

Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices

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Week - 02

Lecture – 07

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta, and we are in week 2 of our course. Then as we have gotten into the discussion about the simple weaving and then, I mean, much more fairly complicated ones. So, we will continue our discussion on the brocade of Varanasi. So, what happens in this case as I have mentioned there are the silk threads as well as this gold or the metal wrapped silk threads are used which is also called Zari that we have already sort of noted in the earlier lectures.

So, in this case we see that the zari is used as a base and on the top of that the



motifs are created with the silk threads and which sort of creates almost like a 3D effect and in which we can see that almost like a

tactile quality that if one passes their fingers through the fabric one can see the up and down and then this slightly 3D quality that is achieved in these motifs those are also created. It is not just about the technique but also this variation of the material..... one is just silk thread and the other is metal wrapped silk thread or Zari. So, the differences between them enables this kind of interplay. So, this is also something we need to take into account that how this the diversity or like I mean all those intricacies, are

achieved in these complicated weaving styles are not just about how it is woven but it is also ingrained in the kind of materials which are used in it.

Now, the other thing that we find here in the case of the brocade weaving is that there are certain terms, and at least for the Varanasi Brocade we find that there are many architectural terms which are used. if we pay close attention to the image that we have on screen even though it is pretty shiny for that reason the kind of like the horizontal, and the vertical, the crisscrossing is very hard to sort of hard to register. But if you see that there are those parallel horizontal lines which sort of run across the entire piece of fabric and then there are also the vertical grids in some cases [is] how we find that to be also dividing the entire space into [the] grid like form, a graph paper like form.in this what also happens [is] that in many brocade weaving, I mean of course in all brocade weaving we have that there needs to be a paper or an already made drawing or



a piece of reference which needs to be followed when this weaving takes place. and since weaving is something that is constituted of ... vertical warp and then horizontal weft, for that reason, the drawing also needs to be conveyed through a form which would probably be corresponding to these boxes.

So, if I am thinking in terms of a diagonal line like this that needs to be sort of imagined by how many boxes it will pass through. So, this is something that we find that to be there

for any motifs which would be created in the brocade weaving or in any kind of extra weft weaving or like in the tapestry weaving. So, this is something that remains at the heart of it.how the motifs are created or any kind of patterns that we find which are not just there for the arrangement of the warp or the weft threads, so all the other patterns how they are created.

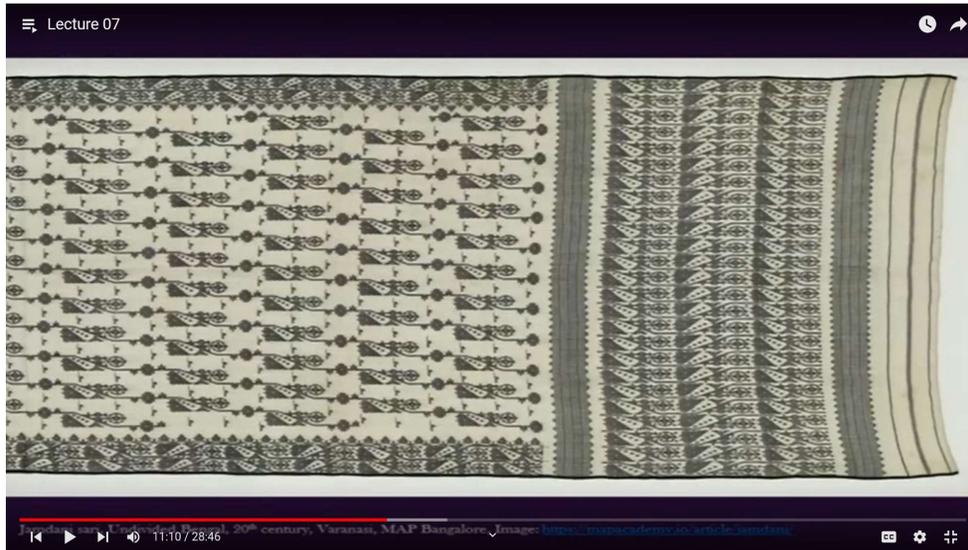
Now for those reasons as I have already mentioned that I mean the draw person who is also called as a 'Draw-Boy' who would sit on an elevated level and would raise a set of threads for inserting the weft thread into it. that was also replaced by the 'Punch Cards' that we find in the 19th century France and that is how this jacquard loom technology was also brought in the Indian subcontinent. Then we find that I mean how the jacquard loom technique in which like instead of a person who is sitting there raising this set of threads punch cards are used for passing those particular set of threads. those punch cards are also created keeping this reference drawings in mind in which the entire drawing is sort of divided into this grid like format. So, this particular kind of grid like format that we find which remains at the heart of, of course like any form of weaving that is the simple weave, brocade weaving or whatever it is but also at the same time making all the kind of patterns which would appear on a brocade weaving or on any kind of extra weft weaving. So in this cases what we find here is that this jacquard loom technique that draws on the existing technology. I mean working on this silk weaving technique and then makes it much more weaver friendly in certain ways when this punch cards are introduced. But however even though today we find in many of the silk weaving centers this punch cards are extensively used there are also places for example in Varanasi and few other places in Gujarat and so on in few of the other pockets of ... India as well [like] in the Deccan India and so on we find that still the manual work in which a draw person would sit on the top of this ... elevated ground and then would raise this set of yarn for weaving is something that is continued. So with those things what we also find that in this kind of weaving and not just this kind of weaving but in many other [or] all weaving there are certain architectural terms which are used in the weaving styles.

