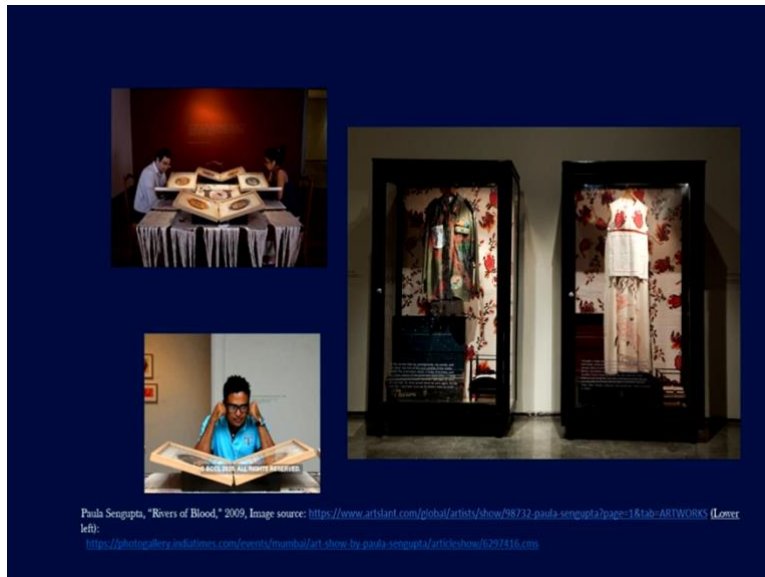


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture - 57

Hello everyone I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are continuing our discussion on the multimedia approaches, the second part of it or the final part of it now. So we have already started talking about some of the artists who have recontextualized some of the traditional means of expression or the traditional media which were already been there.

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So if Zarina Hashmi's work we find that that how that recontextualize the use of print making. Then the other artists perhaps we see would be Paula Sengupta and then Paula Sengupta's work that we see on screen here. And this is all these works come from this one particular project which is called the Reverse of Blood that was displayed in 2009 in Mumbai and in this work what we find that how the printed works like.

For example, here we see how the works which were printed on paper etching prints. Then those were framed, but the frames were not displayed on the wall like the traditional display of paintings and prints. Instead of that, all of them were kept as books and then they were placed onto tables.

And so, this work what we find that I mean then in this work like the printed this images, they actually came to represent almost like a book of recipes.

Or like I mean a place where you get to know about different kind of food. So, on this work, also like the making of the work we find that multiple intaglio plates or the etching plates were overlapped. And this deliberate overlap, that also gave rise to this complex images, which also that I mean as in this particular set of works or in this project Paula Sengupta had spoken about her roots in East Bengal which is now called as Bangladesh.

And then how in this particular work that we see which is around this table, it is about recipes about cooking fish. And in Bengal as in East Bengal and in West Bengal, there are different recipes of making fish and there are also those differences, which are celebrated sometimes those are fought upon and so those issues what we find that I mean those were also brought together on this same table about the recipes.

And then how those printed images, those came to represent the book of recipes or almost like I mean a place where people can sit and flip through menu of a restaurant like space. What we also find that I mean how these printed images were celebrated that the same prints were then used in other displays as well or like I mean you know the same prints can also go onto the wall. So when the print like I mean print allows those kinds of movements that I mean one print can one image can be made in multiple editions and since there are overlapped prints.

So then we find that there are many possibilities or flexibility in terms of constructing dismantling or like reconstructing images. So and when the same print that appears on the table in the horizontal plane, that the same print which appears here when it goes up to the wall, then it also gets a new context. So that is not something that just adds to the thematic of this the shared identity, which Sengupta had spoken about. But also about how the; it also celebrates or like I mean it also indicates to the fact that how printmaking makes this kind of shift.

Or giving different context to the same set of images. So this is something that we certainly do not see, that how painting or works which are exclusively done by hand, singularly can serve. So this

is how we find that I mean when how printmaking was recontextualized by artists like Paula Sengupta. So and in addition, we find that I mean these artists they have not stopped in terms of looking at one particular medium for expression.

