

SPECIAL FEATURE

THE NAKSHI KANTHA

heritage of Bengal

There is not a single household in Bangladesh that does not know of the Nakshi Kantha. Every newborn has his own 'Kantha' (quilt) — even if not the 'Nakshi' variant, but one possibly made by a close relative with love and much affection as the entire family greets the newest member of the house.

Nakshi Kantha's lineage can be traced back to a time when rural women engaged in this form of craft, not necessarily with an intention of creating 'art', but out of everyday need. A heritage product of Bengal (east and west) was prized by many Europeans and Americans, and the fascination lasts till this day.

The running stitch or the 'Kantha Stitch' was mainly popular with the Hindu ladies of the greater Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Faridpur and Jessore regions. Today, although the production is not limited to these areas only, the most exquisite 'Kanthas' are still made here.

The term 'Nakshi' was derived from 'Naksha', meaning, an array of colourful patterns and designs, which were embroidered onto a piece of cloth. At the beginning, the sole purpose of the Nakshi Kantha was to be used only as a quilt, as the name suggests. However, later the stitch became so popular that it was incor-

porated into many things including everyday wear such as the sari, kurtis, even tablecloths and decorative wall hangings.

Many fashion houses of the country have experimented extensively with the Nakshi Kantha including Aarong, Kumudini, Mayasir, etc. We talked to Maheen Khan, the designer and proprietor of Mayasir to learn more about the fabled stitch.

Maheen Khan feels a sense of pride working with national heirlooms and making an attempt at reviving traditional art forms.

"My obsession towards heritage material began a long time ago, in 1986, when I worked for BRAC. This is when I got the opportunity to learn more about our 'desi' folk textiles. I noticed how the Nakshi Kantha was an inherent part of our culture, and was a necessary part of the Bengali lifestyle."

