of, like, the mulberry silk production. something that we see there is that in the silk moths, the silkworms are sort of like, I mean fed this mulberry leaves, and that is how like I mean this that is how like I mean silk has been harvested for millennia. And this is one of the predominant ways of harvesting silk that we find in China as well. In the agricultural fields and all, we will have the mulberry trees in the fields and so on, and where, like I mean alongside agriculture, the silk or the sericulture would also take place, something we also find today in India as well. And after, like I mean, these silkworms would feed into this mulberry leaves, and then they will form this cocoon and this cocoons we find it here in the left side of the screen in which we see that there is this structure made of bamboo and in which like I mean as many as cocoons that we can see them to be there that can be sort of like I mean kept. And then these cocoons are allowed to sort of, like I mean, form this protective sort of a surface or like I mean a protective layer around them and this fibery layer that we find that to be there is the waste of the silk. Now once, like, I mean this cocoon, this silk formation is done, then like I mean this cocoons are then boiled in water, and that is how like I mean of course this silkworms they die, but then like I mean cocoons like I mean the silk is extracted this fiber is extracted. So, with this fiber extraction, what we find that the fiber which is there

on the outer layer of the cocoon is usually made into raw silk and then, like, I mean, the fiber that is there in the inner part of the cocoon is something that is used for the finer silk. So, processes we also find that to be there in mostly like I mean how silk extraction process is sort of like I mean followed throughout.

Now, one of the very specific kind of silk we also find that to be there that is called the Airy silk. And Airy silk is something that is called the Ahimsa silk in which like, I mean the silk this worms are allowed to sort of like I mean get out of this cocoon and then like I mean the silk is extracted from it. This creature they do not die, and so that is the reason it is called as Ahimsa silk and how that is like I mean how this production process is different from the other much more sort of like I mean the predominant means of silk production.

Now, in the right side of the image, we also find that there is this yarn making which is going on here. So, after, like, I mean, this particular way in which this fiber is extracted from this worms, the silk worms and then it also sort of like, I mean, goes through the process of cleaning and then like, I mean finally when we have like I mean the fiber being ready to be spun and then like I mean there is also sort of like I mean spun in the spindle different kind of spindle that can be and then like I mean the yarns are sort of like I mean made there.



So, a lot of times we find that, I mean, for silk it depends on what kind of worm we are talking about; based on that, we have also different varieties of silk

and also, like, I mean different kind of color we also find it there. So, for example, here we

have like a number of different silk fibers and then, like, I mean how the silk these yarns are produced out of the fibers. So, and this image is they come from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and in the side, we have some of the varieties of the wild silk as well as, like I mean, the cultivated silk and one can see here that I mean how here this particular kind of silk the luster of it or like I mean the shine in it is something that sort of sets it apart from the cotton yarn. So, those kind of things we will find that, I mean, it is not just the shine, but it is also like, I mean the tactile quality of it, also at the same time like I mean how this fiber would behave when we sort of make into a wearable fabric all those things depend on this the nature of this yarn and as I have already mentioned that the visual characteristic is not something that is separated from its material characteristics.

So, these issues can be sort of like, I mean, also read into there. Now here, like, I mean if we compare this, like I mean the kind of like I mean this the evenness in the fibers or like the yarn that we see here in this particular, you know formation and how that is different from like I mean the yarn formation here it is much more kind of crimp and much more sort of like I mean this is not really as fine as the one that we have in the left side of this image. So, all these different kinds of silk we find that to be there and as I have mentioned that, there are many different kinds of silk, like the mulberry silk, Airy silk, Muga silk, Tussar silk. So, all those different kinds of silk all are extracted from this silk worms they would result into different kinds of fiber, and eventually, like I mean, leading towards making different kinds of fabric. So, today what, we find that there are many different areas in the Indian subcontinent where silk production takes place, and then the mulberry silk production is something that certainly is the predominant one and that something we find that to be part of in eastern India in Bengal, in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and so on and then in southern India and part of it. Then we also have in Madhya Pradesh the use of silk and everything else those are there.