But there are multiple kind of things which were brought together. So as we can see those the cupboards here in the right side of the screen. And here we find that there were two cupboards which were made one for her father, one for her mother. And how the fabrics, which some of the fabrics, which came from her family those were then incorporated with some of the constructed fabric by her.

And then there are also like the family heirloom and few other objects, which came from her family those were made as part of this installation. So in other words, what we find that, I mean this idea of object that gets a high significance that some of the objects which already has a history attached to them. Some of the objects which came from this deep experience the experiences of laws, the experiences of travel and everything else.

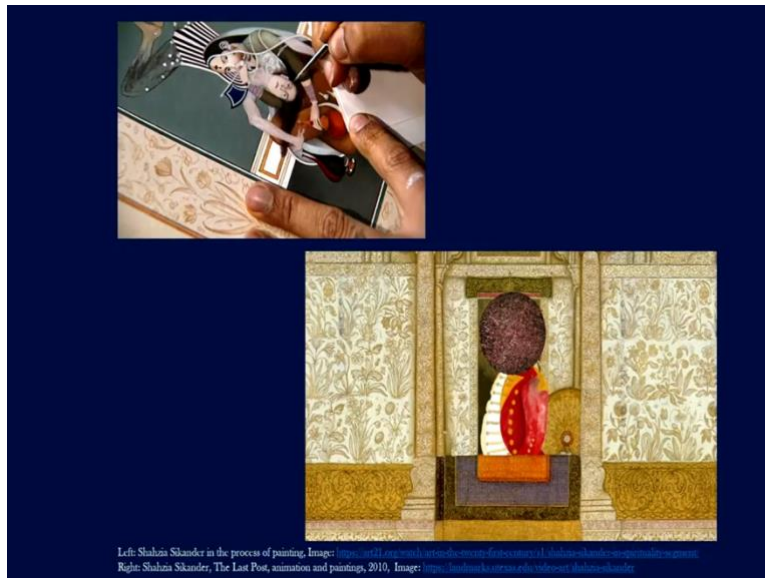
So they were then made part of this artistic projects something we definitely do not see much in the second half of 20th century. So this objects many times, which are addressed as so called found objects. So those are the ones what we find that those objects, were already existing in certain families, in certain socio-political and cultural situations. And then they were taken by the artist.

And many times we find that I mean how those objects, that their histories and their the memories attached to them were enhanced by the artistic interventions. So the identity of the object was not compromised. But they were sort of kept in conversation with the works that the artist would produce. So in this way what we find that there was also a discussion about what is the role of artists in our society.

So it is not just about artists who would make those artworks. It is not just about displaying the works and justifying them. But it is also to engage with our histories, with our memories, many things which are not really addressed in the institutional narratives, in the institutional archive lives

and the artist became much more involved and invested in gleaning those narratives and making them as part of their artistic factors.

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So talking about the use of history in the works, what we also find that people like in the 1990s, we also see that something else was happening. Perhaps not in India, but across the border in Pakistan so what we see that in the NCA or the National College of Arts in Lahore, which was previously the Mio School of Art, that I have already spoken about in one of the earlier lectures that, how Mio School of Art was one of the one of the significant Colonial art education art schools in the Indian subcontinent.

So this National College of Art where we find that there was a training program for a miniature painting. And in this school, we find that this artist Shahzia Sikandar a Pakistani artist then like I mean she has moved to the USA and she lives and works there. So what we find that I mean Shahzia Sikandar has looked into the making of miniature paintings. And we find that, in her many experiments and explorations that the use of text, use of imagery, use of like imagery directly from the history those things were brought forward in her images.

So her, the technique of making the works, we still find that is painstakingly following the making of miniature paintings the way she had learned. And then of course, she had extended that into drawings. And then we also find that how the things like I mean making video, making installation

and very significantly the use of animation, which also came only after 2000s or from the 1990s in the field of art making.

