

## **Threads of Visual Exploration: Textiles and Allied Practices**

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**Week - 02**

**Lecture – 09**

Hello everyone, this is Rajarshi Sengupta and we are talking about the Korvai technique saadis from Kanchipuram district in Tamil Nadu. Now, we have already been speaking about temple as a body and then saadi as a body in these two cases and we are kind of like trying to understand the parallels between them and not just seeing some simplistic connection between the visual motifs which are understood as either temple motifs or like I mean you know the kind of the birds or the like the stylized lotus forms or any other things that we find in the decorations or the ornamentations of the temples. But also trying to understand that I mean how the entire temple complex or the sanctum sanctorum that works as a body and then the saadi as a complete garment. In this case the Korvai saadis are also something that operates as a body. Now understanding these ideas and then probably the step forward with it will be to sort of relate it to Semper's theory which would also include the ideas about what all constitutes architecture and also like I mean how architecture and textiles are connected. The four elements that Semper sort of like I mean emphasized those will be the roof, the enclosure, floor and foundation. Of course the foundation should come first instead of the roof but we see that I mean how this elements that sort of like I mean starts from the foundation then like I mean the enclosures, the floor, the roof all of them they sort of like I mean constitutes this idea of a space, a habitable space, something that can allow human interaction, something that can allow human experiences. So, in other words sort of like I mean seeing it as a parallel process of understanding it, the temple architecture as a body. and then when we see this kind of thing that I mean how there are different elements like the roof, enclosure or like I mean the floor or the foundation are the separate elements, but then they are also connected and made into a whole. So, this is something we also find that to be there in this Korvai sarees as well, as I have already mentioned that the three parts in this sarees the frontispiece or talaippu or

like I mean the middle section or the body or like the vodal or like I mean the border or karai are three elements that we find them to be like the separate the sections which are then sort of like I mean combined into a whole.

So, we can see that I mean if we sort of like go back to Semper's theory about the relationship between textile and architecture and thinking about their foundations we certainly see that I mean there are certain kind of like parallels which are running in both of this kind of visual material.

Now we see that I mean how this pattu sarees or like I mean the silk sarees of Kanchipuram and as like I mean I do not want to call like all textiles to have like I mean the similar kind of connotations as the one that we have this Kanchi pattu or the Korvai sarees because I mean this formation of the body and then like the head or the border or the margins are something that is very specific to making this kind of sarees in Kanchipuram is not something that we will find in the belief system of the weavers in all other parts of the subcontinent. It might exist in some places, but it might also not exist. So, for that reason, we also need to understand the specificity of this situation that, if we are here trying to make as like I mean the correlation between a textile and architecture as something either in terms of the body like I mean a livable body, a living body that we can find it or a constructed space which is then constructed with all those different elements and then made into a whole is something that we are talking very specifically about temple architecture and the Kanchi Korvai sarees.

So, this is some of the things we find that I mean how the sarees have also sort of spearheaded discussions on its representations. So, for example when we see that I mean how these sarees are represented if you remember that in some of the earlier discussions we have mentioned that this diaphanous quality of the muslin cloth is something we find in this Mughal portraits and of course in the other representations as well in which the body or like I mean something that has been there underneath the layer of the muslin cloth is seen almost clearly is something that is a different kind of fabric or a different kind of quality of the fabric we kind of see there for muslin. Now when it comes to this kind of

silk sarees or the silk sarees which are also sort of like I mean associated with auspiciousness is something we will find them to be represented in different ways in the visual works.

