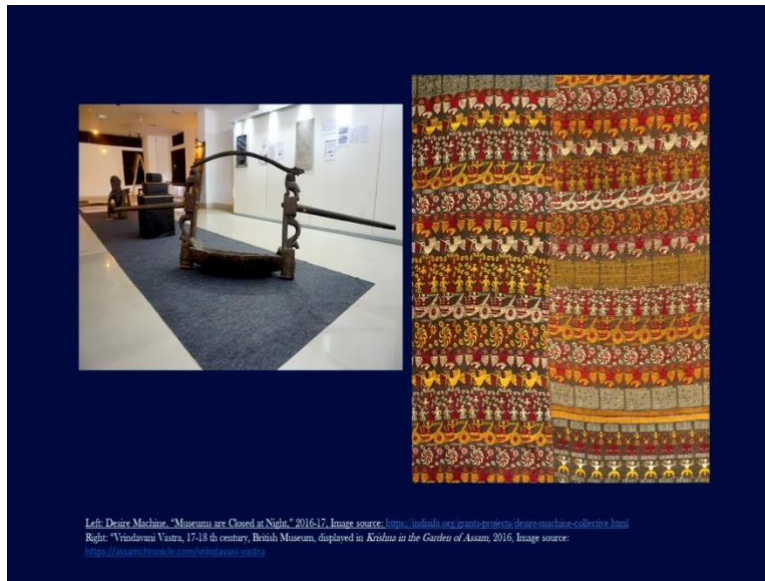# Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
Prof. Rajarshi Sengupta
Department of Humanities and Social Science
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture - 60

Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are at the final instalment of our lecture on the multimedia approaches the second part. So that means that I mean, we are almost at the end of our course. And so I will be continuing the theme that I mean that I have already started addressing in the last lecture here.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:37)

Left: Desire Machine, "Museums are Closed at Night," 2016-17, Image source: https://indiaifa.org/grants-projects/desire-machine-collective.html
Right: "Vrindavani Vastra, 17-18 th century, British Museum, displayed in *Krishna in the Garden of Assam*, 2016, Image source: https://assamchronicle.com/vrindavani-vastra

So and that is about the role of artists in research, the role of artist in collaborations, and then also addressing like I mean what are the roles of art in our changing society. So what we see here is that there is this one particular project that was undertaken by a Desire Machine collective and that got this grant from Indian foundation for the arts and this was actually in this took place in the island of Majuli in Assam;

And what we see here, this is called the Museums are Closed at Night that took place in 2016-2017. During this time the project had developed and we see that there was this there is this museum in Majuli. And of course, Majuli being this very culturally significant site not only for Northeast, but also for the entire Indian subcontinent and for the Vaishnavite traditions and then

like a particular form of dance;

And then also like the mask and various different modes of ornamentation in architecture as well as on textile and of course, for the rich literary works. So for those reasons what we find that this particular site or this area in Assam, Majuli is it remains significant. And then there was there is also this museum space where we find that there were certain objects, which were there. Other thing is that I mean for the lack of preserving for the lack of viewership;

And everything we find that many of those objects were tucked away and did they almost remained away from the public view and many people perhaps also were not aware of like I mean what kind of objects and things were there in the museum and how that can also help in understanding the regional specificity or the specificity of the Majuli island there. So those are some of the things that we find that was brought forward by Desired Machine collective;

And in this display called Museums are Closed at Night where some of those selected objects from the Majuli were displayed in this place and the way they were displayed also marked a shift from the way like the usual display in the museum space would take place either on the pedestral or in the glass case. And this display also allowed a different kind of viewer's participation from the more formalized displays.

In display also we also see this highly specialized form of weaving that was featured in the Vrindavani Vastra. And this Vrindavani Vastra is that we see it is from 17th and 18th century and this is an example of that it is highly specialized form of weaving that we only find in Majuli in Assam and Assam is known for its weaving but I mean this is also like I mean highly specialized in that.

In which we find that the Vrindavani Vastra is the Vaishnavite textile in which we have inscriptions, scriptures written from the Vaishnavite text. At the same time various figures, the narrative scenes are also depicted on to them. Like for example, here we see that I mean how this particular story of Kalia or this make was there involved in Krishna's narrative and then this evil bird that was also there in one of the other narratives which Krishna defeated.

So all those things we find that in form of this repetitive patterns they became part of the Vrindavani Vastra. So Vrindavani Vastra is something that was historically been woven in the island of Majuli. But then this tradition was also lost in the subsequent periods. So this is something we find that I mean how this some of this memories, which were not preserved in the side those were also brought to the public view by this project by desired machine collective for people.

To think about what is remaining in the museum there, but also like the things, which were there in the past. But those things like Vrindavani Vastra which are not preserved at the site of Majuli, but only like I mean the only few surviving pieces of Vrindavani Vastra, which are there in some of the leading museums today in the world like: from the British museum and also like the Philadelphia museum of art.