Now, silk is something we, as I have mentioned that I mean there are many varieties of the fibers that see there, and then if we think about that, I mean how these varieties of fiber can lead towards different kinds of cloth. That example, of that we can see in the right side of the screen and in the right side of the screen we have this Tussar weft ikat that is this one

from Nuapatna in Orissa in which one we see that the Tussar silk like I mean the this unevenness of the Tussar silk or like I mean perhaps the kind of like I mean no one can one can see each and every fiber of it. So, those things we can certainly see that there in this Tussar silk this stoll and how that Tussar silk is different from the Airy silk of Kachar and Assam. So, like I mean the Airy silk that with that here and this is something that is different from like I mean how the Tussar is there and then of course we also have the Muga silk from Guwahati Guwahati and Assam is known for its Muga silk and I mean of course like I mean Airy silk as well but like I mean also like I mean very much known for the Muga silk and how the wearables are made from it. If we also make a comparison between, like I mean, how this three varieties of silk that we have on screen are there presented here, we can also see like the kind of fold the crumb and everything else that is there possible perhaps in this Muga silk will not be the same way if we think about the Tussar silk from Nuapatna in Orissa. So, those also add to the these are not just like I mean some material characteristic but they add tremendously to the entire aesthetics also at the same time like I mean how it will appear once someone wears it.

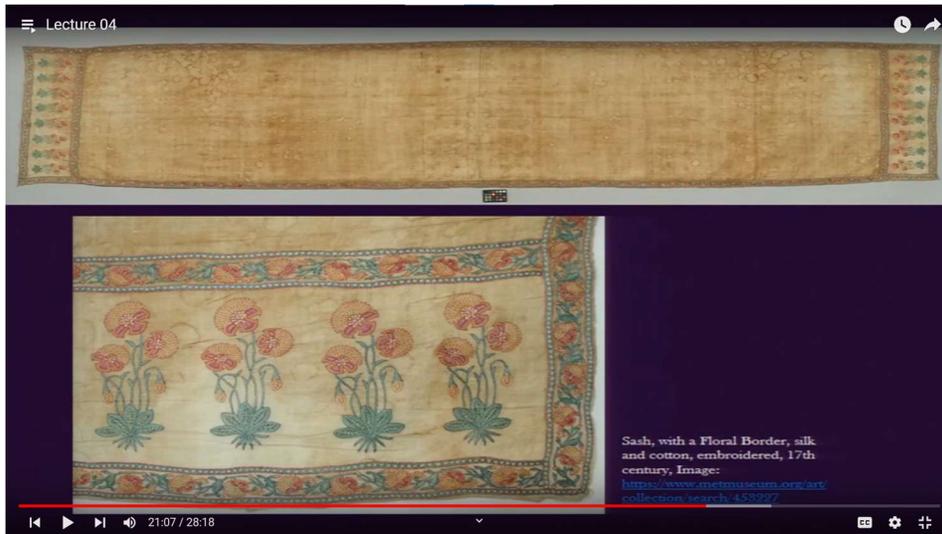
So, with this discussions on silk, we will go back to this image that we have already studie,d and that is the portrait of Shah Jahan. So, if we have, like I



mean, one part of the fabric that is this Jama that I mean he wears on his body that is made of this fine Bengal Muslin, then something we find that to be there that is made of silk and that is the Sash. I mean, of course he also wears this, like, I mean, this woven silk Pajama that is there this bright purple color Pajama but we also, what I wanted to sort of like, I mean focus on this particular Sash or Patka that we find that to be there on his waist and

like I mean the ends of it is hanging right. So, this is this is something that we have, like I mean the Sash is also like I mean it's a wearable for men, and we find that to be there very much in fashion during the early modern period in the Indian subcontinent.

