

Folk and Minor Art in India
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Lecture - 32
Characteristics of Contemporary Collection-Thematic
and Iconic Analysis

So, after the basic semiotic analysis where we concentrated on the basic line, form, tone, texture, color, the composition, the space arrangements, the kind of illusion of depth and motion; whether they were there or not different kinds of texture and also with the line and all other elements, what kind of style that picture was depicting through its pictorial representation, we talked about all those things.

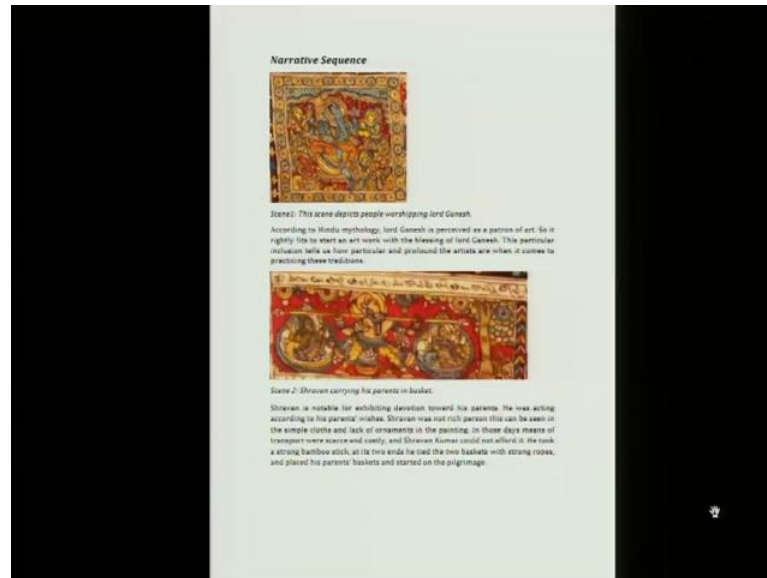
Right now, we are going to a purely thematic data based on the write ups that are there in Telugu and also by some of the interviews. So, I am just writing what I got from different interviews and I am also thankful to some of my students to help me translating the data's. So, I am just going by a description, the scripts will be there and I am also narrating it in parts. So, right now we are trying to see in reference to our previous lecture how the space is created and also, we are trying to understand the culture specific icons and understanding the basic iconographic features of the whole painting which is a single framed narrative painting.

And then finally, we understand the narrative sequences very clearly through its thematic understanding. So, we are starting from the first frame and trying to cover each and every frame as much as possible. There are certain repetitions where we are skipping those things, but it is overall the narrative and we will also see how the semiotic understanding of it gives us certain notion and how these 3 things cannot be put in a linear formation rather they belong to a layer all this thematic iconic and semiotic way of looking at art they stand in layer and we cannot do without the other one.

But this is also true that unless the semiotic aesthetics, like aesthetics in semiotic layer is successful it hardly matters whether the theme is rich or not. Because finally it does not have any aesthetic value and there are many other depictions of Ramayana which is just read and it is used for different kinds of religious proliferations but we do not count them in the mainstream art practice where we are talking about the folk art and minor art and

their inclusion into the topic. So, it is not only the subject matter or the popularity of the subject matter, but also the pictorial depiction that makes it all the more important. So, let us see the theme one after another through the slides.

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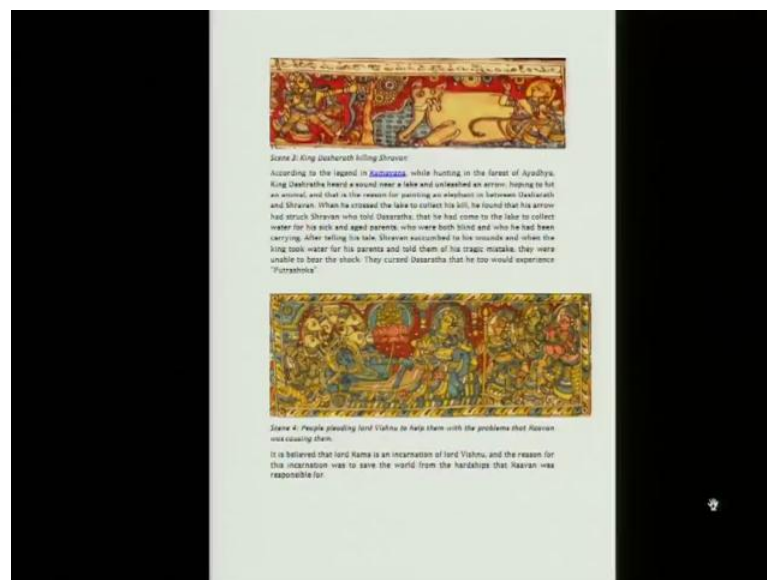
So, in the first scene the squarish frame at the top left what we see is the scene that depicts people worshipping lord Ganesha. It is very interesting to see that according to Hindu mythology lord Ganesha is perceived as the patron of all kinds of art. So, it is rightly suits the type of art work that we get to see here that the story is starting with the blessing of lord Ganesha. So, it is the first frame where they place Ganesha and this is there in tradition we almost see in all Ramayana scrolls and other mythological scrolls that they put Ganesha which is slightly out of context to the entire narrative, but it is there it begins with Ganesh and the stotra the worship of Ganesha. So, this particular inclusion tells us how particular and profound the artists are when it comes to practicing these traditions. So, they strictly adhere to the traditional norms that this is the convention to put Ganesha so it is there.

So, what we see in the next frame is Raavan, a character who is placed right at the center who is carrying his parents who are old and they are not able to see they have lost their sight. So, he is carrying the father and the mother, the parents with stick. He was acting according to his parents' wishes what he did was not like he was not a very rich person who could afford to have a cart to like make his parents sit there and travel, because his

parents were the saintly people who were the sages and they lived in the forest and they were basically like occupied in religious performances.

So, profession wise he belongs to a very respectable family, but he is not rich. So, what he thought of you know when he wanted to fulfill the wish of parents what he does here is in those days the means of transports were scarce and very costly and Raavan Kumar the character could not afford it. So, he took a strong bamboo stick at its two ends he tied the two baskets with strong ropes and placed his parents in the baskets and started on the pilgrimage.

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What we see in the picture is the scene where Dasharatha is hunting. So, here Dasharatha is hunting an elephant, but this is just the illusion that he went through. So, by showing the elephant it is giving us a surreal feel where Dasharatha felt that it is an elephant, but it was not an elephant, but in the place of elephant it was Raavan who came there, the unfortunate fellow he came there to collect water for his old parents who could not see they were blinds. So, according to the legend of Ramayana while hunting in the forest of Ayodhya king Dasharatha heard a sound near a lake and unleashed an arrow hoping to hit an animal and that is the reason for painting an elephant in between Dasharatha and Raavan.