So this kind of dialogue those are created by this artist's and who we can also think that I mean there their role not only in terms of like I mean making a set of work which would follow a particular statistic gesture. But like I mean to engage people with the history of the region, with the history of various kind of artistic and artisanal practice from the region and how those things can be taken further by the viewer's participation.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:09)

Left: A page from *Gulshan-i Ishq* (Rose Garden of Love), 1743, Bijapur, Image source: https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/634-549.html#object/49733 Right: View of the South Asian Gallery, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Photograph: RS

This is another example, let us say that I mean how this idea about the artist participation or the

artist collaboration with museums that can yield result, which not only benefits the which is not in debt intended to just I mean add a more artworks to the galleries, but it is intended for a more immersive experience of the viewers as well as like I mean the viewers deep engagement with the art works in the museum setting.

So this comes from the Philadelphia Museum of Art in USA and here what we find that there is this one this is the South Asia Gallery that is there and then like I mean in this gallery we find that there are of course, there are sculptural works, there are painted works, there are textiles and various different other expressions from South Asia. Now in one of the part what we find that there is also this this particular place one of this one of this manuscript which is featured there.

That is a Gulshan-E- Ishq and the Rose Garden of Love which is that is one of the manuscript that is in on display in Philadelphia Museum of Art and here that was made sometime in the mid 18th century and so how this particular manuscript had served as a point of departure or as a reference for the contemporary artist to interpret on that.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:46)
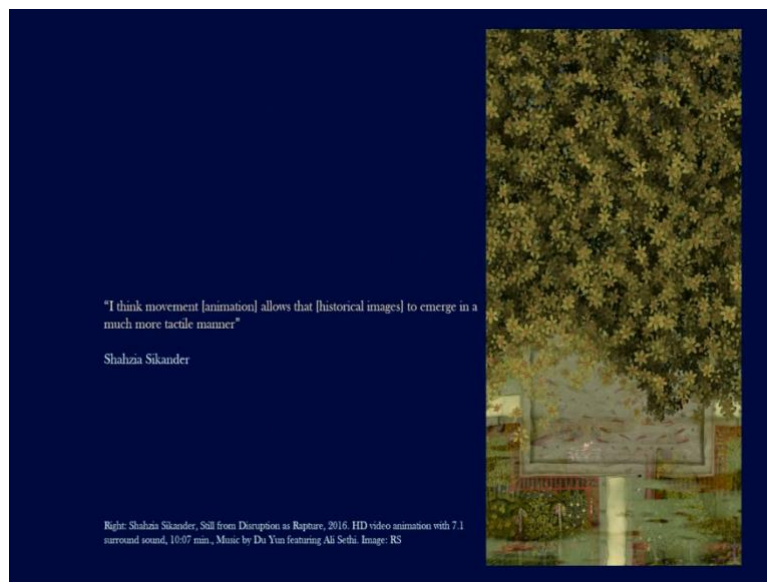
So there we find that another project by Shahzia Sikandar and this particular project which came as it was titled as Disruption as Rupture and that was in 2016. So this is it is a video animation that we find it's around 10 minutes long and then there is audio that is involved and then there are also components of music those where involved in part of the making of this animation. So for this

animation the museum had commissioned Shahzia Sikandar.

So Shahzia Sikandar as a learned artist, who is well acquainted with the; language of miniature as well as its history and context. So that was something that was recognized by the museum and the museum wanted to have this animation as one of the features in the South Asian Gallery and whereas we know that I mean many of the manuscript paintings even though they are highly expressive, but we do not really see them having this aspect of animation or having this physical movement associated with them.

So how to make that more appealing or how to see like I mean those layered movements, which are embedded in those still images. So those attempts had brought forward this kind of collaborations and this kind of commission work and for there what we see that Shahzia Sikandar made this particular video and this animated video and she also said in quotes that, I think movement in this case it will be animation, allows that historical images to emerge in a much more tactile manner".

So this is something that I mean Shahzia Sikandar says that I mean it is not just a technological intervention that makes it appealing, but there is also something about the way in which we participate with the images. So something that we see that I mean when we encounter a manuscript, painting or a page of manuscript, then we the way we read it, the way we see it are there are mode of participation with the image it will be immediately changed.

If the same images we see they are in action, they are in motion, they change, they transform and they emerge from different perspective and context. So those are some of the things we find that how this ideas, which are associated with the technology of animation that was understood and that was a absorbed and that was rightly incorporated to elucidate this historical works. So this is how we find that without research without understanding, deep understanding of works.