..... I will start by discussing some of the terms that we find in the Varanasi ... brocades. So for example, some of the names which would be like, 'Jali', 'Ashrafi' and so on. some of them might also refer to the stars or the moons and so on and as ... also have been documented by the Museum of Art and Photography in Bangalore we find that this kind of terms are something that also refers to the architectural structures and if we can think about like I mean some of the architectural structures in the Mughal context and Jali is something that is made of stone which is there as a perforated stone structure which is used either as a lattice window particular kind of viewing experience or this is also used for the warmer summer climate where air can pass through the structures much more uninterruptedly. So, this is something we find that there are certain architectural terms in brocade weaving as well as ... [in] all different forms of weaving and perhaps I'll also extend that by saying that there are architectural terms in all sort of textiles we find. So, now what does that signify? do we think about [these] things to be something that the architecture came first and that is how like I mean the textiles also sort of got influenced by it. So, I use the term influence very cautiously here because there can also be certain issues or problems with terms like influence. Because when we talk about influence and we find that this term and its significance has also been addressed by Rebecca Brown and Deborah Hutton in terms of when we talk about influence it sort of signifies that there is a source from which like influence travels and then there are recipients who sort of receive this influence. So, there is already a kind of hierarchy that is set in this relationship. So, for that reason what happens when we use the term influence we cannot really see this thing as a transmission of knowledge between two stakeholders. But we always try to understand that influence is a thing in which there is an already inherent hierarchy. there is a point from which influence starts and then there are recipients which receives the influence and then it gets modeled further. Now what if we do not really think that there is a particular kind of influence, but there is a conversation or there is, like, I mean, transmission of knowledge? If we think in these terms, then what happens?

So, in this case [if] we can flip the question. [though we] see that there are certain established architectural terms which are there in the textiles, does that always have to mean that the textiles [have] always received these architectural terms, or

can it also be the other way? Can there be a possibility that these textiles actually existed before the architecture came into being? and then somehow the terms which are used in the architecture were also used the same way in textiles instead of textiles borrowing the architectural terms? Can it be possible that these terms already existed and it is part of like a shared vocabulary and in from which like the architects also have received these terms and also the textile makers utilize these terms can it be a possibility. So, this is a particular question that we will be probably like I mean addressing little more with more examples.