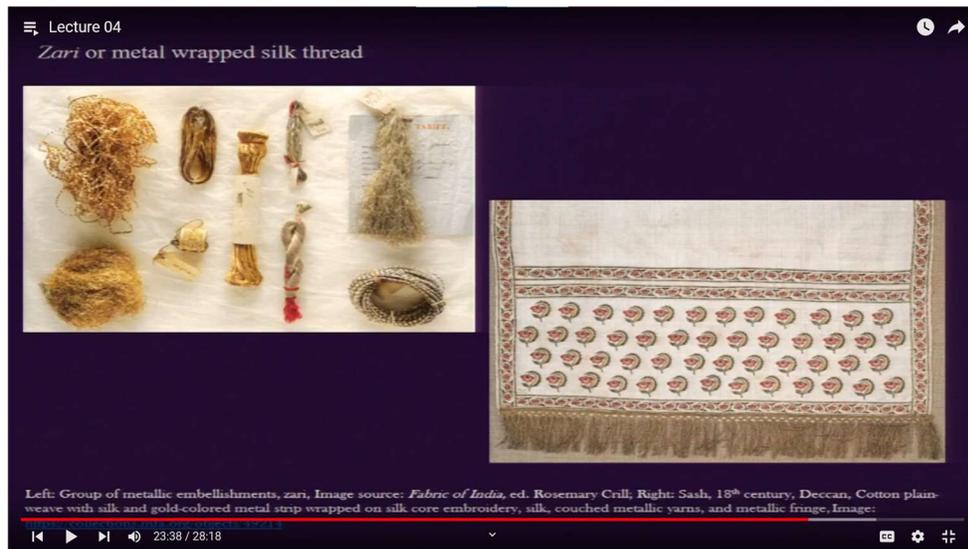
So in the Mughal court, we find that I mean Sash or Patka is something that is worn by the courtiers and of course like I mean the royals and in this, one, we find that how Sash is sort of, like I mean tied in the waist and it is not just for tying and for just as a fashion statement but it is also used for holding certain things. So, for example, we find this visual dagger, which is also tied to this Sash in the waistline sometimes this waistcloth is also used for, like I mean keeping money and other important resources which can be sort of like I mean pulled inside this Sash. So, if this is something we find that to be there and then what are the other characteristics we find in the Sash. We see, that I mean of course like I mean these two ends are hanging and in, these two ends we have also a lot of detailed motifs. So, in the right side of the screen, I wanted to show this another Sash, and that is it's a Sash with the floral border and in which both silk and cotton is used in its warp and weft and then, like, I mean silk threads are then used for making the embroidered motifs that appear on the border here. So, the floral motifs that we find that to be there on the border and then the continuous creeper motifs that sort of, like, I mean run across this. So, those characteristics we definitely find them to be there featured in this Sash as well in which we find that clear there are like continuous borders which are running there, and in some cases, we also find that I mean how there would be like I mean extra set of decorations or ornamentations featured in the ends of the Sash. So, something that we have in this one on the right side of the screen. So, these are something we find that I mean how putting this object right beside the visual representation of the object can make us think about its larger relevance and then like I mean thinking about not only just as a fashion like I mean understanding like I mean you know what is the fashion during this time period what is prioritized what is not but also that I mean how different kinds of making this fabric or like I mean different kinds of using them they also contribute a lot to the overall aesthetics of this particular kinds of cloth.



Now, to continue on that, I wanted to show the entire Sash that we have already seen in the in the earlier picture. Now,

why there is an import I mean, why is there a requirement for looking at this Sash as just one untailed piece of fabric, and then like, I mean, looking at it as something that is tied on the waistline, right? So, with that, what happens is that when we see this one untailed piece of fabric with like this continuous borders here and then, like, I mean, you know, the extra ornamentation in these two edges with those ones what we find that I mean how the material made in the workshops of the of the makers the embroiders, then how this fabric is like I mean when it is made the wearer's perspective was already taken into account that the edges this two edges of it like I mean this two edges would be like I mean hanging from the waist and that's the reason like I mean those these two edges would be visible to the viewers and since like Sash is something that is like sort of tied in the waist then like any decoration which comes perhaps in the middle of the cloth will not be visible to anyone and that is the reason the middle portion and most of the part of this fabric has been left without much decoration. I mean, it is not the same for all Sashes but mostly we will find that I mean how there is always stress on this continuous borders and the edges, which would be hanging, and that is that also something that talks about how the aesthetics of Sash is also intertwined with the utilitarian aspect of Sash. And here I just wanted to show this one Sash of, course like I mean this is the detail from the one we have already studied in which we see that I mean how does the silk threads are very carefully employed, with like I mean the color variation and everything to show this marigold flowers and then how the floral motifs are very carefully sort of selected and put forward in the edges of this Sash.