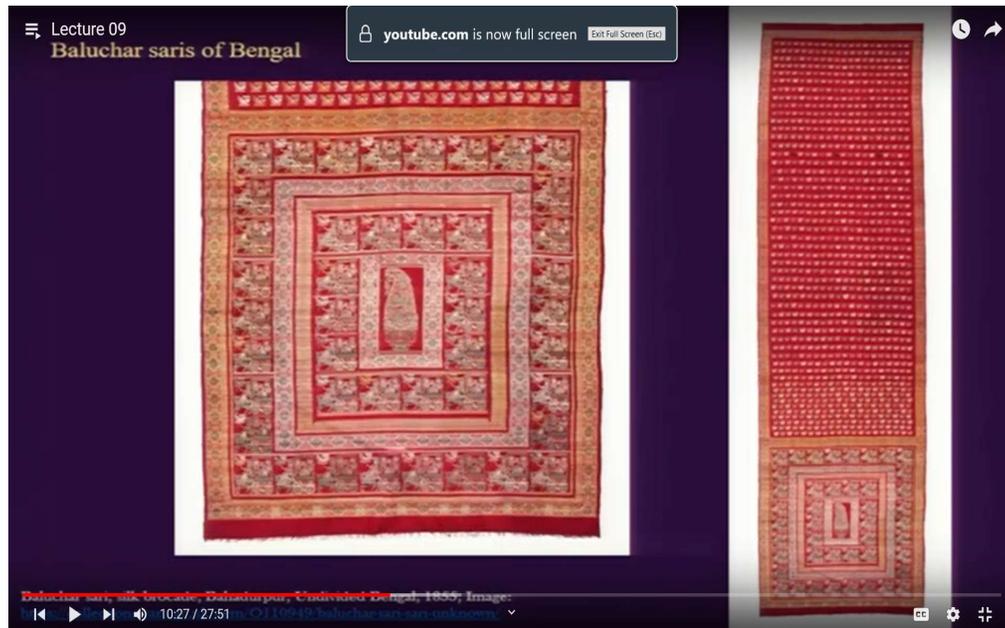


So, for example here we have representation of Goddess Saraswati from late 19th century by this prolific celebrated Indian artist Raja Ravi Verma. And in Raja Ravi Verma's work in this case we find that I mean how Goddess Saraswati is seen here wearing a simple but an elegant silk saree, a brocade she is wearing here. And even though we cannot really claim that to be a korvai saree but what we can see here clearly that I mean how the border this golden border contrast the white ground of this body. And of course we can also see that I mean how the same color of the border is then attributed to the palla or the frontispiece of this saree there as well something like I mean some of those criteria that we have discussed so far for the korvai sarees. Also we can see that I mean in this case there is no like a daftness quality or like transparent quality that has been sort of exemplified in this sarees. However the shine, the luster of it or like I mean the kind of the glow of the saree is something that is very much emphasized in this work. And more than this white surface what we find that I mean the golden border which is presumably a zari border. And as we already know that in this many of this silk weaving that including Kanchipuram sarees that zari is simultaneously used with the silk threads so this zari border sarees are something that we see here and that's the reason the color scheme has shown here the area

which has been highlighted and then like I mean the area which are much more darkened because of like I mean this particular quality of this metallic threads.

Now how we also find that the shine of this silk is shown here in this work is that I mean there are slight hint of like yellow tone which we see in various places of this saree and this is nothing but like the reflection of the zari that that sort of like I mean falls on this shiny silk surface and since silk is very shiny and reflective surface and that's the reason it sort of like reflects the color of the zari that is there on the border. And that is how we can also imagine or at least we can understand that this white surface that we see or like I mean this white fabric that we see in goddess Saraswati's body it is nothing but silk. So this is how like I mean we find that how the representation the visual representation of silk and of course like I mean this brocaded sarees have been taken up by the Indian artist. Now what we also find that I mean since silk is something that is a prized possession it is usually sort of reserved for either royalty and then when there is a need for showing divinity and then of course going with the iconographic conventions in Hinduism we find that I mean in these cases as silk saree is always sort of like I mean given a priority. Now we also find that among the Hindu gods especially for Lord Vishnu we have the use of silk so for example, we find that Vishnu is someone who's identified in yellow silk garment usually a dhoti an untailed piece of fabric. But in this case that I mean since Vishnu is considered as the sustainer of the universe in Hinduism for that reason like I mean sustainment is something that is then we find that to be related to silk. Even though we find that I mean silk is something that is also related to violence in case of like I mean how the silk worms are then boiled in water to for the silk the threads to be extracted from it. But then what we also find that this comes as a way of cultivation that it is not something that is found naturally but there is a complicated process through which it is cultivated. It might require violence but it also leads to particular kind of way of being and that is something that talks about sort of like I mean sustaining in the world. So that is how we find that there are many symbolisms which also gets associated with the material as silk. And then of course I mean when we see that I mean the silk brocaded this highly complicated kind of sarees or the garments we can understand that I mean this kind of symbolisms are then made much more complex by sort of like I mean by also adding its economic and cultural value to them.