Then this kind of participatory works would not have been possible and this works, they are collaborative in nature as I have already mentioned that there is a component of music that is associated with it. There are also animators who would be working with the artist and that is how
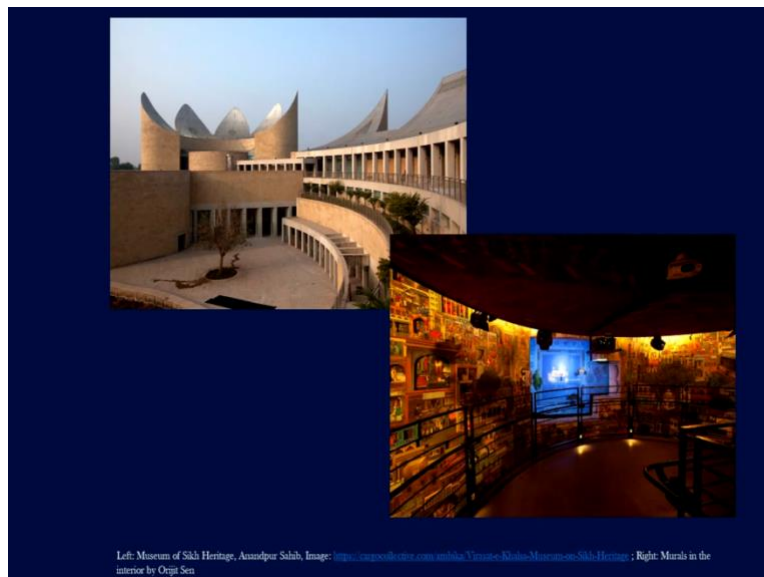
like the entire project would be built. So this is something we find that this aspect of how artist as a researcher.

And then how artist did they contribute to research, viewership, appreciation those things that gets enhanced in projects like this and this is just one project I am talking about from many different other examples. So this should this stays as those the examples of how art works can be part of this: the artist and the researcher's dialogue and how art works can also be part of historical inquiry. It is not just always the historical archive, which contribute to making the artwork.

But it can also go the other way around that how the artwork they contribute to our perception of the historical archives. So it is a back and forth and in that way we can also consider that how the artworks, they empower the position of the artworks and it is not just about as I have already mentioned that it is not the historical text which is hierarchically placed on the top of the artworks. But it can also be like I mean how the art works they are in the in conversation with the historical play text.

Also, they deposit the like the quality or the capability of sort of reshaping the historical text in many ways. So those things are brought forward by this project.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:12)

Left: Museum of Sikh Heritage, Anandpur Sahib, Image: https://carpediemhotel.com/ambika-Virsat-e-Khalsa-Museum-on-Sikh-Heritage ; Right: Murals in the interior by Orijit Sen

And to conclude, I will mention other project. And this is why this is called the Museum of Sikh

Heritage, in Anandpur Sahib, Khalsa and this is a project which was conceived in 1999 and then finally it was inaugurated in 2011. So in this project what we find, in this project we see that there are of course that we see that this is a very important site for the history of the Sikh Gurus. Like I mean Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singhji and this that which is known as Khalsa.

So this is all of them they had prime importance in the site of Anandpur Sahib and that was commemorated when the this museum was planned at this particular site. So in this place what we find that, I mean with this museum was constructed then, I mean of course there are aspects of the museum we can see in terms of its architecture and how concrete was used and then how reflective surfaces here those were used for reflecting the image of Anandpur Sahib, which is not at a distance from this site of the museum.

So all those things were there, but what I would like to sort of get little more into is the making of murals inside it which also takes forward our discussion on the participatory works. Now the works that we see inside the museum space, this the there are those interactive murals and those murals were planned by and executed by a graphic artist Orijit Sen. So Orijit Sen is an artist who is a known for his work in the in the field of graphic novels and of course in terms of design.

And so what we find in his practice is that I mean how he had been involved in making narratives. So he is also the artist who made perhaps the first graphic novel in India. So that is how we find that from the very early in his career he started interacting with the mode of narrative expressions and how the narratives hold the capability of engaging viewers, how the narrative can bring historical moments and alive in front of the viewers.

So those are some of the things we find that those that was enhanced in his within this museum of Sikh Heritage. So as we can see in the right corner and here we have a few of the murals that we have on screen and then there are those ramps through which like the viewers can walk through this place and as they walk through this see like various aspect of it is not just about Sikh religion, but it is also about like the culture in Punjab.

And then of course, there are also some of the very important sites. For example, Harmandir Sahib

or the Golden Temple in Amritsar. So this is the side that we see I am talking about this is the sacred site for the Sikhs and so this is what we see here is that there are the histories and culture of the land and then like the culture of the people all those things were combined and put together in this long narrative mural and what we see is that I mean it is not just drawn on the wall.