With that, we also look into that I mean the other kind of silk thread which is much employed in Brocade



silk weaving and also for embroidery and so on and that we understand as Zari or the metal wrapped silk thread. So, in this case what happens we find that I, mean there are metals so for example, there can be gold, silver, copper and so on and when metal is heated then there are ways, in which, like I mean how the metal is pulled from like I mean the entire matrix and then like I mean the pulling of the metal from it when it is molten and then what happens is like I mean one can see that the wire formation that takes place for its elasticity. Then when these very thin wires, are produced then it is immediately wrapped around the silk thread and then like that is how the Zari threads are produced. So, in this case what happens we see that I mean the Zari threads are something that that sort of like I mean it has a silk core and then like I mean the silk core would be like I mean wrapped with this metallic threads. So, there are two kinds of like I mean wrapping that we also find that to be there at least what like Stephen Cohen and Rosemary Crill they also suggest that one is like a 'Z' or 'Z' and the other one is like 'S'. So, imagine like I mean if this is the silk thread and then like I mean the metal thread is sort of like I mean wrapped like this which is anti-clockwise then that is called the 'Z' sort of wrapping and then in the other way in which like I mean this clockwise wrapping is done and that is the one which is the 'S' kind of like I mean wrapping. Now, in these two cases what we find that in the mostly in the north Indian samples and many of the samples which are found from Deccan and also part of southern India follow this 'Z' kind of metal wire wrapping. However, the

ones which we find in Iran and part of the Middle East in which we find that the 'S' kind of curve is shown. Now, for the 'S' curve we also find that I mean in many of the Deccani and South Indian specimens would also feature this kind of 'S' curve Zari threads. And the Zari threads are something that we find that I mean if one of the ways in incorporating metal is to have like I mean this these Zari threads there are also other ways in which we find that the different kinds of metallic embellishments are employed in making threads. So, for example, the one we have in the left side of the screen we have that I mean there are different kinds of like I mean beads of metal and then like I mean perhaps sometime like I mean pieces of metal which are incorporated in making this kind of Zari. Of course, I mean, which are not really meant to be like I mean worn directly on skin but on the layer on top of some other layer however like I mean how this kind of threads are also part of like I mean making Zari. And then the Zari threads are also used in making this another very special embroidery technique that is called as a Zardozi. In which we find that the different kind of like I mean metal fragments and then like pieces of metal and different kind of embellishments are the ones which would be incorporated there. Now in the side of the screen we have another Sash that comes from Deccan and from the 18th century and I'll just go through it and comes from the Museum of Fine Arts Boston's collection. And in this one I'll just go through the specificities of its technique. So, it is cotton plain weave with silk and gold-colored metal strip wrapped on silk core embroidery, silk couched metallic yarns and metallic fringes. So, what we have here that I mean there is cotton plain weave that is there in the body but then like I mean the embroidery is done with like I mean silk yarn but at the same time like I mean the Zari yarn in which like I mean we have the gold colored metal strips and then like I mean of course the Zari yarn which is also gold colored and then those all are then employed for making the embroidery. Now, we also find this the metallic fringes which are then attached at the end of this fabric. That is something that we find that how this Zari is used not extensively in the embroidery but also in the fringes. And fringes is something we can also imagine that if the ends of the Sash is hanging from the waistline and the fringes would also be very much visible. So, for making like I mean drawing attraction to that we find how this Zari threads can be useful for it. So, this this is again going back to this idea about like I mean how utility, aesthetics, and making of these textiles; all are interconnected. And these different kinds of material which

are used for making this one piece of fabric are also very much strategic and it's never really coincidental. Thank you we'll talk about the other materials in the next lecture.