

Kantha in Bangladesh is not any frozen art stored behind museum glass, it is an integral part of the lives of the country folk and is a living art form.

Most research on Kantha has not been able to date the craft. Kantha was a craft of the poor and did not get recognition as a craft for a long time. The most poetic reference of Kanthahas been found in Poet Jasimuddins Poem 'Nakshi Kanthar Math.' The earliest mention of Bengal Kantha is found in the book, 'Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita' by Krishnadas Kaviraj which was written some five hundred years ago. The second earliest reference is found with Abanindranath Tagore,



who seemed to have encountered a woman in a village in a district of Srihatta of Bangladesh, who recorded her life story in her Kantha spanning a period starting from her marriage to old age.

In style, form, fabric or technique, through sheer skill and patience the Bangladeshi women have been able to create stunning patterns by employing the most simple and frugal methods. The Kantha is really a play of the ordinary running stitch used in its myriad variations. Through variation in its length and spacing, a surface composed of multitudes of squares and triangles is created that has a marvellous speckled

texture. (C.R Das, Semoitic Study of The Motifs of Nakshi Kantha-The Tree of Life, The Fish and The Lotus, <http://www.craftrevival.org>, 2010, (accessed 1st February, 2017)

Today over 60,000 women are formally producing Kantha as an income generating activity. It has also graduated from focusing on mere household quilts to fine pieces of decorative textile art. It is also a great source of inspiration for couture saris and dress goods. **Silk Weaves of Bangladesh** The Arthashastra has mentioned that silk weaving in Bangladesh has existed from the ancient times. The cultivation of mulberry silk and its weaving is carried out in the plains of North West Bangladesh, predominant in Chapai Nawabganj and adjacent districts. Rajshahi on the north bank of Padma river is today the most important centre for silk rearing in Bangladesh.

The silks were originally used by Nawabs and Muslim aristocrats of the Sultanate period and later adopted by the elite. Hindu noblemen also used the raw silk for there stitched garments. Mulberry silk was woven into saris where the borders were narrow with floral and foliage motifs and the fall of the sari was covered with small paisley and other floral designs in undemonstrated but bright colour schemes. Another familiar motif for the body of the sari was diagonal butis. Even today similar saris which have smaller anchals are being woven at the weaving centres to match contemporary tastes.

Rajshahi is famous for its 'Garod'. Saris made of fine mulberry silk with flat, deep- red or blue borders made with three shuttles. The borders were laced with fine serrated design in gold zari. The fine gold lines are supposed to represent the fine trail left on its path by the spirits of divine angels. 'Motka', a form Khadi Silk, preceded 'Garod' of Rajshahi. Today there are many applications hand-painted designs and embroidered and printed materials.

Handloom Green Textiles Khadi is the homespun symbol of freedom and recently it has come out with a new attitude at the fashion event --Khadi Festival-- a celebration of aesthetic char-

acter of this quintessentially Bangladeshi textile.

Can we call khadi redundant, since it originated in a social and political context that does not exist today, or because as a symbol, it is no longer relevant? Or does it glorify poverty? -- are apparently reflections of Khadi in the current context.

While that may be the perception, khadi can also be used as a powerful tool; and no one does this better than our new generation of designers. The fabric itself does take your breath away. As "Everyone is carried away by the romance of khadi and it is really flawless ideologically."

The nub of the issue however, is the feel of the fabric. Many of us urban Bangladeshis like the idea of wearing khadi. But the fabric itself is nubby, thready, thick, and yes, flawed. Shoba Natayan discussed this the best. "Ironically, true connoisseurs love these flaws because they reveal the fact that it is handmade. Imperfection is the hallmark of the hand. It is only soulless machines that can spin out yard after yard of perfectly alike and aligned yarn. When humans get involved with their hands and minds, the fabric changes. Not all of us have the ability or even the desire to appreciate khadi's subtlety. Nuance is the purview of poets, not engineers. Khadi is flawed, yes, but that is its brand identity, its charm and indeed the reason it is today a luxury fabric. Unlike mill-woven cloth, khadi gets softer with each wash. Home-grown textiles, much like local crafts, are children of the economy." (Narayan S, 2010) When a nation's GDP flourishes, so do its indigenous folk arts, crafts and textiles. With Bangladesh's ever thriving and confident middle class starting to look inward for its style cues, design mantras and textile techniques, you could argue that khadi is ripe for a reincarnation. A rising number of young fashion designers are seeking out local fabrics, crafts and techniques, using hand loom. Then why aren't more of us wearing khadi?

Maheen Khan is a fashion designer at the helm of Mayasir.

Model: Priyam, Masiyat, Risila
Wardrobe: Mayasir



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

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