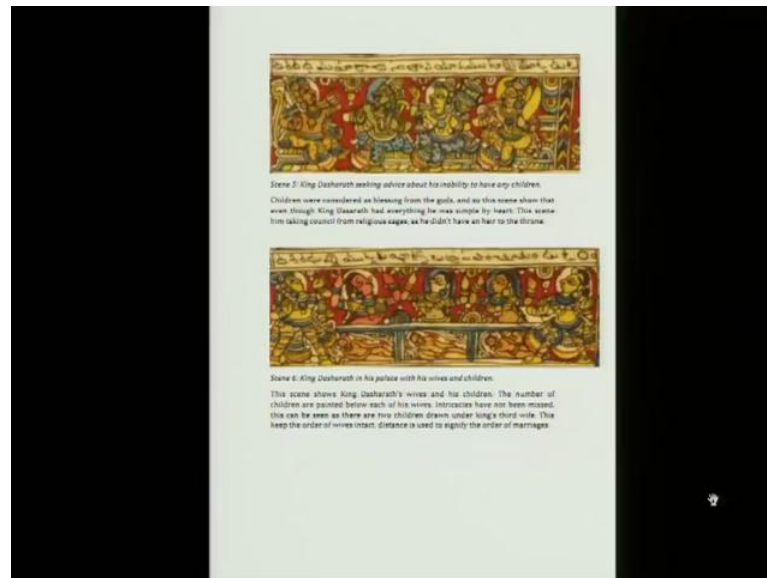
So, the elephant is not there, but this is the illusion that he felt there is an elephant. When he crossed the lake to collect his kill he found that his arrow was stuck in Raavan's body

who later told Dasharatha that he had come to the lake to collect water for his sick and aged parents who were both blind and who he had been carrying. So, after telling this his tale Raavan succumbed to his wounds and when the king took water for his parents and told them of this tragic mistake done by him they were unable to bear the shock. So, they cursed Dasharatha that he too would experience the similar kind of misery which is caused by the death of the son or some way he will get the Putrashoka. So, the shoka or the misery the grief the sorrow caused or related to the son. So, after that Dasharatha wonders that he does not have any son. So, it is like you know if the curse is there that is bound to happen. So, with the curse he can now expect son.

So, in the next frame we see that people they are worshipping lord Vishnu who helps them with problems caused by another character who is Raavan. So, Raavan is the demon king from Srilanka, Lanka and Vishnu was listening to the problems that are caused by him. So, it is coincidental that there is Dasharatha, the character who is hit by the curse and then Vishnu is there with the purpose he is thinking of some solution how to control Raavan. So, things are happening simultaneously. So, it is believed that lord Rama is the incarnation of lord Vishnu and the reason for his incarnation was to save the world from the hardship that Raavan was responsible for.

So, here the picture it shows that there is Laxmi, Vishnu's wife who is sitting right near the feet of Vishnu on the bed and Vishnu is actually in a great thought. From his navel comes out a lotus where Brahma sits there. So, it is a typical iconographic feature which is connected to Laxmi and Vishnu and Vishnu takes birth, like in the form of Rama who is Vishnu's incarnation and Rama happens to be Dasharatha's would be son. And so, Rama is being born with a purpose and that is a great story where Dasharatha he asks for son and then he gets the son at the same time he is also being warned with a purpose. So, it is all connected and that ties up the story into a narrative order.

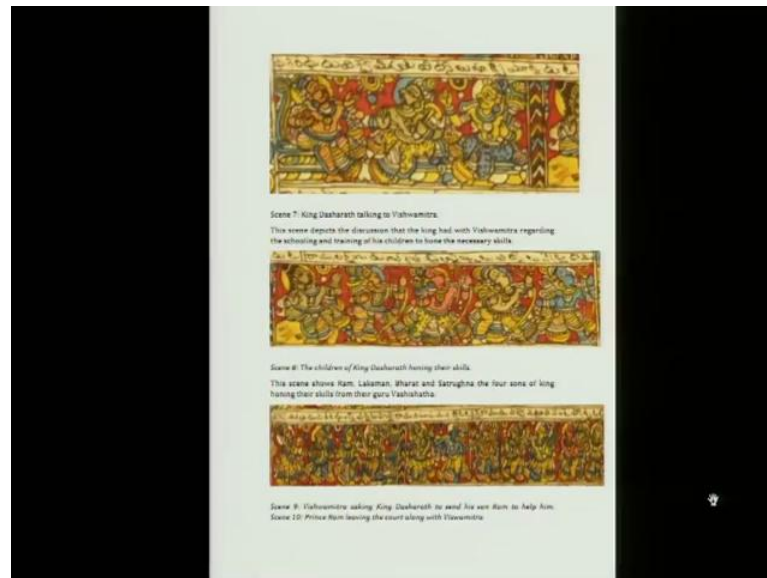
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So, after that it is seen in the picture that king Dasharatha is seeking advice about his inability to have any children. Children were considered as blessings from the gods. So, the scene shows that even though king Dasharatha has everything he was quite simple by heart. He could not bear the lack of children in his life. So, this scene shows him taking counsel from the religious sages and he did not have an heir to the throne. So, it is all about the crisis that he needs somebody to take over after him. So, he seeks a son and all the sages are sitting there. So, seen in the picture are three people all at a row, but three of them are facing at Dasharatha and Dasharatha is facing to the other side. So, that gives it a sense of symmetry although there are four figures, but it is because of the eye direction it has an asymmetrical order in the picture.

So, king Dasharatha in his palace with his wives and children seen in the next picture and the scene shows king Dasharatha's wives and his children. The numbers of children are painted below each of the wives. Intricacies have not been missed anywhere, this can be seen as there are two children drawn under the king's third wife. This keeps the order of wife intact, distance is used to signify the order of marriages and there are like twin born to the third wife and the first two had two children.