Now when we talk about brocade we should not think that brocade is something that is just reserved for silk and Zari. But it can also happen with cotton fabric and so this is



actually an example of a fabric. Here it is a Jamdani saree that we have from undivided Bengal. In

this case, what we find here is that there is the continuous warp, the continuous weft, and then on the top of the weft, we have the extra weft, which is usually inserted. So, for Jamdani weaving for ... this meticulous work that we have on screen, we usually have that the needle or like, small tools which would hold the weft threads those will be inserted only with this meticulous calculation through this warp threads and ... it is not something that is continuous. So, this is something we find in this Jamdani weaving. Now the term 'Jamdani', people have argued [on] how the term came into being. Of course, it has its Persian origin, and Jamdani sometimes might mean a flower vase. some people have also noted that whether Jamdani, the word ... came from 'Jama' and 'Dani' like some kind of a container, which seemed to be not making much

sense. However, Jamdani as a flower vase can ... have its significance since we are looking at many of these motifs, which are flowering or blossoming into the entire fabric.

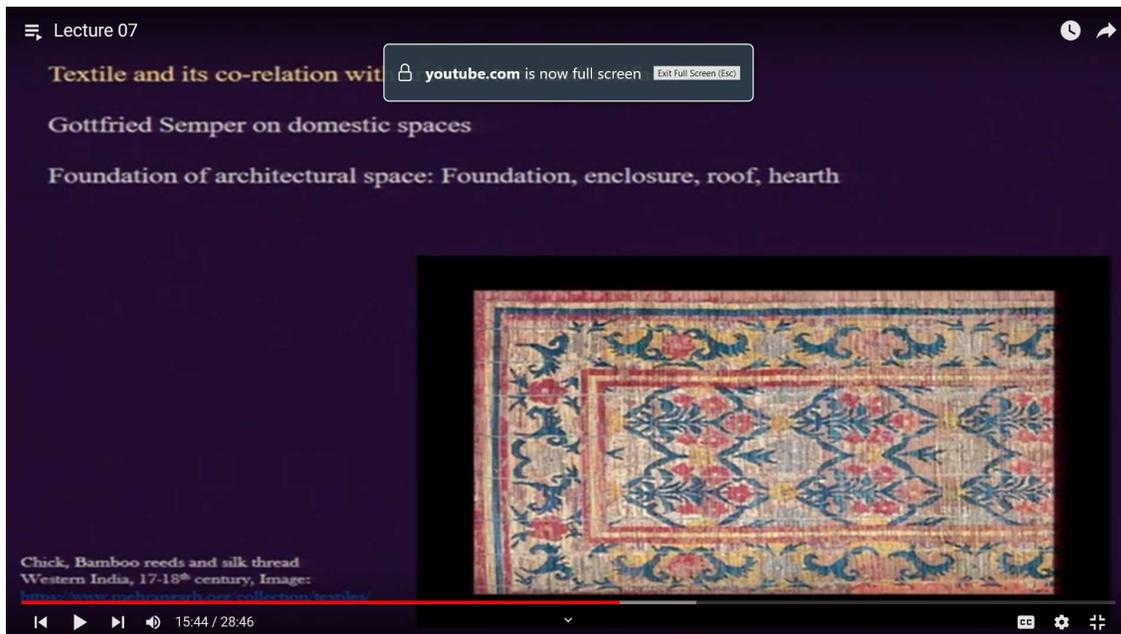
So, in this case we find that the Jamdani weaving, which also comes very close to the brocade weaving, was something that was preferred ... [by] many people who were not comfortable wearing silk. So, for example, in a number of Muslim societies, we find that the direct use of silk was not encouraged, and for that reason, we find either things like this kind of cotton fabric(that we have) that is not made of silk [is preferred] of course for silk there are issues around whether the silkworms were killed or not and these issues which are associated with violence is something that remains as a determining fact for many religious sects for either using or not using silk.

