

# Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices

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Week - 02

Lecture – 06

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in the week 2 of this course. So, this week we will be talking about woven textiles and allied practices. So, in this week what we will do is we will be looking into some of the basics of weaving and then what does it mean by like warp, weft, few of the terms which are central to understanding weaving techniques. And then we will be getting more into the details about how this kind of weaving is also interrelated with many other forms of making artefacts, as well as making

architecture.

And then we

will be

looking at a

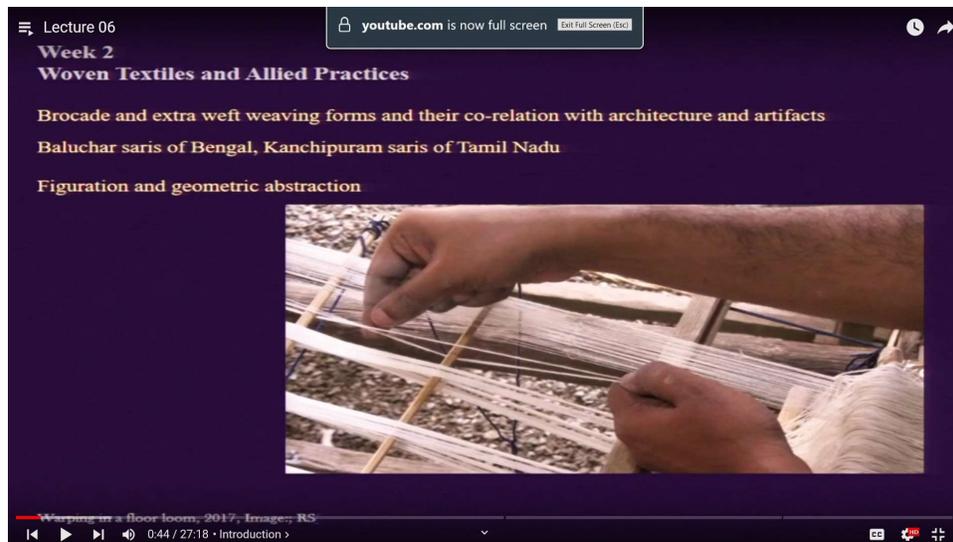
number of

case studies.

So, first like I

mean as you

have already



seen on screen that I mean we have sort of flagged some of the terms here. Like I mean, brocade and extra weft weaving forms and then their correlation with architecture and artefacts. So, this is something that we will be kind of discussing all along this week. And then the kind of the examples or the case studies we will be looking at, they will look into the Baluchar Saris of Bengal, then Kanchipuram Saris of Tamil Nadu. However, the examples will not just be limited to these two forms of Saris but we will have like extended discussion on these two forms.

And then we will also look into some of the other aspects of textile making and then like the pattern making we will be looking at and that will concern figuration and geometric abstraction. So, figuration and geometric abstraction, they also remain central to understanding like different kind of textile making traditions. Some have argued that ..... how geometric abstraction is something that comes from much more kind of cultural understanding. However, there can be other nuanced understanding of why geometric abstraction is required and in what cases figuration can also come as something useful. So, with those issues we will be looking into the act of weaving.

Now on screen we also have an image and this image is taken during the warping technique. So, this is a simple draw loom and in which like I mean various kinds of ..... simple weave can be done but at the same time like I mean, the complicated brocade weaving can also be done. Now, in this case, what we have here is that, I mean, there is this simple, you know, the warping technique for the plain, unbleached white cotton yarn. In this case what happens that I mean the first thing perhaps that also comes here. Why I wanted to show this image here is also because of that comes from my experience of how the many of the techniques are explained as part of a recipe book and then how the techniques might differ when it comes to experiencing that. And then also, one of the things that one needs to understand is ..... that there are many different ways in which one can understand the recipes or like a particular set of instructions. But then there are certain things that I mean we also need to understand through our bodies. Which then invites..... like I mean sensory appreciation or understanding of certain aspects. Which are not or could not be understood strictly in the technical terms.