So before that we definitely have animation, but they functioned in a very different sphere. So they were not usually considered as part of like I mean the art making practices. So those things we find that those were brought forward, that she started her practice, Shahzia Sikandar, she started her practice from the this the technique of making this Indian Miniatures and then she extended that to things like animation making videos and everything.

So in the left side, in the upper left we see that, there is an image of Shahzia Sikandar, making this paintings. And here we see that I mean this fine needle like brush that is used and some of those brushes as we also know that those were described even in the Mughal atelier as like how the squirrel hair brushes are used. And the selection of the squirrel hair that is also a specialized process.

And then with that like I mean the brush that will be made like I mean the tip of the brush and that is used for making the minute test of the lines, like the hair, each and every wrinkle in the skin and everything those things can be made with the use of this kind of brushes. So we find that kind of training which survived in some of the cities with this Mughal history. For example, in Delhi, in Lahore and so on, so those knowledge were passed on to Shahzia Sikandar.

And then she had utilized that and she had recontextualized that to express concern about the changing world around her. And so taking that as an example and how that was also incorporated as part of our animation practice. So here is a still from her animation which is called the last post. And that was an animation work which was displayed in 2010. And in this one was this particular work was about East India company's intervention and the opium trade in China and an of course in the Indian subcontinent.

So what we find that she had looked into and she usually does this that not only just looking into, but directly quoting images from history. So something that we find that was that is also present in Gulam Mohammed Sheikh's work. So what happens for Shahzia Sikandar, is that she directly

quotes images like I mean certain images, which are recognizably from either Mughal miniature, from Basohli miniature and so on. So those images are then like recontextualized in her work without losing their original context.

So in this one what we find that, she had also used this the Mughal architectural framework. And here we see that I mean this is a Darbar scene. Usually like the window, the Jharokha window through which, the Mughal the Kings or the Emperors would appear to the audience. So it is probably it can be a Diwan-i-aam or a Diwan-i-Khas complex. And so what we find that I mean all this recognizably Mughal Flora on the wall with like I mean all the elaborate decorations on the panels as well as and the columns and everything else.

And at the center what we find that there is a recognizably British official who is depicted here. So from the image of this British official I mean why it is recognized, it is because of this red coat, which is synonymous with the British officials. And what we find that and of course like I mean in the in the South Asian visual culture we certainly associate that with that. So what happens here is that I mean this particular image of the Britisher is found from one place.

And then like I am in this particular scene about this Jharokha window is also found from another place. Perhaps one from a painting or an oil painting perhaps and then one is from Mughal miniature. And then this images instead of like I mean doing something some modification to them. They were almost like I mean they were put together almost like doing a collage in painting. So that I mean the character of the Mughal miniature is not lost.

The character of this British figure is also not lost. Now what happens when an artist does this kind of coating? So they certainly recontextualize the images from the history. But at the same time they also can have the creative approach towards re-looking at the history. Something that we; perhaps do not see in the institutional history writing. So in this particular work what happens is that we find that this figure of this British official, this company official.

It emerges and then like I mean then at one point we find that it totally dismantles. It just vanishes and then like I mean there is a rebuilding of the form. So something she also had spoken about and

she had mentioned that how the transformation of this recognized forms into something else is something that I mean she is deeply interested in. But what also happens here that, how this transformation of this forms, that we do not really see that in the history.

But in this artistic reconstruction or retailing of those pasts that we; can find. And through that there are newer approaches for us to look into history. There are new approaches for us to think about what are the roles of the historical narratives in our lives today. So what we see here there if there is this part of the man, which is present and then like I mean the head is then like I mean in the process of being exploded.

So and that is the reason like I mean the head is not shown in this particular still. And as I have mentioned that I mean this still comes from an animated video. So that is how like the transformations are depicted and they are played with.

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So from there also we see that some of the artists like Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, who had started working from 1960s and we have already mentioned that I mean how people like Sheikh, Jyoti Bhatt, Swaminathan they were in the 1970s. They started thinking like what are the use of tradition, how do we think about the renewed use of tradition in our societies. So it was certain different approach from the way we think about the Bombay progressives, as we have already discussed.