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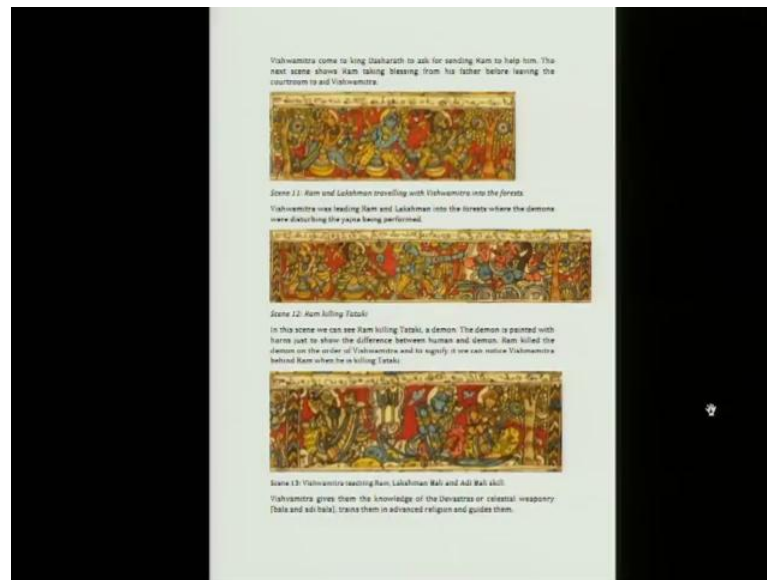
Then scene seven where king Dasharatha talking to Vishwamitra. So, Vishwamitra is the teacher who is going to teach these sons, these four children who were born. So, the scene depicts the discussion that the king had with Vishwamitra the sage regarding the schooling and the training of his children to hone the necessary skills a king should have. So, here we see the rishi Vishwamitra who had a Brahmin Kshatriya kind of a combination. So, he was sage at the same time he was a great warrior he knew the tricks of war. So, he is sitting there facing Dasharatha and we get to see by changing the skin color a little bit they could give us the identity of Vishwamitra. So, he is slightly greenish dark n complexion.

So, the children of king Dasharatha honing their skills you get to see in the picture that in the tutelage of Vishwamitra these four kids, one with blue body he is Rama then Lakshmana, Bharat and Shatrughana. So, they are learning the skill together with their bows they are learning archery. So, this scene shows Rama, Lakshmana, Bharat and Shatrughana, the four sons of king honing their skills from their guru Vishwamitra. And here I think it is Vashishatha who is sitting there who looks slightly different from Vishwamitra. So, there are slight differences that make them look different.

So, here Dasharatha has a kind of necklace where Vishwamitra the sage has some Rudraksh in their as a like necklace for them and similarly we see that Vishwamitra had a different head dress where as Vashishatha has some other thing. So, they are learning

the skill from different Gurus, different teachers. Then we slowly see in a sequence which is slightly compressed to show the stretch. So, Vishwamitra asking king Dasharatha to send his son Ram to help him, the Prince Ram leaving the court along with Vishwamitra.

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Vishwamitra comes to king Dasharatha to ask for sending Rama to help him.

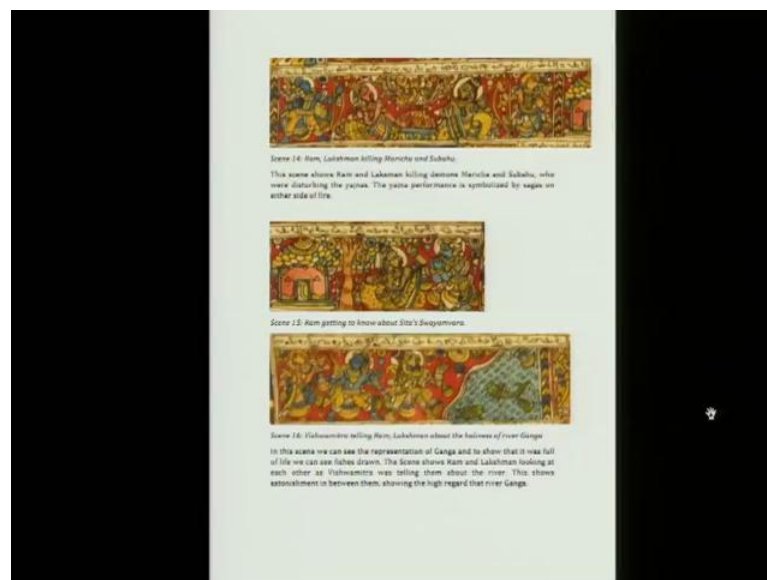
The next scene shows Rama taking blessings from his father before leaving the courtroom to aid Vishwamitra. So, Ram and Lakshman travelling to Vishwamitra into the forest Vishwamitra was leading Ram and Lakshman into the forests where the demons were disturbing the yagna being performed then we see Rama killing Tataki, the demoness. In this scene, we can see Rama killing Tataki a demon the demon is painted with horns just to show the difference between human and demon, those are the iconographic features that makes one character different from the other despite the similarity in the figuration. So, all the faces hand the body the other limbs they are all similar they are highly simplified and stylized, but because of the iconographic features we can clearly make difference between different characters.

Rama looks different from Lakshman, Lakshman looks different from Vishwamitra, Vishwamitra looks different from the demoness and so on and so forth. So, what we see that Rama killed the demon on the order of Vishwamitra and to signify it we can notice

Vishwamitra behind Rama when he is killing Tataka. Vishwamitra goes back and gives instruction to Rama so that Rama can kill Tataka.

So, in the next scene Vishwamitra gives the boys with the knowledge of the Devastras. So, all the weapons which are given by the celestial characters they are coming in. So, he is offering them with that. So, these people are getting trained on how to use the celestial weapons. So, it is the bala and adi bala, those two weapons that are offered to them as a blessing and then Vishwamitra trains them in advance religion and guides them how to use them and the restrictions and so on.

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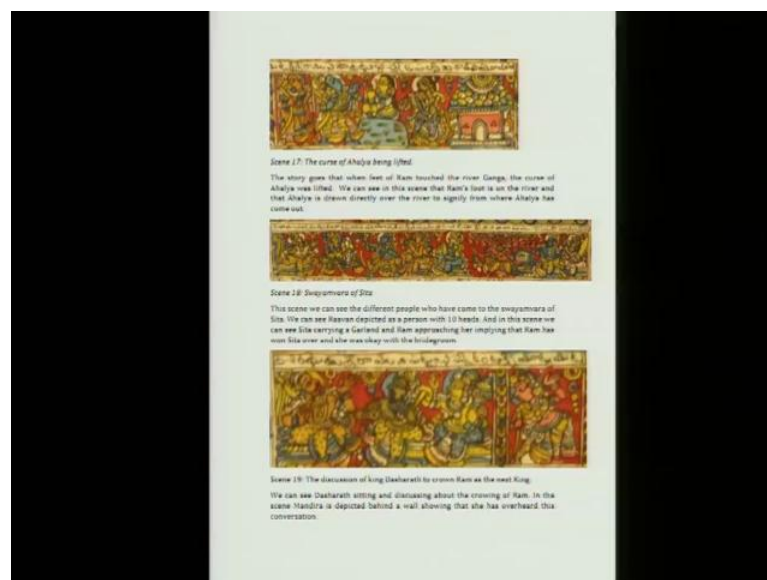
Then we see Rama Lakshman killing Maricha and Subahu, the two demons. So, these were two demons that were disturbing the yagnas performed by the sages that time. So, the scene shows Rama and Lakshman the two brothers killing demons Maricha and Subahu who were disturbing the yagnas, the yagna performances symbolized by sages on either side of the fire and then Rama getting to know about Sita's Swayamvara.