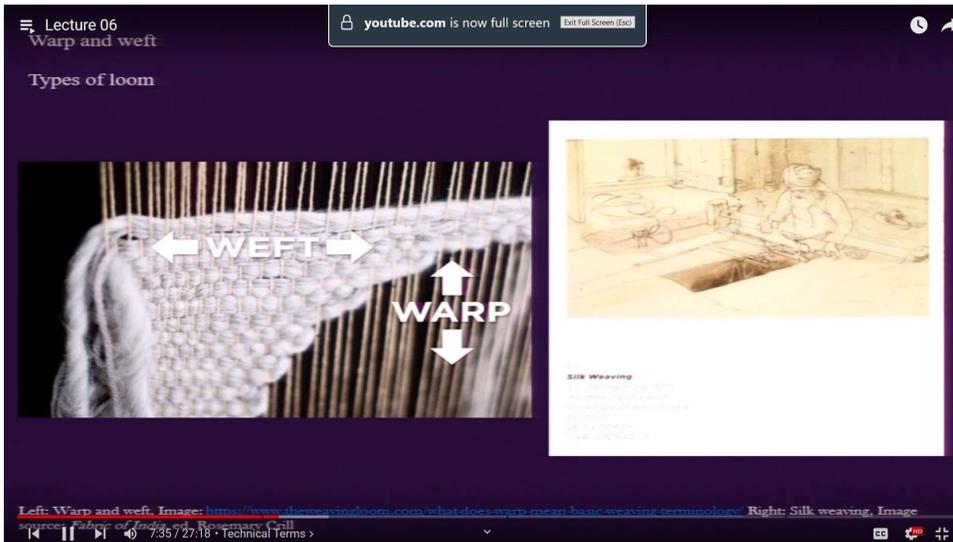
So, in this warping technique what happens or at least if I go back to my experience then why I wanted to bring this up here; it was because ..... after all the things which were said on the loom for example, the heddles and then like its relationship to the paddles which we are supposed to operate with our two feet. But what happens is that, the tension of the thread is something that is really important and then the tension of the thread is not just like ..... I mean created by the structure of the loom, but it is something that comes here with joining the threads. So, if there are part of the fabric which are already been there so

in this case what happens in this particular way in which like I mean when the warp is there and then it needs to be connected to like I mean an already existing set of threads for that to like I mean have the tension in the loom. So, there is this particular way in which like I mean these warps are twisted, one warp with another. That is how like I mean each and every warp needs to be twisted and formed in this seamless warp. And then in this technique what happens that I mean more than what is described in the recipes in this one, one needs to understand the tension of the thread. I mean, the threads cannot be like ..... twisted or thread cannot be like ..... hold these two threads cannot be held too strongly or too softly. But there is a particular balance in which like I mean, needs to be understood. And no recipe can actually sort of tell us ..... how much of balance it needs to have or how much of pressure one needs to put in. Sort of like I mean, joining these two warps and to make it ready for a seamless weaving.

However, this is just for plain weaving but this is just a reminder for all of us to understand that how this kind of exercises might help us to understand that some of the terms, some of the technical terms and all those things we may read and we may try to understand weaving only through those technical lenses. However, when we are on the site or when we are working with these particular techniques, then we find that there are more than that. There needs to be a bodily understanding. Which is needed to enable ..... how much of what needs to be done and being at that moment or also like I mean, understanding all these issues through our bodies, through our senses and not just through our brain like, the way it functions or like I mean not the way the brain remembers certain information from like understanding the techniques is something that is very important. For that reason, I wanted to talk about this thing at the forefront of this lecture. Which make us remember that whenever we are talking about techniques the techniques cannot just remain in the realm of understanding them through recipe; or as I have already mentioned it in the earlier lecture that this course is not enabling us to learn to weave. Like I mean, this course is definitely not enabling us to make us understand dyeing or all the techniques as a manual. But perhaps, it will lead us towards certain paths and then like I mean it might give us certain leads towards going into the hands-on practice. However, we need to also understand that this hands-on practice and the theoretical knowledge if they are put hand

side by side or like I mean if there is a synchronous relationship between these two then that might lead to a much more holistic understanding of textiles and allied practices.