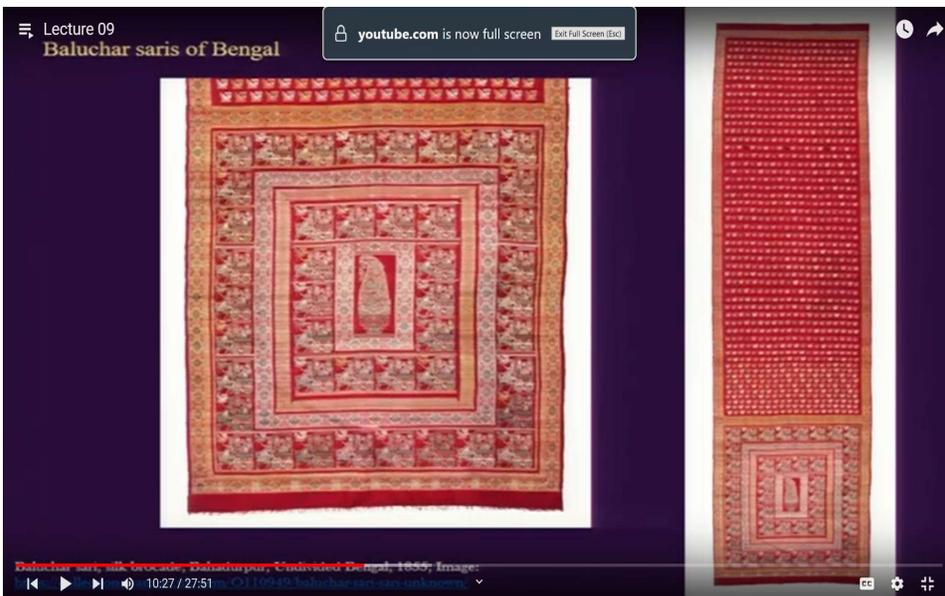
So, afterwards we will get into the other kind of brocade sarees and that will be the Baluchar



sarees of Bengal and this Baluchar sarees are something that we find that to be there at least since the 18th century. We do not know that the Baluchar sarees existed before 18th century or not and but at least from the time of the Nawab Murshid Quli Khan in Bengal we find that I mean Baluchar sarees were prominently been shown. So, during the time when Murshid Quli Khan shifted his capital from Dhaka to central Bengal today like I mean in central West Bengal today which area then came to be known as Murshidabad after Murshid Quli Khan. In this area what we find that in the bank of the river Bhagirathi there is this place called Baluchar where the saree weaving started. Now there are many different kinds of many different kinds of like I mean theories or opinions about from where this weavers picked up this very complicated way of doing this silk brocade. So, at least like I mean map academy or like I mean the art and photography in Bangalore they suggest that how the weavers from Dhaka perhaps migrated with Murshid Quli Khan in Murshidabad and that sort of like I mean allowed the local weavers as well as the weavers from Dhaka to kind of exchange knowledge and then start with this kind of complex process of brocade making. Now at the same time we also find that textile historian Stephen Cohen he sort of suggests that I mean this kind of this very complicated brocade weaving is something that has to have some connection with Gujarat. Because from very early times, we find that at least for more than 1500 years or so we find that Gujarat has excelled in making complicated brocade patterns, and that has sort of, like, I mean, been a point of

reference for Stephen Cohen to understand that perhaps there are connections between Gujarat and the Baluchar saris.