After he gets to know that there is one Swayamvara being arranged by Janaka the king of Mithila and he wants his daughter Sita to get married off he leaves for that, Vishwamitra telling Rama Lakshman about the holiness of river Ganga on their way. So, Rama and Lakshmana they are just going accompanied by Vishwamitra and on the on their way comes Ganga. So, this is the first time they are viewing Ganga and that is another very serene experience by the two of them. So, in this scene we can see that representation of

Ganga and to show that it is full of life we can see fish they are drawn there on the river. Now the whole light blue base with the textures is quite simplified and it does not have any natural resemblance as such, it is not naturalistic and the fish is also quite decorative. We see quite a few of them, the snails are also there. So, it is the water body which is which has lots of prosperity to it. So, it is almost the source of life and it has that kind of a feel to it with the simplified depiction of it. So, there is people, they are watching the river Ganga.

The scene shows that Rama and Lakshman looking at each other and as Vishwamitra was telling them about the river, this shows astonishment in between them showing the high regard that river Ganga had for them.

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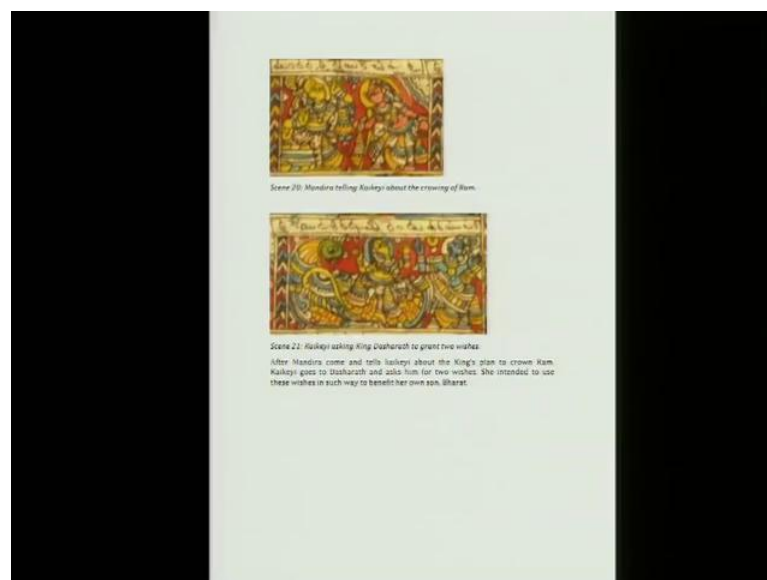


The story goes on the curse of Ahalya being lifted. So, the story goes that when feet of Rama touched river Ganga there was a stone and Ahalya was the lady who turned into the stone and there are stories connected to it. So, when they touched river Ganga and that stone, the curse of Ahalya was lifted. So, we can see in the scene that Rama's foot is on the river and the stone is shown there and we can see the texture of the stone once again it is the light blue stone from Ganga and that river water that has some stone like texture. So, Rama touched his foot on the river, on the stone of the river and with that the curse was lifted from Ahalya.

So, we can see in the scene that Rama's foot on the river and Ahalya is drawn directly over the river to signify from where Ahalya is coming out. So, there we see that Janaka is sitting at one side in his throne and also, we see the appearance of Raavan who was also one of the candidates who came seeking Sita and Sita is standing there with the garland and Rama is approaching Sita. So, this scene we can see the different people who have come to the Swayamvara of Sita. We can see Raavan depicted as a person with ten heads and in the scene, we can see Sita carrying a garland and Rama approaching her implying that Rama has won Sita over and Sita was okay with the bridegroom. So, they liked each other and that shows the promise that a marriage is going to happen very soon at it is followed by the marriage.

So, we can see that Dasharath sitting and discussing about the crowning of Rama. So, after marriage it is a reason that you know Rama should be made the king by Dasharath the wait was over there was a queen also on her way. So, in that scene it shown that Mandira or Manthara is depicted behind the wall, there is a separation and then we see Manthara standing there she is one of the main servants of Kaikeyi. So, she is standing there and she is listening to all the discussions from behind the wall. So, it is showing that she was overheard this conversation totally.

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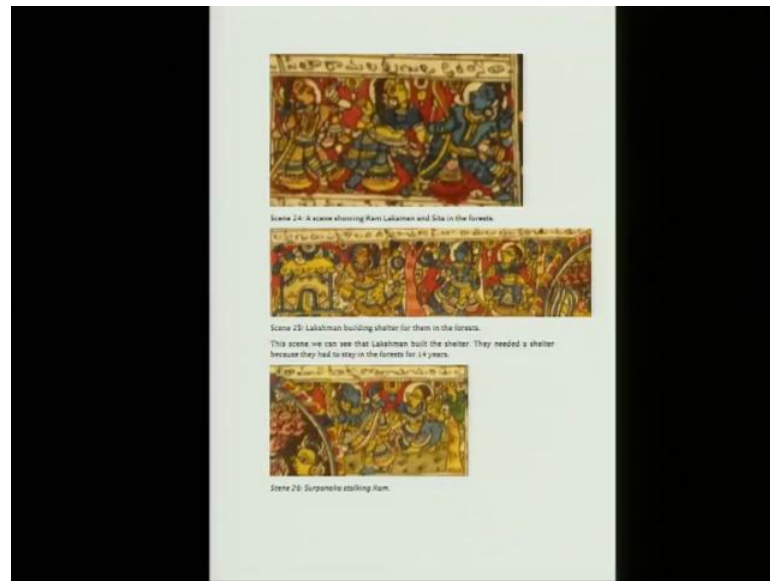
So, these three queens Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra; Kaushalya's son was Rama, Kaikeyi's was Bharat and then Sumitra had two sons Lakshman and Shatrughan. Now

Manthara or Mandira telling Kaikeyi about crowning of Rama, after Manthara comes and tells Kaikeyi about king's plan to crown Rama, Kaikeyi goes to Dasharath and asks him for two wishes. She intended to use these wishes in such a way to benefit her own son Bharat. So, there had been some story that it was Dasharath who promised to Kaikeyi once that he will fulfill two of her wishes and now it was time for Kaikeyi to use that in the benefit of his own son. So, that Rama cannot become the king and Bharat becomes the king instead.

So, before I continue with the rest of the story I will clarify here that this is just a reminder that Dashrath had three wives Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Kaushalya's son is Rama, Kaikeyi's Bharat and Sumitra had the twin brothers Lakshman and Shatrughan. Now Rama was very close to Lakshman and Bharat was with Shatrughan. So, they made these two pair, but they did not have any conflict, they were very friendly amongst each other. But then Kaikeyi once like you know asked for two wishes and rather Dasharath made a promise to Kaikeyi to fulfill two of her wishes and right now she just felt this is the golden opportunity. Manthara also conspired a little bit and then she felt this is the time when she should go and ask for those wishes and Dasharath has to fulfill it because he is the king and he is the person who has to keep his words. So, she comes and asks for those famous two wishes.