Now let's come to some of these technical terms and to understand why those are there at



the forefront of discussion. So, the first thing first, it will come about the warp and the weft and those are the

basics of weaving. As we know that the warp is something that we have the threads which are usually like I mean set lengthwise and then like I mean that is also something that is stationary, it does not move. It needs to be sort of like I mean stable throughout the weaving technique. And then it is also something that sort of runs parallel to the salvage. So, if we think about like a length of a fabric then the edges of the fabric in the two sides that is ..... called as the salvage and that which also holds together the entire fabric. So, warp is something that sort of like I mean runs parallelly. Then what is weft? Weft is the one which sort of like I mean goes horizontally. So, in that sense we can consider warp being something that is vertical and weft being something that is horizontal.

Now in a loom setup..... so here we have an image of a loom and that comes from late 19th century. This is John Lockwood Kipling's drawing from Agra, from 1870. In which we find that there is a man who's doing silk weaving on a pit loom. So, what happens in terms of like any loom structure we have something called a heddle in which like I mean there are comb like structures which separate the warp threads..... as all the warp threads cannot just be clubbed together when the weaving has been done. And then there is a requirement for moving the heddles or .... I mean if there are more complicated ways of

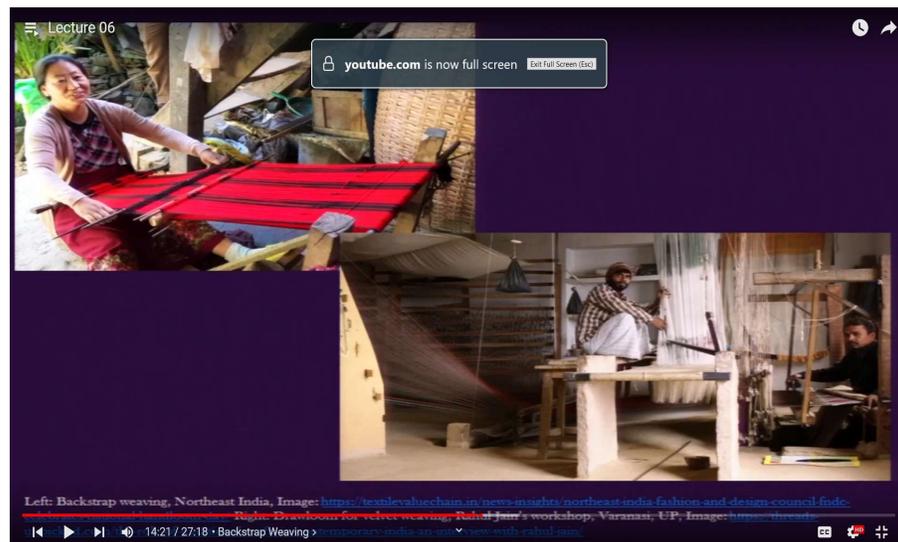
weaving then there are multiple heddles instead of ..... just one heddle. Then what happens in the heddle there are like I mean the warp threads which are sort of like I mean passed through it. Then when weaving, the warp threads cannot just be in one level. Because, for inserting the weft thread there needs to be a gap between two sets of warp threads as the weft threads can just ..... pass through it. So, the heddles function is to ..... separate it and then through it like I mean there are usually paddles or like I mean other mechanisms; or in the simpler structures we find .....like sticks or some other kind of wooden devices, which are sort of like .... inserted between these two sets of the warp threads so that the gap is created for the weft thread to pass on. And then once the weft thread is passed on through it and then the gap is diminished and then another set of ..... warp threads are opened up. If ..... the same warp threads get opened all the time, then the weft threads would not be woven into the fabric structure. It needs to have a stability. So, there needs to be a locking of the weft threads when the weft threads are passed through this one set of warp threads. So, this is how usually weaving is sort of like I mean done.

