



STORY OF THE humble paisley

In folk paintings of Bangladesh, the 'kalka' is identified with the raw, green mango. When placed on the four corners of the 'kantha', it has a different significance - it is identified with a tree. Needless to say, from one artisan to

ART historians believe that the humble 'kalka' - a twisted teardrop or the kidney-shaped form - is of Persian origin. In the West, the motif was termed 'paisley', derived from the town of Paisley, in West Scotland. This township was a centre for production of fine textiles and here the 'kalka' was extensively used as a motif. In Iran, where the paisley has its roots, it is known as 'Boteh Jegheh', and has been used since the Sassanid Dynasty (AD 224 to AD 651).

Majority of scholars hold that the paisley is in fact a convergence of a stylised floral spray and a cypress tree - which is a symbol of life and eternity, a reminiscent of Iran's Zoroastrian past. The paisley is still popular in Iran, as it is in South and Central Asian countries.

In the 16th century, travellers from Persia came to the subcontinent and along with them came the paisley motif depicted in classical paintings, and textile. While it was woven using gold or silver threads on silk or other high quality textiles for gifts for weddings and special occasions, in Bengal it had gained common parlance, while still being used to produce textile of exquisite quality.

India stood at the confluence of three mighty rivers - Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra. Here, a culture developed, absorbing the traditions of the nearby countries. The civilisation diversified and transformed with age. Soaked in the richness of the indigenous culture, foreign flavours received an alteration in the vernacular of local art.

By the 18th century the Bengali artisans had not only integrated the paisley into their art work, but had put an indelible stamp of indigenous culture to the motif. Its use was noticeable amidst the Jamdani weavers and also among embroiders of 'nakshi kantha'. The 'kalka' became a familiar representation that

could be interpreted in numerous ways - an opened bud, a petal, an enlarged seed, a bending tree, and a raw mango. Bulbous at the base and tapering at