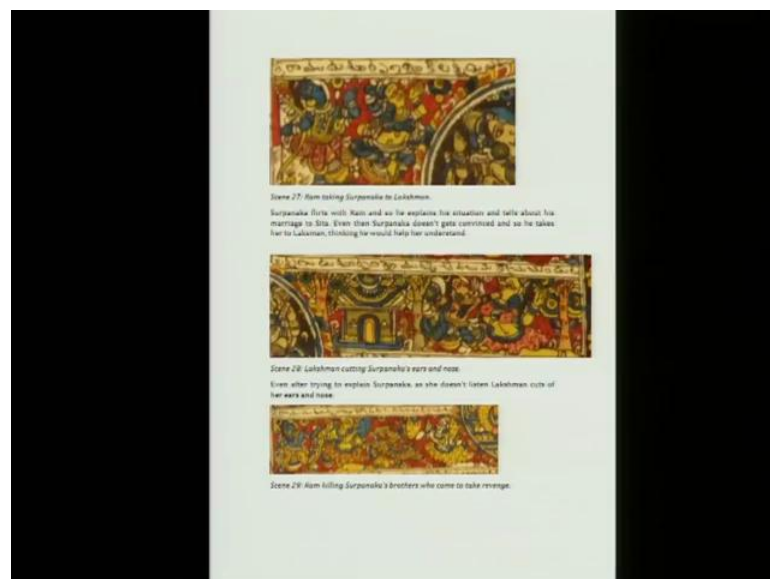
Those two wishes were first of all the cancellation of the Abhishek ceremony for Rama right then. So, this is to request or express the wish to Dasharath by Kaikeyi not to make Rama the king of the throne. So, rather you know having Bharat as the next brother to be in his place and become the king and the next wish was even more dangerous that she wanted Rama to go in exile for another fourteen years to keep the throne secure for Bharat. So, with that the story goes on and I will show you the next frame. Kaikeyi informing Rama about his exile Rama Lakshman and Sita leaving the courtyard before leaving for the forest, so Sita accompanied Rama and Lakshman as his follower brother also said that he needs to be there for the for both of their protection. So, three of them they leave finally.

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A scene showing Rama, Lakshman and Sita in the forest; Lakshman are building a shelter that is a parnashala or the parnakutir that is the small hut made out of dry leaves. So, that is the shelter for them in the forest. The scene we can see that Lakshman built the shelter, they needed a shelter because they had to stay in the forest for next 14 years, and then the appearance of Surpanaka who started stalking Rama.

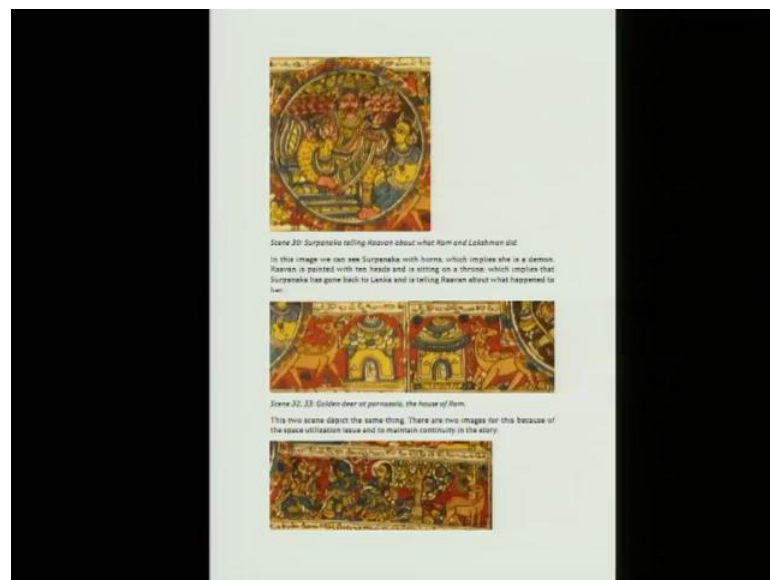
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And the Surpanaka was the sister of Raavan, the demon whom we saw before in the Swayamvara of Sita, who was refused and who could not win Sita. So, that was another side of it.

So, Rama taking Surpanaka to Lakshman; Surpanaka flirts with Rama and so he explains his situation and tells about his marriage to Sita even then Surpanaka does not get convinced. So, he takes her to Lakshman thinking he would help her understand. Lakshman cutting Surpanaka's ears and noses, even after trying to explain Surpanaka as she do not listen Lakshman cuts off her ears and nose - Rama killing Surpanaka's brothers who came to take revenge and after that Surpanaka is telling Raavan about what Rama and Lakshman did to her.

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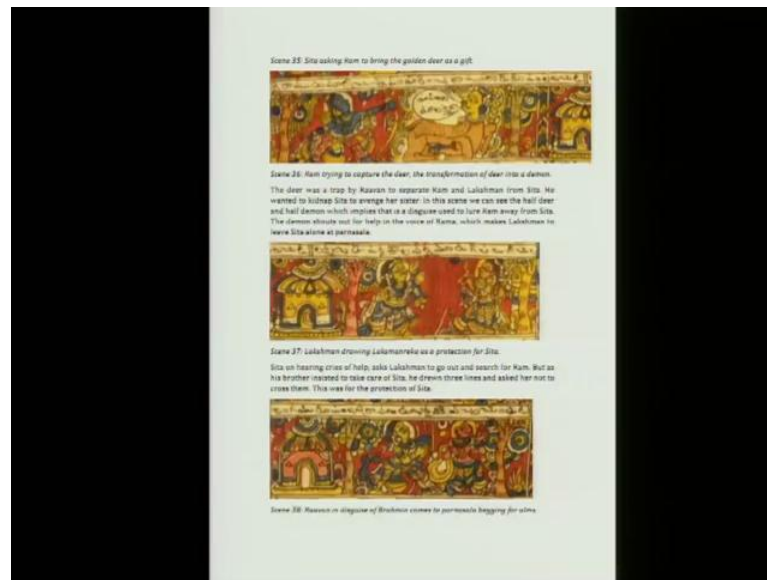


So, in this image we can see Surpanaka with horns which imply she is a demon. Raavan is painted with ten heads and is sitting on a throne which implies that Surpanaka has gone back to Lanka and is telling Raavan about what happened to her. So, the golden deer at the parnashala or the parnakutir, the hut that was made by Lakshman, we see the golden deer in two directions which are almost like a mirror image and that also gives us the feel as if he is loitering around to get attention. So, this is the demon in disguise of the golden deer and in front of house of Rama in the forest.