So, in the simpler forms of weaving we do find that I mean there are the warping techniques are much more similar and then they are handled the way I think in terms of like I mean using simpler tools for moving or like I mean raising the warp threads and sort of like I mean making use of it for locking the weft threads into it. But then like I mean there are also complicated ways of weaving in which we find that I mean how paddles are sort of attached to the heddle in which like I mean if the hands of the weaver is working towards inserting the weft thread and also like I mean finding the tension of the warp thread and if there are other things need to be done with the hands then the feet are used for like I mean raising one set of warp thread and then the another set of warp thread. So, like I mean if one set of warp thread is sort of like I mean raised by using a paddle and then like I mean then once the other paddle is sort of pressed then like it is locked and now the set of warp thread sort of opens up. So, this is how like I mean this the weaving sort of continues. It is a very repetitive way of functioning.

However, when I say repetitive, I do not try to call it as something that does not have any intellectual capabilities or like any other aspects of generations of knowledge. So, with

those things what we see that I mean in the Indian subcontinent there have been early depictions of the use of weaving and then like I mean if in the text or at least like I mean you know when we see some of the archaeological evidences. So, there are woven cloth which are found in the Harappan sites or in the Indus valley sites. So, we can imagine that ..... the weaving techniques must have already been developed in the third millennium BC or so on. Now what we know is that, there have been pit looms which were there in the Indian subcontinent for the longest period of time. And the image that we have here, even though it comes from 19th century or from the late 19th century it gives us a sense of how pit looms actually looked like. So, pit loom basically means ..... there is a pit inside the house. It's usually in the house of the weaver or like I mean in the courtyard or somewhere which is already associated with the residential space. So, in this case .... we find that in the pit loom ... the warp is sort of ..... stretched at the ground level and then ..... the loom mechanism sort of ..... functions on the ground level. However, the weaver ..... sits and their feet goes beneath the ground level if there requires to be paddles and stuff that definitely goes inside the pit and that is how like I mean the pit loom usually functions. Now with that we find that I mean there were early mentions of pit looms or like I mean there are certain indications that pit looms how pit looms had been in used in the Indian subcontinent for the longest period of time. Then we also have evidences that suggest that in the northeastern region of the Indian subcontinent there had been Backstrap Weaving. Backstrap weaving is something that goes very differently from this regular pit looms.

In the left side of the image, we have a backstrap weaving set up. Here, what we find is that ..... the discontinuous warp is kind of