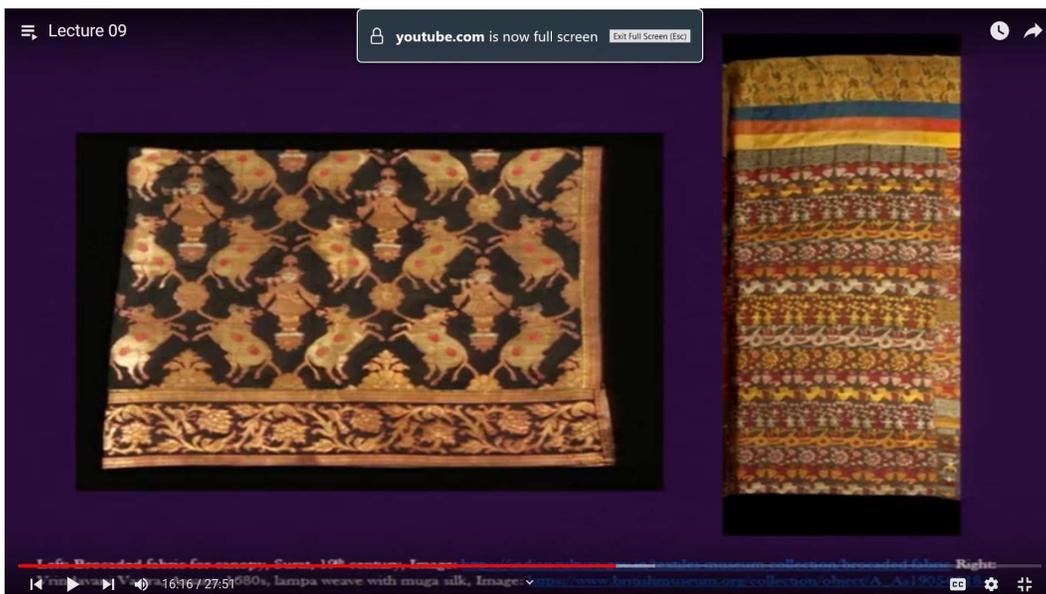
Now what we wanted to discuss here also is that I mean what kind of color scheme that we find and if there are connections then what kind of connections we might find here. So, in one hand we if we see that I mean Murshid Quli Khan's move from Dhaka to Murshidabad and then the subsequent patronage as well as like I mean the weavers experimentation that led to the making of this complicated brocade saris of Baluchar. And then we also see that I mean in Murshidabad district there was a prominence there is still a prominence of the Jain merchants from western India. And we wonder that I mean if the connection that Stephen Cohen talks about has also something to do with the communities who have their sort of like I mean connection to western India, especially in Gujarat and then if this kind of exchange between the merchant families and objects had also enabled or enriched the brocade making tradition in Bengal or not. Now what we find in the Baluchar saris, so in the Baluchar saris as we can see I mean in the right side of the screen highly brocaded, minutely ornamented saris that we will have and that would have this one body and then



like I mean this heavily ornate borders and then the borders would usually have floral motifs or geometric motifs mostly floral motifs

we will find. I mean however today I mean in the contemporary times the kind of Baluchar saris that we find them those are mostly made in Bishnupur of the Bankura district in Bengal those ones we also find that figurative motifs are used extensively in the borders of

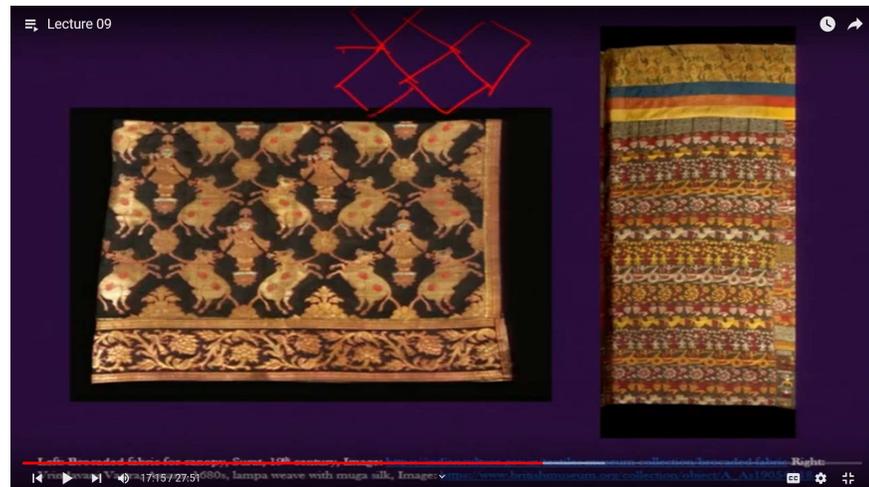
the saris as well. Now what we find there is that I mean how this particular kind of this borders that those are there. And then we also have the Buttas or the Buttis which are there all over in this sari. I mean it is not necessary that all the saris would be having or full of this Buttas or this small medallion like motifs. However this is a typical organization of this Baluchar sari. Now comes the most important part of the Baluchar sari and that is the Achol or the Pallu. And this Pallu that we find that is much more broader or like I mean it is almost like this rectangular frame that we find for this Baluchar sari. And in this Baluchar sari we also find that extensively figurative motifs those are there present in the Pallu's. So something that we find that in this case is at least for this particular Baluchar sari that we have here, we have the one weft that is the continuous weft and it has both like the warp and the weft that is red in color, and then on the top of this one weft we have two three or like I mean all the colors the different colors that we see in this sari would also have ..... come from a separate weft. So, for that reason we have like I mean both this extra weft that is continuous at the same time there are also wefts which are added only in sections so those are the discontinuous weft we also find them there. And this is not just there in the Achol but also there in the border as well. So, this kind of like I mean weaving technique we find that to be there in this Baluchar sari.