So, the two scenes depict the same thing. There are two images for this perhaps because the space utilization issue and to maintain continuity into the story also showing how he

is appearing disappearing and there is a mystery about it that the artist perhaps wanted to show. And then what we see in the picture is the three of them Rama, Lakshman and Sita they are eyeing the deer and Sita is asking Rama to catch the deer so that she can take him - Sita asking Rama to bring the golden deer as a gift.

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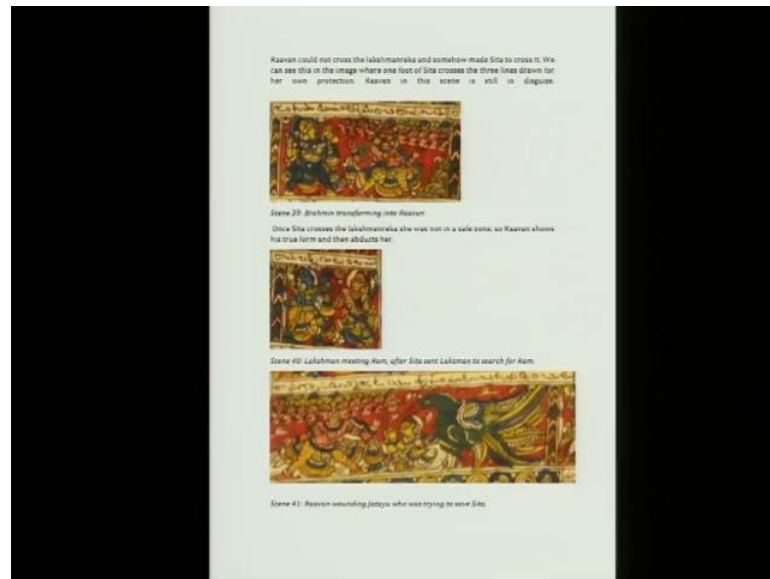
The next scene is very important where Rama is trying to capture the deer and the deer's transformation into a demon who is Marich. So, what we see here is the interesting use of a speech bubble. In the speech bubble demon in the disguise of the deer is calling out the name of Lakshman in the voice of Rama. So, he is in disguise and also, he took the voice of Rama and said the Lakshman save me Lakshman hears this from the distance and he was also wondering that his brother cannot be. So, coward, but still in the insistence of Sita he had to leave Sita alone and go. So, deer was a trap by Raavan to separate Rama and Lakshman to Sita, he wanted to kidnap Sita to avenge her sister.

In this scene, we can see the half deer and half demon which implies that is a disguise used to lure Rama away from Sita. The demon shouts out for help in the voice of Rama which makes Lakshman to leave Sita alone in the parvashala. So, what we see in scene 37 Lakshmana drawing Lakshmanreka as a protection for Sita and this lakshmanreka is another mysterious element there that it is the line it is like you confine somebody with fire. So, Sita on hearing the cries for help from Rama asks Lakshman to go out and

search for Rama. But as his brother insisted to take care of Sita he drew three lines and asked her not to cross them, this was for the protection of Sita.

Now, in the next frame what we see that Raavan in disguise of a Brahmin who comes to parnashala begging for alms.

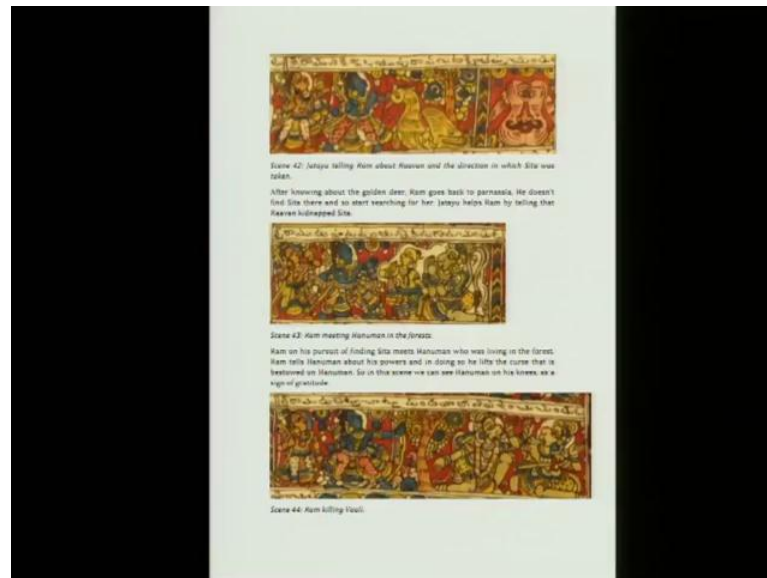
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Raavan could not cross the lakshmanreka and somehow made Sita to cross it. So, we can see that in the image where one foot of Sita crosses the three lines drawn for her own protection. Raavan in this scene is still in disguise.

Now, in the next scene, scene 39 what we see that the Brahmin transforming into Raavan. So, once Sita crosses the Lakshmanreka she was not in a safe zone. So, Raavan shows his true form and then abducts her and then we see that Lakshman meeting Rama after Sita sent Lakshman to search for Rama.

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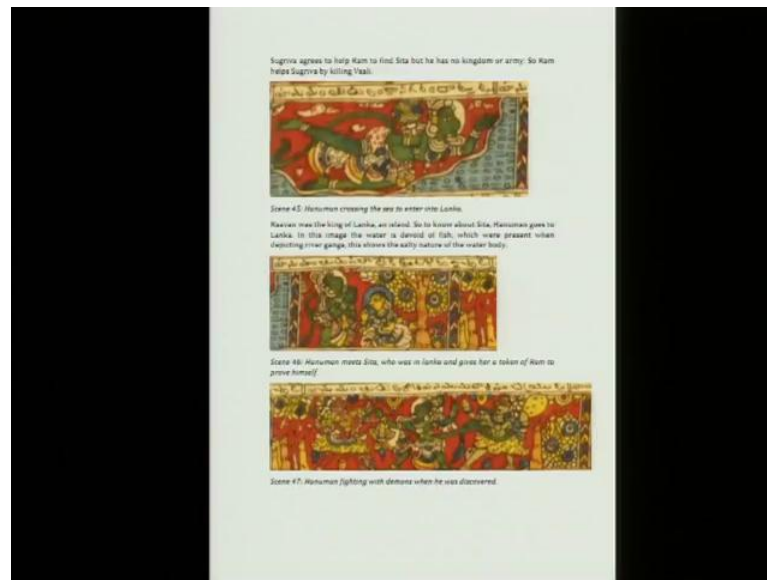
Raavan wielding Jatayu who was trying to save Sita on the way when she was abducting Sita and going out Jatayu telling Rama about Raavan and the direction in which Sita was taken. After knowing about the golden deer, Rama goes back to the parnashala he does not find Sita there and so he starts searching for her. Jatayu helps Rama by telling that Raavan has kidnapped Sita and he was the eye witness, he was injured and then he died because he was old bird who was the friend of the king Dasharath who was Rama's father.