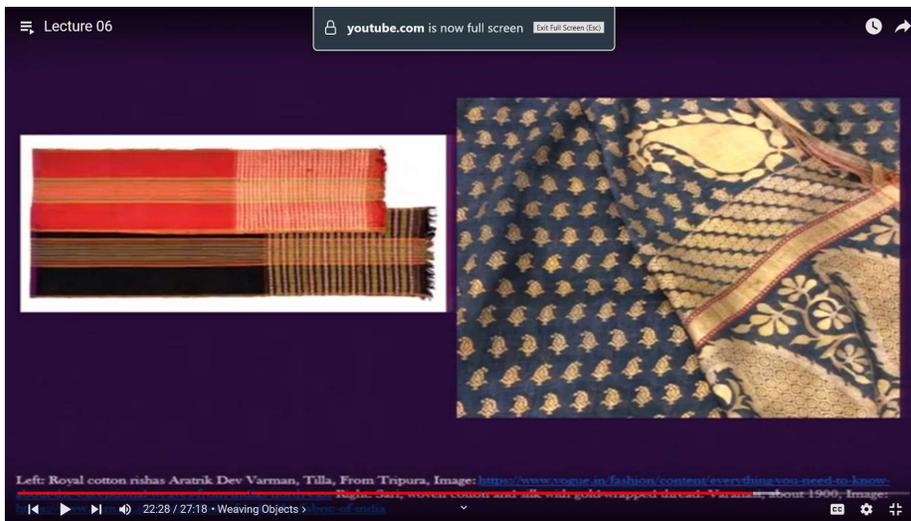
..... set into this structure in which there are ..... the entire warp, the heddle and then ..... the spindle or ..... whatever we need to ..... pass it through the warp for ..... separating it and also to ..... passing the weft thread through it. All those fairly simple tools mostly made of wood or bamboo ..... are joined and made into ..... this one set. The Backstrap Loom weaving it sort of thrives ..... with two points. In which here one can see that, there are those wooden posts where ..... one part of the loom is ..... sort of attached here and that is how ..... the tension is created; and then the rest is where like I mean there is a strap that sort of ..... goes around the weaver's body. The weaver needs to sit at a certain distance so that ..... the tension of the thread remains intact. So, this is how ..... the tension of the thread (something that I have already flagged at the beginning of this chair) is something that remains central to all kinds of weaving. In the pit loom structure, we have ..... much more sort of table mechanism for ..... handling the tension of the warp threads. In this case the weaver's body which sort of ..... adjusts according to the need. .... that is how the tension of the warp is kept intact, and ..... the weft thread is passed through it, and the weaving continues. So, this is one of the things that we find that, ... how there are these ..... both ..... this table loom structure, at the same time the mobile loom structures both of them are ..... used simultaneously in the Indian subcontinent. Then there have been also much more sort of complicated loom structures that we find and one of the more complicated loom structure that we will see here is this the draw loom structure. So here in the right side of the slide we have a representation of a draw loom ..... from Varanasi from Rahul Jain's workshop that and this photograph was taken perhaps around 2015. In which what we find that I mean this classic draw loom structure in which we have like I mean the weaver who is here at the right corner and the weaver also sort of like I mean you know sits in the pit loom. Then .... when the weaving ..... continues we find that there are ..... extra set of warp and weft threads. For that reason ... and not just for the weaver to ..... using the heddles and paddles ..... move the or ..... raise the warp threads and insert the weft threads, but there are many more .... complications within this structure. For that reason, there needs to be one more person, the person (that we see here, who would be) sitting here on a raised platform; their work would be to throughout ..... is to sort of understand that which thread or like which set of threads need to be sort of raised and ..... [which of the weft] threads needs to be passed

through it. So, with this, what we also find .... [that] this is a structure that says ..... [which] kind of weaving. We are not just talking about a simple warp and a simple weft but there are more than one set of warp and one set of weft that is involved in it. So in the case of, like, I mean, the Backstrap Loom weaving that we have here on the left side of the screen, there is only one set of warp, even though there are two colours of the warp threads that we find here ..... red and black. .... it's just one set of warp that we have here, and usually, in this case, we also find that only one set of weft thread is sort of passed through it. This is how ..... this entire ..... fairly simple plane weave is ..... created. I mean, there ..... are options for ..... tweaking the technique and making it much more sort of complicated and sophisticated. However, this is .... the basis for ..... using the backstrap loom. Whereas when we come to the pit loom structure or the draw loom structures or ..... the standalone looms, in these cases .... or at least for this Varanasi structure that we have on the .... right side of the screen, ..... there are two set of warp threads ..... and ..... there are more than one weft threads. So more than one weft thread could also attribute to more color variations that we can have in this fabric. However, for these warp threads and especially for the Varanasi brocade and in velvet .... there needs to be one set of warp threads that would make the base for whatever fabric .. being made. Then on the top of that, ..... there needs to be ..... the pattern making; and everything ..... comes on the top layer of it. So the same goes for the weft threads as well; ... there needs to be one set of weft threads that passes through the warp, and that is how it gives us stability to the fabric. If we want more patterns onto it then there needs to [be]..... extra weft that would .... add to the patterns of the fabric. So, this is how we find that it's not just a simple set of ... warp and weft but for stability at the same time for understanding .... how the motifs would ..... flow through the entire piece of fabric. This kind of regulation is very much required.