Now the Gujarat connection that I had already sort of like I mean spoke about and what happens in this case that I mean some of the brocades from Gujarat might also give us some sense about kind of connections we are talking about so Assawalli or like Ahmedabad is

the place where brocade fabrics brocaded fabrics have been made and sold for millennia. There we find that I mean there are different kinds of experimentations that went on. Here we have this one brocaded fabric which was intended for a temple canopy, and that comes from 19th century from Surat. And in the left side of the screen that we see here and in this case what we find that there is this border in this continuous creeper-like border with floral motifs.

And in the body of it we find that there is a particular kind of Jala organization in which we have the sort of like I mean how this motif sort of continues like as repetitive motif. But



then like this repetitive motif is not really shown as strictly geometric. But then like I mean the motifs are then broken down into figurative forms. In this case we see images of cows and then at the center we find Lord Krishna standing on a lotus with his characteristic flute in his hand. So, this is something that also sort of suggests that I mean how this temple canopy must have been in use by a Vaishnava temple and not any other sect. So, those issues we find. However, what we also find in this case is the kind of the combination of the vegetal motifs, the figurative motifs and also this heightened sensibility towards Jala or this geometric organization of the entire body. So, this kind of things we find them to be there in this particular fabric that gives us a sense about what kind of like I mean brocading has been done in Gujarat.

Now Stephen Cohen also sort of extends his understanding about the other brocade techniques which are then like I mean eventually found in Assam and that is one of this Vrindavanivastra that we have already seen in the earlier part of this course. and this one comes from late 17th century and this is again a very complicated lampa weave in which

we find that there are multiple warps, at least two warps and then at least two wefts or maybe more than two wefts those are used here. So, those things we find that and then Stephen Cohen sort of argues that the brocade making in Gujarat was perhaps the source for the transference of the knowledge of brocade making to the other parts of the Indian subcontinent at least in the northern belt of the Indian subcontinent. And for that reason like I mean the areas from like I mean from Gujarat to Assam like I mean these two frontiers of the Indian subcontinent we find that there probably was some kind of relationship between the weavers or like I mean these textiles were probably exchanged between these places and the knowledge was circulated. Then Stephen Cohen sort of like after this entire discussion he sort of concludes by saying that the Baluchar saris in Bengal that we see them in the 18th century must have had something to do with the Gujarati brocade making and or else like I mean it might not have come into being.

