

Maheen Khan at the Aspara Fashion Week 2021

A sartorial curation of international designers, global influencers and fashion experts showed off their salt's worth at Aspara Fashion Week streamed virtually from the alluring and Eastern city of Taraz, in Kazakhstan.

Reviving the lost stories of the Great Silk Road that once bridged Asia and Europe, the star-studded fashion show is one of the largest in Asia and is yet another reminder that traditional ramp shows are being rewired to incorporate digital solutions. Here, the best of Eurasia has been championed and the diverse community that has formed as a result is a massive shout-out to culture, heritage and dialogue.

The story of the best in Eurasian fashion is incomplete without the footprints of Maheen Khan, a Bangladeshi fashion designer revered even abroad for her advocacy for slow fashion and empowerment of rural women by incentivising their unmatched skills in needle and thread work. This time, for Aspara Fashion Week, her label, Studio Mayasir, stitches into fabric the literary enchantment of Rabindranath Tagore's 1913 poem, *Paper Boats*.

Khan's cinematic portfolio directs powerful imagery of rural women setting sail to their daydreams and dainty paper boats down the waters by the riverbeds. What completes this tale is the sensory narration of Tagore's iconic poem done in Khan's own voice, so producing a brilliant juxtaposition of fashion and film.



"Day by day as the rural women float their paper boats one by one down the running stream," in Tagore's words, Khan envisions them clad in delicate prairie dresses, tea-lengthed and frilled in a ditzy mess.

"In big black letters, as the women write their names on the paper boats and the name of the villages where they live," Khan creates floaty silhouettes overshadowed by the setting sun but modernised with textures, tiers and tassels hanging free and loose from collars tie-necks.

"As the women load their little boats with jasmines from their garden, and hope that these blooms of the dawn will be carried safely to land in the night," Khan visualises the scene with hollow, puff sleeves and the romantic yearning, almost a nostalgia, for the days gone by, perhaps, better than the times we are entrapped in today but certainly different in the air they existed in.

Cut to present reality, Tagore's intimate stories of pastoral Bengal may struggle to survive through the passage of time, but thanks to Khan, new life has been breathed into his words. Her designs of functional

and tactile fashion are the perfect glove-fit for the once starry-eyed women who have now been inevitably transformed by the developing world we recognise today.

In Khan's version, these women are efficient, powerful and command every room they walk into. Live Khan's sartorial dream with her latest ode to the boho-chic style. Studio Mayasir's midi dresses timelessly styled with strappy sandals or lace-up Dr Marten's suede boots and woven, wicker handbags are what you need to be a part of this saga.

Vintage jewellery, layers of faux-fur coats for the changing winds of fall-cum-winter and there you have it: the perfect chord between Tagore's masterpiece and Khan's rehash of the '90s fashion headline that once dictated the cover pages of fashion magazines.

By Ramisa Haque

Photo: Utturn Production

Model: Maria, Hira, Mili, Tania, Efa, Nazia

Wardrobe: Maheen Khan

Make-up: Orko

Co-ordination: Sonia Yeasmin Isha