



MAGNIFICENCE OF FIELDS OF FLOWERS

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PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

Nakshikanthas from Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin's collection displayed at the BGFA.

The centenary of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin was celebrated by a massive *Nakshikantha* display at the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts (BGFA), which drew crowds from home and abroad. With the wooden relief by Rokeya Sultana as the unique backdrop, and the billowing bamboo trees for the background, it was a marvellous setting for a dazzling evening. Ladies had turned out in their preserved silks, satins, and *nakshikantha* patterned ephemeral saris for the occasion. The evening was balmy despite the December chill.

While inaugurating the function, Begum Jahanara Abedin stated that she had taken care of the *nakshikanthas* of Zainul Abedin's collection, some which were 150 years old, as if they were babies. She didn't know whether to dry wash them or wash them by hand. After shunning them, she stored them with *neem* leaves and naphthalene. In 1955, when there was a big famine in Bangladesh, many people visited a *nakshikantha* display at a grand hotel. They needed "pairs" and specially made table tops to put them on display. In this way they were untouched by hand, as Luva Naheed Chowdhury informed in her speech.

Earlier while speaking to the media, Chowdhury had said that Zainul Abedin collected objects of clay, metal and wood—handicrafts—which, he hoped, would one day be in great demand. This desire is being fulfilled today, she said. Even ordinary *batis* or cups were kept as decoration pieces.

Speaking to Ruby Ghaznavi, managing director of Aranya, one learned that Zainul Abedin had chosen her, Hamida Hussain and Parveen Ahmed, as crafts persons of repute to carry on the work of preserving *nakshikanthas* and such knickknacks of importance to foreign and local collectors. *Karika*, in fact, grew from this, as Ghuznavi informed. The skill for making *nakshikanthas* was there, and thus an income generating people were found. These people sought out women who had the skill to make these *kanthas* which were later sold in outlets.

It was Subir Chowdhury and Qayyum Chowdhury who had originally thought of making a grand, informative display of *nakshikanthas*, said Chowdhury. Finance Minister Abul Mal Abdul Muhit reminisced how he had helped Zainul Abedin with his work while they were together in Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Karachi and Lahore, in order to establish an art school way back in the 1960s.

Abul Khair, the founding director of Bengal Foundation, spoke of the necessity of saving the treasure trove that Zainul Abedin had left behind as a national heritage. The book on Zainul Abedin—'Great Masters of Bangladesh: Zainul Abedin'—written by Abul Hasnat, and published by Bengal Foundation and the Italian publication Skira Editore was launched at this ceremony. The monthly magazine 'Kali O Kalam' also issued a volume to mark the centenary using pictures from Zainul Abedin's personal collection.

The walls of one of the rooms of the Bengal Gallery were decorated with famous reproductions by Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin. His famous paintings, the one with a



naked child sitting beside his dead mother who was surrounded by two black crows and the other with farmers going home with hay on their shoulders, their lungis hitched up, were reproduced for the occasion. The reproduction of Abedin's depiction of men jumping from the Fort Titumir with British shoulders waiting below was also painted on the walls. Among the important photos displayed were ones with Farah Diba of Iran, and Shiekh Mujibur Rahman.

Wandering over the magnificent display of the "nakshikanthas" one found an eye catching centrepiece. It had a central motif, with a cycle and a bird in a cage with writings in Bangla done with green thread. They were done by satin stitches. The border was embroidered in a *kolka* pattern depicting pink white floral bushes with red circular plants. Some of these plants had green pink and mauve floral motifs.

Another jamdani piece which took one's breath away was the one with trees and bushes at the centre. At the side of the *nakshikantha* were four red, green and yellow flowers on trees or bushes; and one with red, green and yellow flowers stitched around it. There was a runner with mauve, orange green and red motifs. The tablecloth on display had red floral motifs with yellow and green stitches and a green border.

The piece de resistance was surely the neat snow-white piece, with the tiger and unicorn motifs, taken from legends, further enriching its grace.