Now the other kind of weaving that we have here is in terms of .... the carpet weaving. We would find in [the carpet weaving] ..... instead of having like a horizontal arrangement for weaving we .... have like vertical arrangement in which .... the carpet weaving usually takes place. And also .... in terms of like the tapestry weaving ... we also find that the same way that I mean how the vertical structure would have its prevalence. Now, for tapestry

weaving, we also find that .... there is no requirement for an extra warp or extra weft to be there to give stability to the patterns, but like I mean, the warp threads and the weft threads are .... Intertwined. Mostly with the weft threads, we find that with a spindle or, like .... with a needle, usually .... the threads are inserted to a particular point, and then that is .... removed. It's not continuous weft threads, but .... the weft is ..... inserted only in some places, and then the rest of it is removed, and that is how, like I mean, we have the tapestry weaving. These are some of the basics of how we find that ... the weaving structures can function and how these various techniques .... make sense to .... us.

Now talking about the weaving techniques then how they manifest in the objects which



come out of the loom. So, in the left side of the image we have like I mean some of these cotton coverings. So these coverings are fairly

narrow in shape and then they are used for like covering the upper body of women. ... this is sort of prioritises the weaves from Tripura in the Northeast and again we are sort of going back to the backstrap loom weaving. that if we have looked into the backstrap loom weaving that kind of technique that sort of like continues. This is an example of how the fabrics they come out of this particular weaving style. So, in this case we can again like I mean see that I mean what is happening in this fabric .... there are the set of warp are here and then ... during setting the warp on the loom there needs to be a measurement. I mean how much of this red warp will be here and then the same red warp will be .... on the other side of this set of patterns that ..... continues ... as the central band in this fabric. And then when inserting the weft threads we find that there is also particular way in which the borders are created. So, ... with the there also needs to be measurements .... what would

be the gap between .... the threads and the white threads and that is how like I mean the gap is maintained throughout this entire section and then .... the rest of the fabric is kept plain. So, this is how we can see that how using the different warp and weft threads but in this fairly simple strap loo, structure how this kind of patterns can be created.

Now with that when we ... come to much more complicated ones for example the one we have on the right side of the screen. This is a saree which is also made in Varanasi; but this is not a Varanasi Silk Brocade but ... this is a woven cotton and silk mix. So, in this one what happens we find that in the Varanasi Brocades there is something that we have that again that as I have mentioned that there are the weft that .... Continues, the warp and the weft that .... continues and .... there are extra set of the weft which are inserted on the top of it. So, by that .... these kinds of patterns are created. Now, with these patterns, what we also find here is that the patterns are definitely not continuous, so this gold-wrapped thread that we have here as extra weft is inserted here for making this mango motif or like all the butas and the borders here. So, all those ones are definitely not used I mean all those ones are like I mean definitely not the continuous weft thread but .... the weft thread is inserted in only those places. So, after weaving of this piece, weaver needs to, like I mean sit very carefully and .... piece out all the extra threads which would come out from the from these motifs from the backside of the saree. So, this is how like I mean the brocades also sort of manifest. Now another thing we can see, I mean why using extra weft or when using .... simple weaving then what different kind of possibilities one might open up to. So, these are some of the things that we can see, this is not just about exploring the techniques but there are also many other ways in which they need to be interpreted. If there are particular kind of community requirements for a particular kind of weave then we can think that..... I mean only those kinds of weaving are sort of like prioritized in particular community setup or particular regions. Whereas, like I mean. this kind of much more specialized kind of weavings techniques are something those are reserved for either royalty or like very special occasions.

So, these are some of the things that we need to understand. I mean, technique again is something that is integrally connected to the cultural lives of the communities of the makers as well as the users. We will continue more on this topic in the next lecture. Thank you.