And then there is another character in a separate frame that was there and this is another demon named Kabandha. So, this Kabandha it is a one eyed horrendous looking demon who was there, and on the way, when Rama and Lakshman were searching for Sita he appears and he wanted of them to cut off his hands so that he gets like his curse gets lifted. So, this is another small story we are not going deeper into the story, but this character is Kabandha for sure. So, after known about the golden deer Rama goes back to parnashala, he does not find Sita there and so he started searching for her. Jatayu helps Rama by telling that Raavan kidnapped Sita and Rama on his pursuit of finding Sita meets Hanuman who was living in the forest. Rama tells Hanuman about his power and in doing. So, he lifts the curse that is bestowed on Hanuman.

So, in this scene we can see Hanuman on his knees as a sign of gratitude then Rama killing Vaali. There had been two brothers Vaali and Sugriva and they had some kind of

a rivalry between them and Hanuman was their minister. So, somehow Rama got engaged with these monkeys and the kings there and this whole people came into Rama's help because you know by killing Vaali he became the friend with Sugriva and then he started to for a new venture to rescue Sita.

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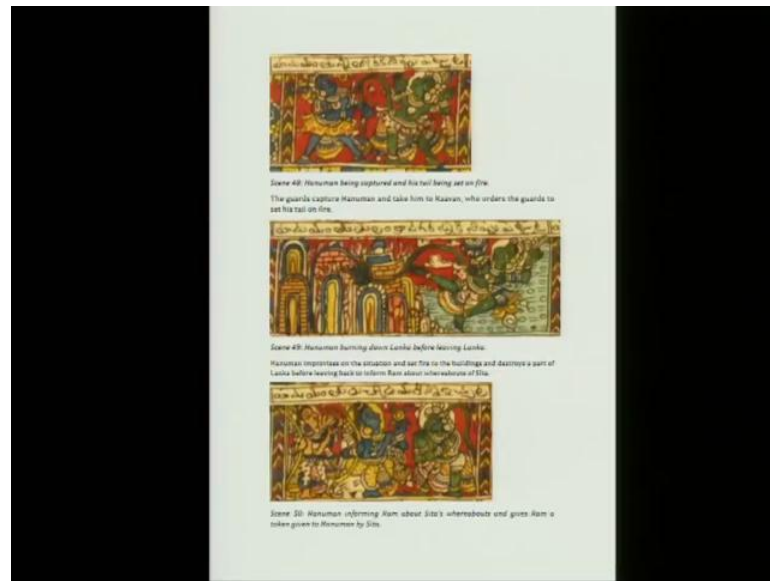
So, Sugriva agrees to help Rama to find Sita, but he has no kingdom or army. So, Rama helps Sugriva by killing Vaali.

So, Hanuman crossing the sea to enter into Lanka, so we see another water body, unlike Ganga it does not have the fish and snails and other living things because the water is salty and the span is much higher. So, they are using the same texture for showing water, but the water in river and the sight of ocean are very different in the depiction Raavan was the king of Lanka, the island. So, to know about Sita, Hanuman goes to Lanka. In this image the water is devoid of fish which were present when depicting river Ganga this shows the salty nature of the water body.

So, in scene 46 Hanuman meets Sita who was in Lanka and gives her the token of Rama to prove himself. So, he is showing the ring to Sita so that Sita trusts him.

Hanuman is fighting with demons when he was discovered in Lanka; and then in scene 48 we see Hanuman being captured and his tail being set on fire. The guards capture Hanuman and take him to Raavan who orders the guards to set his tail on fire.

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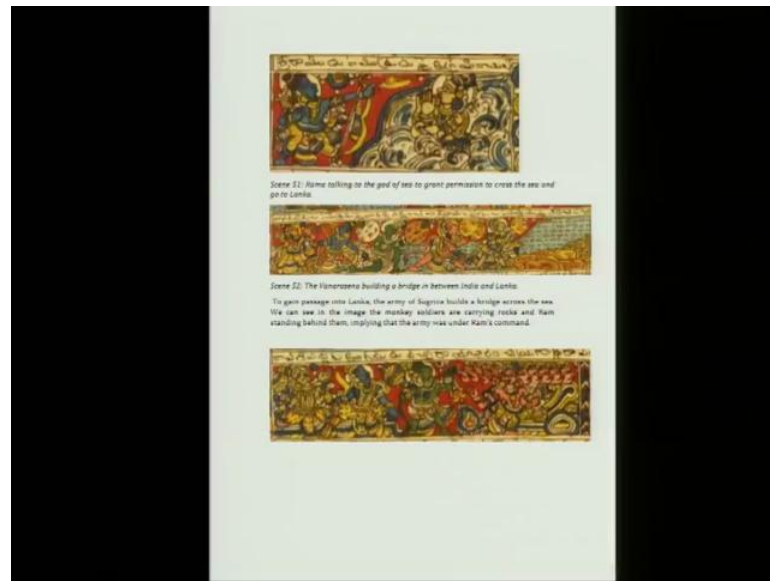


Hanuman burning down Lanka before Lanka and what we see in the picture the city, the architectural structures which is also not very angular, they are very organic in their shape. So, that is another feature for it, apart from the separator those horizontal vertical lines and the grids there are hardly any angularity in the line although there is a bit of foreshortening which is shown in Hanuman's body and the foreshortening is something that is like you know I should have discussed during the description in the semiotic level.

So, Hanuman is handling the situation and like you know he set fire to the buildings and destroyed a part of Lanka before leaving back to inform Rama about the whereabouts about Sita.

Then Hanuman informing Rama about Sita's whereabouts and gives Rama a token given to Hanuman by Sita.