But like different kind of projections were made in terms of like I mean how certain surfaces are not in the same level with the others. So there are projections and at the same time different kind of lights which are used here for illuminating particular sites, particular area of the mural. So this differences what we find. So it is a kind of like in one way we can think about its root going back to perhaps some of those the sides, like the caves of Ajanta, where we also have like this in immersive experience.

Once we go inside, then we see, a depiction of the Buddhist world or like the Buddhist worldview where the Jataka stories are depicted and then we also see that how aspects of the contemporary lifestyle and culture did they also come into being in those sites and we have also discussed that I mean how the light inside those cape sites were limited. So that is how like the entire with the light of the lamp all those images must have been illuminated in front of the viewers.

So that kind of the; use of the light keeping those aspects of viewership in mind. We also see like how limited light illuminating particular sections those are used here as well. I mean I am not suggesting that I mean they have directly looked at Ajanta, but we can see that certain kind of parallels. One can draw from the historical sites in the Indian subcontinent, where the murals in the interior were already there.

So with that what we also see that I mean how this mural is not something that is hand-drawn, but it is printed and then at the same time different kind of lights which are used some time projections are used and of course like I mean the then audio is also used in the background. So by that what we see that how this technological advancement or like I mean this technological tools they have enhanced the narratives and the their capability to engage the viewers into this stories into the this narratives about the land and the religion here.

So this is some of the things we find that how Origin Sen's practice of making graphic novels, making visual narratives that comes in conversation with the technology of and the incorporation of light with audio, with projection and all this how all of them come into being in a work like this. So this work in one hand, we see that it is an artistic exploration of the otherwise the stories the narratives which are there in the history, which are there in the archives.

But then like when the artist explores this themes or then it becomes much more comprehensive to a large group of people and so that is something that is intended here and perhaps that is also something that is successfully put forward by a project like this. So we just to say that there are if we consider like I mean where do we situate people like Orijit Sen, where do we situate people like the collective like Desire Machine collective can be considered them as artists.

Or can be considered them someone who can be who only work in the like I mean in collaboration with museums or galleries. The answer would certainly be no and many different projects like for example, making graphic novel or for the Desire Machine collectives project where we see this the spiral bamboo structure for producing solar energy. So those kind of things we definitely do not consider them as so called like the institutional art practices perhaps in the mid and late 20th century, but now it certainly requires a much more an inclusive view to see what is art.

If we consider like I mean art as more than the stylistic objects, which beard the stylistic aspect of a particular set of people or an individual. If we think about like I mean art work that is much more beyond the identity politics, then we see that I mean art work is also about communication and art work is also about participation. So those things we definitely some of the aspects we that we have already seen in the historical art works in India or like the historical artisanal works in India, in the Indians Sub continent.

Something that is perhaps making a comeback with this new intervention and that is something we certainly need to think about that. This is perhaps that I mean that allows us to go beyond the perimeters of the colonial art education, that how we understand art, how we understand design, what are the binaries, what are the boundaries, what are the margins and then what are the ways in which we can push them forward.

So from there I just mentioned that, in 2010 I mean of course I mean we are almost at the stage of concluding it. But I also briefly mentioned that I mean from 2010 we see that I mean not only people like the graphic artists, not only people like the researchers and many other people. There are also a huge role of the entrepreneurs who we see that I mean they have there; perhaps not directly working in collaboration with institutes, with galleries.

But many of them we find them to use materials in a much more creative way in which like I mean that can serve a bigger community. So there are we also need to be sensible towards that we and in terms of like understanding with where we can consider that as artworks or not and if art is a way of communication expression whether that also sort of a contributes to that and of course that I mean this is also something this kind of questions we also need to ask.

Since like I mean there have been this idea about art which is much more inclusive in from if we compare that from like the modern and start practice or from the colonial art education. Then what is the direction we might think about that the art actually an art in India, the contemporary art in India perhaps take. So those issues can be addressed, those issues need to be discussed further as we move along.

So to conclude this entire section, I just say that I mean as I have as we have looked into this many

different aspect of contemporary art and this week's discussion, we have loosely divided it into two major sections in which take we have looked into the role of the artist and the idea of new media like how the technological interventions had made a difference in terms of thinking about the production of artworks

And then we have also looked into this collaboration between the curators, artists and researchers and how that also unfolded or like I mean made the way for a various different kind of collaborations with galleries and spaces which are not perhaps as conventional as the galleries or museums. So these issues we have a look there and also the rise of the biennales, the entrepreneurship and all those issues also come with the emergence of this newly the new forms in contemporary art.

So with that I would like to conclude the session and as I have already mentioned that I mean art we need to think in much more expansive terms and think about that I mean it is not just thinking in terms of the term in what is included in art, but also thinking about it margins and what we exclude. So those discussions need to be a part of whatever we study and also like I mean keeping the prominence of the materials, the techniques, the sociocultural political situations, which also translate as the content and then most importantly the human participation in making art works in India. So thank you everyone.