So, in this case what we find[is], the kind of material is something that was prioritized for making a particular kind of ... fabric which would be used by either particular community or it can also be suited for particular regions such as in eastern India in Bengal for the climatic condition cotton is something that has been understood as the most suited fibre and that is the reason we find that this kind of incredible diversity of motifs or experiments have been done on cotton. Now the other place where we also find a similar kind of Jamdani technique that was practised is in Tanda in Uttar Pradesh. In which we find that again this extra weft is inserted. However, instead of having the extra weft with different colors, in Tanda we find usually [that] all the weft and the warp to be in the same color; usually white or unbleached cotton. For that reason, there are always these white on white kind of motifs are find in this kind of fabric. For Jamdani weaving, the other thing that we find usually is that the warp and the weft if we are using like, super fine cotton like 120 count cotton or 100 count cotton then the warp and the weft can be 100 or 120 count cotton. But then the extra weft that is inserted in for making the motifs are usually much thicker compared to the regular weft, and that is how we find [that] wherever these motifs are created, they are usually much more stable [and] at the same time a bit stiff compared to the body of the fabric or the cloth.

So, with all these discussions that we have and already as I have mentioned there are some of the issues we see around how these aspects of the architecture, textile, all of them

..... they come together or not, and then when we see certain aspects around like, how what kind of materials are used? If we think about the brocade weaving in which the Zari threads are used as the base and then like if the silk the plain silk thread is used for making the motif, then this kind of light 3D effect[gets] created. [This] is something that also sort of makes us think about the structure of it.

And then how the material, combination with the particular kind of technique can lead



.... towards particular results. The same thing we can think about in terms of the Jamdani saris in which if a particular thread count is maintained for the warp and the weft threads, and then we have the extra weft, which would be much thicker, so it adds to the stability of the textile in a different way. So, all these minute things about the stability of the textile, the durability, the appearance and everything else that make us think that the motifs which we have on this fabric, the saris, whatever they are they're not something that is disconnected from the structure of it. So, the structure and ornamentation are not something disconnected. Again, it might go back to some of the primary concerns we had, that how technology or, like I mean, this technique of doing this weaving is something that is not disconnected from its intellectual aspects.

Now when we think about textiles and its correlation with architecture and artifacts then we also might have to go back to some of the art historical theories [to understand] how they have shaped these concepts and also, ... how they paved the way for us to sort of comprehend these issues in a new light.

So, one of the aspects that sort of came up started with the very warp and the weft. I mean how there are horizontal weft and then like the vertical warp and then the combination of them it's sort of like gives textile the required or the needed stability. Now, if we think about that what kind of horizontal and vertical components are there in an architecture? We can think about ... the most simple form of architecture in



which there can be a pillar and a bar and which would [make] the basic of many, all architectural form I mean

something that is vertical and something that is horizontal. And that is how ... the bars would support the roof and that is how the enclosure can be made and then without a pillar, without this raising [or] a raised surface it cannot have an enclosed space which is the basis of any architecture. I mean well not an enclosed space for as such but like a space which can accommodate people within it. So, if there is no raised area then it cannot really accommodate anyone within it. So, those things what we find here that this particular concern that came up in many of the theories. But perhaps ... one of the most important Art Historical Theories that sort of addressed this correlation between architecture and textile came from German art historian Gottfried Semper in the mid-19th century. Gottfried Semper was someone who worked mostly on ancient structures. So, we find a lot of his work concerned [with] the Greek structures and then how the Greek structures and

