

Imbibed in intricacies

The history of Nakshi Kantha is one that has been explored, ever since the idea of the embroidered quilts began to regain their prominence in our lives. For a while though, it seemed that Nakshi Kantha would be yet another cultural sacrifice, as people started drifting from their traditions. However, Pahela Baishakh, like no other, stokes the Bengali spirit slumbering within us, bringing it to full consciousness. At this point, draping a sari with intricate Nakshi Kantha stitches over you is only fanning the flame of patriotism. Yet apart from that singular association, Nakshi Kantha has a lot more to be credited for.



The Nakshi Kantha could well be a uniting ground between the oft-times separated Hindu and Muslim populations, not only of Bangladesh, but rather greater Bengal. Travelling back a 100 years, it's fascinating to see how the Nakshi Kantha mimicked the canvas of artists or photographers. The transformation of a mundane piece of fabric into an intricate piece of art telling fascinating stories enamoured the population of Bengal.

Maheen Khan, prominent designer and founder of Mayasir has worked with Nakshi Kantha over the years and truly understands the value this garment holds in the hearts of Bangladeshis.

"One of the reasons behind Nakshi Kantha's enduring legacy lies more in its utility than just the detailed designs or motifs that they represent," she began. "The motifs were representations of what the artists saw around them - their climate, conditions, daily lives, religion, culture, etc. would eventually all influence the final theme of any Nakshi Kantha work."

To explain how greatly the culture of the time influence the designs, Maheen Khan pointed out that even the patterns drawn

by people of different religions would be give a viewer a clue of the religion. "Hindu women, and historically it was women who undertook stitching the Nakshi Kantha, would use sacred elements. There were motifs of Radha and Krishna socialising under a Kadam tree, a holy element used repeatedly in various motifs," she explained.

Other prevalent elements were fruits and flowers such as lotus, which had very sacred connotations and even the mango, a common and favourite of the people, would make numerous appearances. Some designs depicted the day to day lives of the people, such as going hunting, working in the field, etc.

"The purpose of the Nakshi Kantha could be broken into three other categories; they could be used as tributes to God, tribute to themselves or just for the utility of the Nakshi Kantha," Maheen Khan explained.

"Recent years have seen a reinvention of the Nakshi Kantha, imbibing the values of the old and the new, whilst retaining its original elegance," the designer said. Dwelling on the reinvention itself, Maheen Khan pointed out that in the olden days, Nakshi Kantha was exclusively used for quilts or

even pillow but was hardly ever worn. "Now, we have many different uses, having Nakshi Kantha patterns on saris, runners, tablecloths, ornas and much more," she continued.

Indeed, Nakshi Kantha, ever since it resurfaced in a different and fashionable way, has once again regained its former giddy heights. "There are certain NGOs and brands that have really promoted Nakshi Kantha and have made it quite an income generating revenue thus reviving the industry as a whole," Maheen Khan replied, when asked how the reinvention started.

"For the last couple of years we have seen a very exciting theme during the Bengali New Year. People have not only started to embrace our local

textile heritage. It is a powerful style statement," Maheen Khan concluded.

In summary, Maheen Khan once more stressed the need to buy 'desi' and support the growing local industry.

"We do need to reinvent but there should not be a distortion. The resurgence and revival of Bangladeshi textiles has continued since Independence and we continue on a forward trajectory but we must keep thinking of fresh new ideas. Repetition of anything can become boring," she added.

The Nakshi Kantha took a 100 years of refinement. Interesting, the map of where Nakshi Kantha is to go in the next ten years can be conceived the same way the patterns are; first map out the trend and then fill in with details. Having a clear vision is the way forward.

By Osama Rahman

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Model: Mashiat

Wardrobe and accessories:

Mayasir

Make-up:

Farzana Shakil

Photoshoot

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