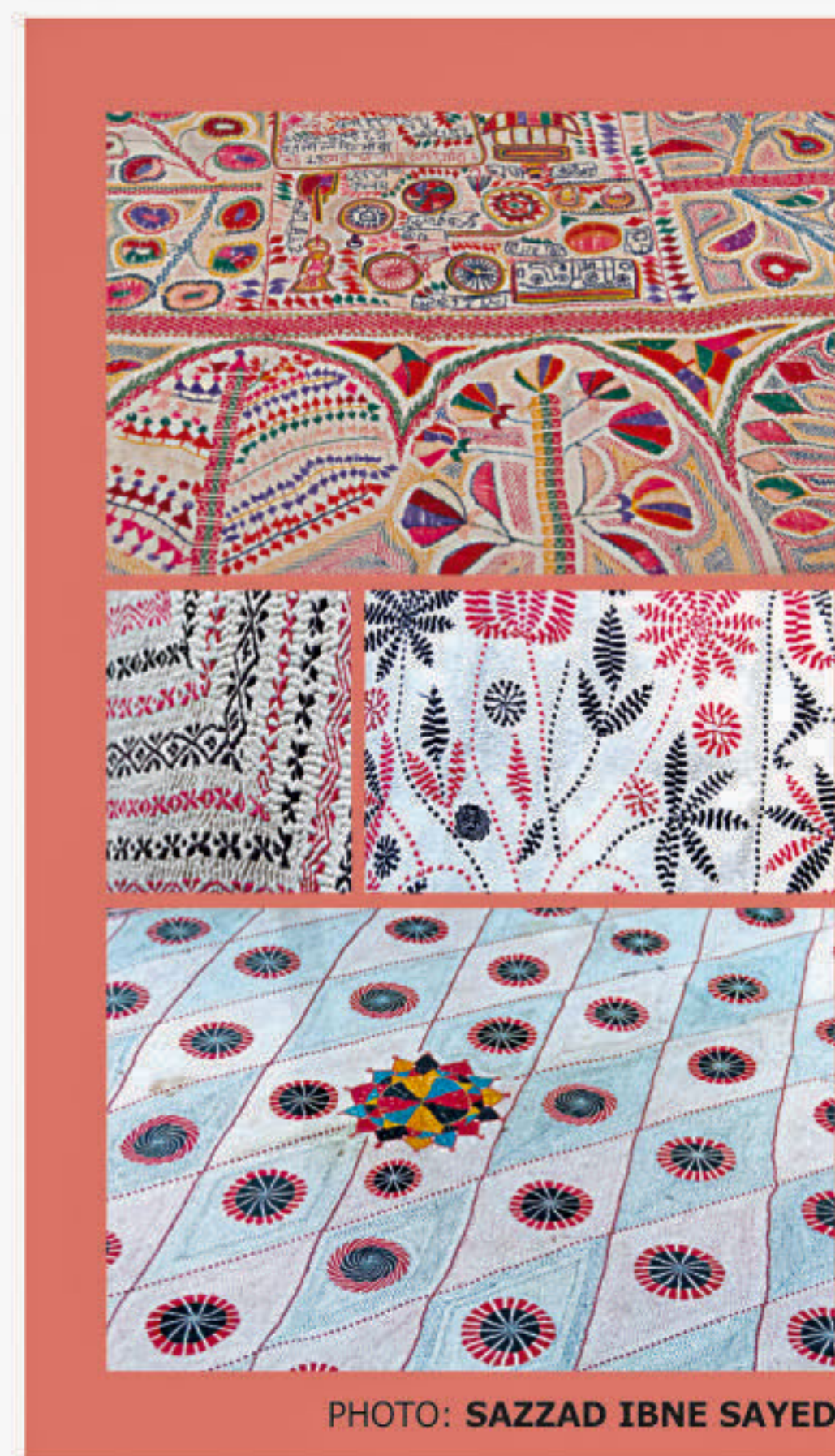
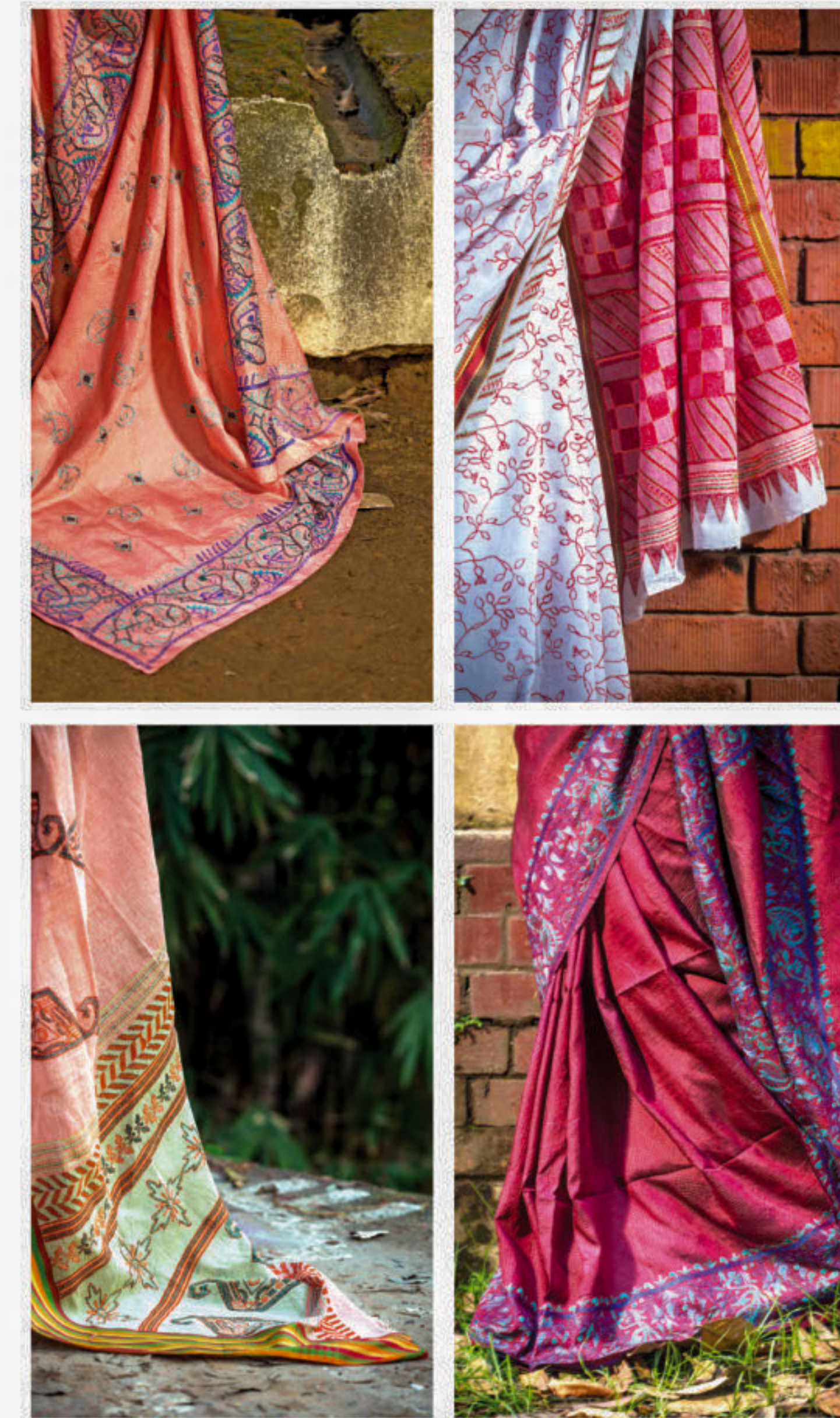


PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED



The paisley assumes graceful contours and makes a brilliant symbol in 'kantha' art. Infused with other folk elements the 'kalka' has been



touch' with numerous forms of fusion taking place.

In some designs, the kalka's rich decorative essence with grandiose curves and branching offshoots, carrying sun motifs, contains elemental aspects of archaic tree images from an inherited memory. Sometimes the 'kalka' branches out to hold lotus blossoms in the elegant layout, while in many the paisley appears as a corner tree in symbolising gestation and birth.

Centuries after the paisley was introduced to the Bengali culture,

the use of the 'kalka' is now common, so much so that it can be attributed as an indigenous design. Despite its foreign roots, the paisley has undergone much change in the years. It has been experimented with and now remains as one of the major motifs found in the local fashion scene.

COMPILED BY LS DESK
PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL
MODEL: SRABOSTI AND ARPITA
WARDROBE: KUMUDINI
MAKE-UP: FARZANA SHAKIL
STYLING: TABASSUM ANILA HRIDI