And then we see that Gulam Sheikh was Gulam Sheikh is involved in terms of how different traditions in India. That can be from the folk traditions that can also be from some of the images like the miniature paintings, how those images have their context and how those context actually help us to understand our own position in the society. So this is an image that we find and which is called the Kaavad.

And Kaavad, is it is a particular tradition of work that we find in Rajasthan, where those painted wooden box-like structures. They are carried with the storytellers and then those boxes are opened, and we see that there are images in the interior of those images as many doors that open and there are more things to see in them. So that particular idea we find that was appropriated by Gulam Sheikh.

And we find that I mean those certain characteristic features of this Kaavad those are also kept here which bears this recognizable trace with this tradition in Rajasthan. And here we find that there is this how the doors they have opened and then there are clamps to hold the doors. So it allows like I mean further movement of this forms. So this is something we find there and within this forms there are more images.

So it depends on how much of the doors you open and where you keep the this opened doors. And so depending on that you can make your own narratives out of the painted images. And what we see here that the traditional painting process is used for making those paintings on this on the wooden surface. But at the same time we also find that inkjet print is also used here. And how those prints are used alongside the painted imagery.

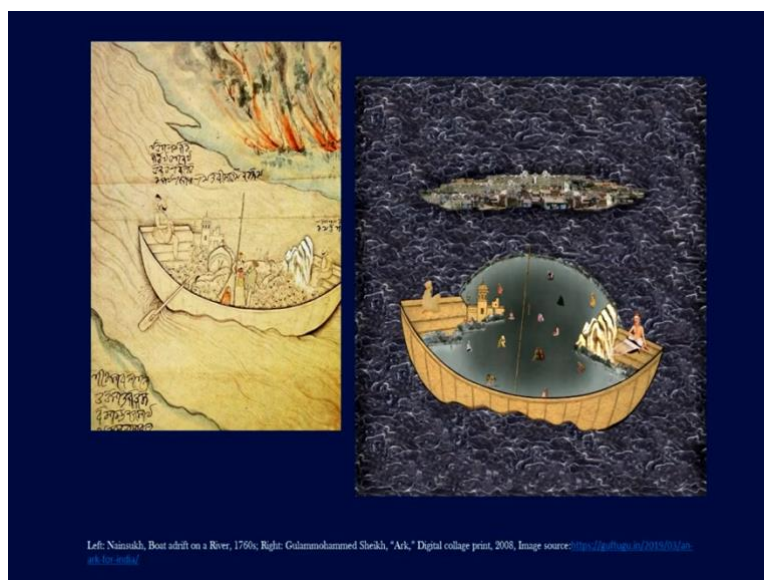
So it is not really like the paint sticking works is printed on inkjet print and then paste it there. But it is a deliberate decision to have those differences. That certain way of doing the painting that might resemble the method of doing the Kaavad in Rajasthan. But then there are also shift in terms of how the artist position is different from the artisans. That is also something that we find that those were also incorporated as a dialogue in this work.

So in this work I mean as we can see that there are image I mean it is this entire idea of this wooden box like form and which comes from Kaavad. And Gulam Sheikh also deliberately keeps the title of the work as Kaavad to have that reference with the this Rajasthani folk form. But then like in terms of the use of images we find that there are various images which are recognizably from different painting traditions.

So for example, this particular figure that we find that appears in the depiction of Hamza Nama in Akbar's atelier. So that kind of images those we find that I mean they would have their presence because a Gulam Sheikh is also an artist who had deeply studied Mughal miniature, various other miniature paintings, manuscript paintings and so on. So to bring certain images from her life, his library and putting them together in this wooden Kaavad is something that comes from his practice, from his experience.

At the same time that also argues for understanding this kind of works differently from how the works would be traditionally perceived by the viewers. So this works in some ways that I mean they not only bring these connections to the audience but also ask the audience to know about this different kind of traditions that and the historic painting practices. So in other words that this artistic practices serve as bridge between the learning about history at the same time to be a thoughtful and critical about our present.