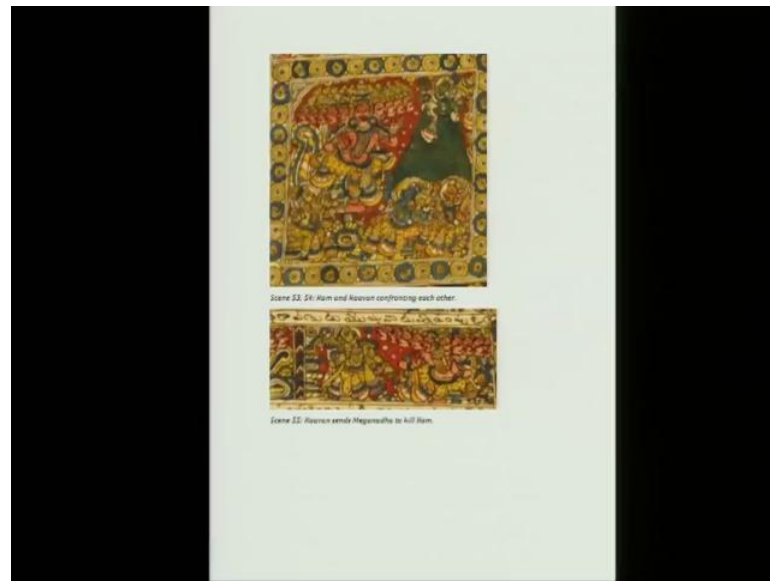
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Rama talking to the god of sea to grant him permission to cross the sea and go to Lanka and he receives the permission and then we see in the frame that the Vanarasena, the army of the monkeys building a bridge in between Bharat, India and Lanka. So, they are holding the stone, again the kind of texture we have seen the light blue stone, the stone from Ganga from where Ahalya's curse was lifted and Ahalya came out as her own form and here they are holding the same stone and that is the texture of the stone that we get to see here. To gain passage into Lanka, the army of Sugriva builds the bridge across the sea. We can see in the image the monkey soldiers are carrying rocks and Rama standing behind them implying the army was under Rama's command.

Now, we see the frame where all these people they are meeting Raavan and Raavan with his ten head, it is very easily recognizable the figure.

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So, Rama and Raavan confronting each other and here we can see Hanuman and it is also a very funny story where Hanuman was not offered with a high chair to sit and that was like an insult to another wise and intelligent person as respectable as Hanuman. So, what he did instead to add the fun element, he increased his tail as much as possible and he put it in a spiral order and made a higher chair which is higher than the throne of the king who is Raavan and he sat on it as the messenger.

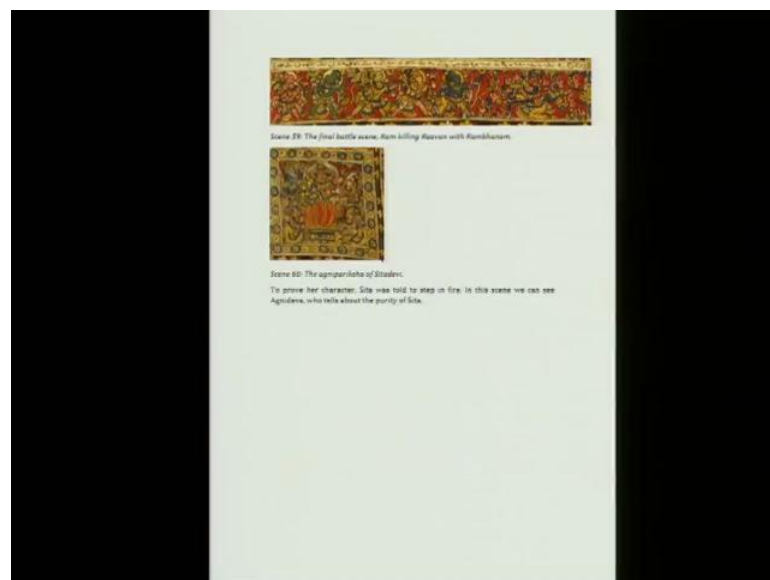
Now, Raavan sends Meganadha to kill Rama. Meganadha Raavan's son who could fight from behind the cloud.

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So, he sends his own son to kill Rama. Lakshman kills Meganadha and then we see Kumbakarna the other brother of Raavan who used to be in sleep for 6 months. So, they are trying to make Kumbakarna awaken. So, that he gets up and goes and fights.

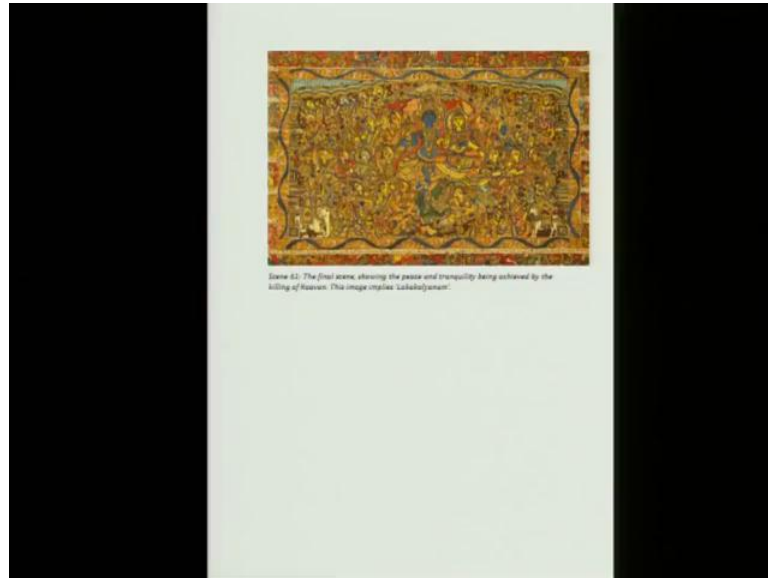
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So, he was also killed eventually and then Raavan is killing Kumbakarna so they are defeated again. So, in the final battle scene we see Rama is killing Raavan with Ramabhanam.

So, the Agnipariksha of Sita devi is the last frame at the right bottom corner. To prove her character Sita was told to step in fire in this scene we can see Agnideva who tells about purity of Sita.

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And this is the center frame that shows the wedding scene of Rama and Sita that I described before into its semiotic level. It is very interesting see they always place the happy episode as the key frame at the center. So, the final scene that was actually that happened much before and that again took place after you know in presence of Hanuman. So, this is a scene that is like just before Sita was you know taken by the mother earth or the fire. So, in the final scene they are showing the peace and tranquility being achieved by the killing of Raavan, the image implies Lokakalyanam.

So, this was more or less an analysis of the saga of Ramayana in its semiotic level in one part and then we described the theme as much as possible. So, we can make out that it had its purpose though this is what which is done more recently. So, once it had been made, this kind of artwork to educate people, to tell all the stories to people and let them know the thing, but that purpose is lost long back. So, right now we see them for their aesthetic purpose. So, it is not that much to tell the story rather there are lots of scenes that escaped from the whole picture because it is a long story and they cut it really short in like relatively. But this is something where you know we are using them as the pieces,

it does not have the utilitarian aspect that was connected to it traditionally, but right now they are individual paintings and we appreciate them from that perspective.

So, in this particular module we are going to see many more such artwork which had some traditional connection some of the artworks are apparently free from their traditional thematic aspects, but still they are carrying the stylistic identity that is part of the traditional skill. So, we are going to see them in our next lectures and try to understand the contemporary profile of the paintings. Also, like you know this is very important that I discussed in the beginning that we should take a look from the critical point of view and judge them for their aesthetic qualities.