the Assyrian structures would be there and his interest in the Assyrian and the Mesopotamian structures spearheaded by his interest in domestic spaces. So, a lot of times he had argued that how the primary structures that we find from the ancient times and if we are talking about India, if we are talking about Egypt, a lot of them we would find them to be associated with religion. Whereas he was someone who was also interested, highly interested in the domestic spaces and for that reason, we find the Assyrian, the Mesopotamian structures in which, like I mean the palace complexes and so on are found at least in ruins. ... Those are the ones Semper was highly interested in. Why he was interested in these kinds of structures because he thought that these architectural structures and the decorations that appeared on the structures, perhaps in the form of the panel or the bas-relief and so on. So, [he thought that] those things are not something to be thought about separately. So, he actually thought that decorations are actually the architecture's organic life. It's not something that the decorations are added on the top of the architecture. But if we at least according to Semper, he was also someone who had extensively reconstructed a number of these architectural structures. I mean like the reconstructed drawings he did with the Greek structures and so on. We find in his reconstruction a lot of colors are used. Perhaps it was also an indication for going with the decorations and not just thinking as like the structure is the thing that is the most important part. So, what Semper, in this case was suggesting was that how the decorations that we find there on any of the structures, if we study them closely, if we understand them closely that might reveal something about the structure itself. So, it's not really like the structure or the form is sort of like influencing the decorations, but it's perhaps sometimes the opposite of it; that if we start from the decorations, we might understand the structure in a new light. And this is something that was understood by Semper and perhaps this is a question that we still sort of argue about. And in this case what happens is that he understood that a form, an architectural form can only be understood when the decorations are taken in account. And with that thing what we also see that he would sort of like extend his understanding of what he meant by ornamentation and decoration to a lot of textiles and decorative items that we have here. And what he would say that in terms of the foundation for the architectural spaces, there are four aspects he had sort of exemplified and that is the of course the foundation, and ... the enclosure, the roof and then ... the earth

or the floor. So, these are some of the aspects that we find that how the architectural spaces he had defined. But then he also said that I mean this idea of the enclosure is something that was not inherent in all architecture. Perhaps there can be pillars, but it's not really like the idea of the enclosure is something that was there in any of the architectural forms, but it might have come from using textiles as tent. So, for example, he would say that I mean the kind of curtains that we use which would separate the outer world from the inner world, right? Like, I mean in the interior space from the exterior space. So, the curtain might become a signifier or like I mean the curtain might become a reminder for us that I mean how an enclosure would be. And that might have served for a base for understanding how enclosure in the architectural term can come into being. The same thing he had said about like the tent structures and then of course like the carpets. Carpets and curtains are something that I mean he had put much stress into it. that I mean how carpet is something that is there on the floor and it's sort of like I mean makes us understand that it is how this earth or the floor is something that is an essential part for habitation. And why he sort of like I mean understood that there needs to be a correlation between architecture and textiles is because that altogether architecture and textile they can contribute to the understanding of a domestic space or something that we understand as home, something that is understand as like a habitable space. So, he was very much interested in this aspect of human experience, and that is the reason he thought that I mean bringing textile and architecture not only as, like I mean something that we understand in terms of like, I mean just the vertical, horizontal structure the technicalities but also through like I mean how we experience these spaces and then like I mean all those cross referencing between architecture and textiles all those things can come together for us to understand that there are deep interrelation between architecture and textiles. So, on screen we have an image and that actually is something called understood as chick is something which is usually sort of used as a separator in the palace settings. It can work as a curtain. It can also be like a separator between like the inner quarters the outer quarters and so on. And in this one what we have like I mean the bamboo strips are used and on the top of that we have the silk threads the colored silk threads that we have here which are sort of like I mean woven into this and that is how like I mean the entire structure is created. So, it is again a reminder that I mean what all different kind of textiles that we find around us and which can also be

incorporated as part of the architecture and that can contribute to the understanding of whether architecture comes from textile or textile comes from architecture. Again, like I mean as I have mentioned this that we have like I mean certain forms of architecture and certain forms of textiles which are much more closely interconnected. So, for example here we have this chhatbandhi or this canopy which is a silk velvet canopy that we have with embroidered motifs onto it and this is something that we do not really use them in the open spaces but this is very much part of like the stable the architectural structures. Like I mean this is perhaps like I mean been on the top of some important person if it is about the king or like I mean the royal members or like I mean the figures of the gods and goddesses that we have and what kind of like I mean a roof or like a protected space it might require.

These are some of the examples that we find and when we sort of connect it to like Zemper's work that we



find that I mean this cross references between architecture and textile is not something we can understand in terms of a simple travel of influence from one source to another but we need to understand them much more as a conversation between these two. So, we will continue this conversation about textile and architecture in the next lectures. Thank you.