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Left: Nainsikh, Boat adrift on a River, 1760; Right: Gulammohammed Sheikh, "Ark," Digital collage print, 2008, Image source: <https://gulfmag.com/2018/01/16/ark-by-ashraf/>

This is another work by Gulam Sheikh and in this one what we see that in this work sort of like I mean had its reference from this particular boat, which was paint, which was drawn by Nainsukh this celebrated artist from Guler and then Kangra. And it this image was done in the late 18th century. So in this image what we see that there is this boat, which almost looks like this Noah's boat and where we see this Royal figure sitted.

And then part of the landscape of this land is there in the in this boat. So like part of the hill we find and then there are part of architecture, greenery and people all of them are there in this boat. And then we see the boat is in the middle of a river. And as we know that I mean the reverse in this region in Kangra and in the Pahari region that they are turbulent. And so this is something that I mean these ideas those were reinterpreted by Gulam Sheikh in this work that we see in the right side of the screen here.

So this work what we have, this is a digital collage print. So the print is made I mean the entire work is made from collecting different images putting them together digitally as a collage and then that is printed. So in this one as well we see that this idea of the water. That is enhanced like this idea of the turbulent water. That is there in Nainsukh's drawing of this river perhaps this is Beas . And then this idea of this turbulent water is the extended and it sort of marks all the margins of this of this print.

And then what happens in the center what we see that there are there is this boat, which is recognizably from this Nainsukh's drawing. But then there are certain things which are different. So, if there are like I mean these Royal figures that we see in the two ends of this boat in Nainsukh's painting. So there are two images that we see in this painting as well. And one image is of Gandhi.

Here another image is of Kabir, Sant Kabir. So what happens here is that I mean the ones who sit in this two crucial points of a boat they are considered to be the one, who show us the way. And they also monitor the movement of the boat. And if it is in turbulent, water turbulent water can also stand as a reminder of a time which is turbulent time. And so those things if we see that, then these are the people who are the most important ones to show us the way whoever is there in this in the boat.

So for that reason keeping Gandhi and Kabir as these two crucial figures in the two ends of this boat is something that we can imagine what he attempts to say through that. And perhaps like, I mean this how these two people were deeply engaged in inter communal harmony and at the same time learning from people also disobeying the societal, the caste hierarchy and all those things. Those things we perhaps see that, those things are emphasized by putting these two crucial figures in this boat.

And also we can imagine that how both of them they have spoken about peace. And then these two figures who are placed in this turbulent landscape how making of those two figures against this landscape that or the waterscape we see that how this idea of peace has been emphasized. And of course, there are also a set of images that they come from various historical backgrounds I mean from renaissance, pre-renaissance, early renaissance paintings to Mughal miniatures and so on.

All of them we find that to be there. So in kind it is almost like an assemblage something that we also see here, but in very different terms. And of course, this recognizable hill structure that we find, it is here as well, which bears a direct link between Nainsukh's drawing and Gulam Sheikhs there is this printed work. In the distance we see there is a land and since like I mean we see it as a small strip of land there it seems like a dreamland.

But this is basically it is a collage of Gulam Sheikhs hometown, Surendra nagar, in Gujarat. And of course, that I mean when we see the current political situation, the socio-political situation and especially in this part of Gujarat, then also that comes into question that I mean whether this is a land that is dreamed of whether this is a land which suggests a peaceful harmonious future or whether like I mean we need to have intervention into think through this situation.

So this kind of questions we find that those are brought forward by people like Gulam Sheikh, Shahzia Sikandar, Paula Sengupta and so on. And this question have always been in conversation with history and also that allowing or compelling the audience to educate themselves with the various images, various artworks in the history, to appreciate and to understand what is happening in their work.

So it is a different kind of practice I would say, that it is a deliberate practice which requires a different kind of attention from the regular display of works which were there in the late 20th century. We will continue more on that in the next lectures. Thank you.