Now with those things let us go back to like I mean the Baluchar saris now. After the saree being made in Baluchor in Murshidabad district we find that after a point that I mean this place was abandoned and then mostly the weavers they moved to the temple town of



Bishnupur perhaps for patronage and also for like I mean the other favorable conditions that we find them to be there in the temple town. And so for those reasons what we find

that I mean in Bishnupur and not in Murshidabad this particular kind of silk brocade making had existed for the last 150 years or so. Now in the Baluchar saris the other characteristic feature that we find is that usually zari is not used. It is different kind of silk threads which are used and then the kind of like I mean the sheen that we see here is not because of zari threads but it is just the character of the silk thread. So, a number of different kind of silk, I mean today predominantly the mulberry silk which is sort of manufactured in southern India mostly near Mysore and also like I mean in southern Andhra Pradesh and in Tamil Nadu are the ones which are sort of like transported to Bengal and then those are made use of. But then we also have records about how the indigenous variety in eastern India in Bengal mostly are also used in the historical Baluchar saris as well. So, in this case is what we find here that I mean there is as I have already mentioned that in this highly decorated pallu or the achol that we find there is that I mean how there are bands of those borders and within those borders we have like I mean separate panels and in this panels we have this figurative motifs. So, in this one like I mean the one we see here in this pallu is we find there is a horse drawn carriage and then in this horse drawn carriage there is also a suggestion of a peacock on the top of this carriage which perhaps also brings certain association with the of the mythological chariots that we have in our epics the Hindu epics. However, in this horse drawn carriage what we also find with all the intricate details with the horse with the hill with the carriage and everything else that there is a man who is seated here clearly wearing European costume. So, this is also something we find that I mean after 1757 that there were predominant I mean of course that I mean more presence of the Europeans in Bengal. I mean of course after the war of Plassey and of course like I mean for the European dominance in Bengal since during this time we find that very frequently the European figures would start appearing in these saris. So, with this narrative motifs what we also have here is that I mean how there are combination of this saris which are there combination of this motifs which will find them to be there which come from like I mean the Hindu mythological sources or like I mean from the Hindu epics. But then we also find extensive motifs from like I mean from the royal courts perhaps from the courts of the Nawabs and that's the reason we definitely see that I mean the dressing with Jama and then like I mean with the headgear and everything which we can closely associate with the Mughal customs and with the with the Nawabs of Bengal we find them there. I mean

the Islamic motifs we will find them very clearly visible in the Baluchar saris. And then on the top of that we also have this European figures. So, we do not really see that I mean the weavers of this saris or the patrons of this saris had any objection towards blending different kinds of figurative motifs. And Baluchar saris today is like one of the very few brocade saris in the entire Indian subcontinent that we see today which extensively uses figurative motifs and not only just figurative motifs but figurative narrations. So, unlike the Kanchipuram saris, the Korvai saris that we have discussed earlier we find in the Baluchar saris there is no sort of like I mean emphasis on using contrasting elements. Instead we see that I mean the entire the color scheme of the saris to sort of like I mean fall into this monochromatic scheme. In which like I mean the kind of the colors which sort of come under the same group like for example we will find this blood red with like I mean hues of yellow then hues of brown or black all of them which would come under the same gradation would be used in these saris. Instead of like I mean trying to create a drastic contrast in them.

Now what we also find that I mean in the early 20th century the Baluchar saris were something that was discontinued and the last weaver who was there in Bishnupur he died in around 1905. And this is usually the kind of narratives we find that to be there that how the weavers did not really share their skill and that is how like I mean the craft died out. However, we do see that I mean during this colonial time period a number of different craft forms in the Indian subcontinent had evidenced this kind of death and it cannot be associated with the will of the weavers but it needs to be sort of seen much more critically in relation to the colonial subjugation of the weavers as well as like I mean the representation of the crafts. In one hand we find that the colonizers were very much interested in sort of like I mean preserving this craft and that is the reason a sari like this which was made in 1855 is still there in the Victoria Albert Museum. But on the other hand we do see that I mean how the weavers were highly discouraged and that is how eventually this kind of sari making sort of fell out of practice. Now with those things we find that I mean how this saris are also something that can be related to the organization of the temple panels.

So, we will sort of like I mean keep the panel of this sari in mind that I mean what kind of borders are used, what kind of images are used, where and then like I mean we can also sort of like I mean compare the figurative motifs with like I mean the ones which are much more geometric, ornamental or vegetal motifs. So, if we see the organization of this different kind of motifs in this sari and then we sort of like I mean go back to the temples, we might be able to also sort of reflect on the relationship between textile and architecture. We will continue on this relationship between textile and architecture more in the next lecture. Thank you.