



KANTHA
Threads of Creativity



Kantha : Threads of Creativity

Under the guidance of

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Declaration by Students :

This is to certify that this survey report titled *Kantha: Threads of Creativity* is based on original research work conducted by Apoorva Kumari, Avantika Sharma, Baibhav Krishna Saikia, Devanshi Mittal, Dipti Jain, Dorothy Lalrinsangi under the guidance of Dr. Sreenanda Palit (Associate Professor, CC-FC & UI Projects, NIFT Kolkata towards partial fulfillment of the requirement for degree of the Bachelor of Design, NIFT Kolkata and has not been copied from any other source. Material, wherever borrowed has been duly acknowledged.

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Certificate by Mentor :

It is hereby certified that the study entitled '*Kantha: Threads of Creativity*' is based on original research work conducted by Apoorva Kumari, Avantika Sharma, Baibhav Krishna Saikia, Devanshi Mittal, Dipti Jain and Dorothy Lalrinsangi, students of Fashion Communication Department (Batch 2020-2024) NIFT Kolkata, under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Sreenanda Palit, (Associate Professor CC-FC & UI-Projects). This assignment is a part of the curriculum of the course, Bachelor of Design. This research has been done in the time span ranging from July to September, 2022.

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Objective:

To focus on sustainable development of artisans group to become a visible identity.

To get understanding of Indian traditional art and skill and to find ways to intervene in every industry that can help the cluster flourish further, because as design students, it is our social responsibility to encourage the local rural communities' traditional crafts.

To get a bigger picture and assess the current state of the artisan community connected to the craft.

To comprehend and analyze various design issues as well as other issues that artisans encounter.

To explore potential development opportunities to enhance the current situation and raise the overall level of living for craftsmen.

Abstract:

In the three days that we visited Bolpur, Santiniketan cluster, we conducted an in-depth study of the process, techniques, lifestyle and socio-economic conditions of the artisans. This cluster intervention sensitized us towards the artisans and their work.

This visit kindled a sense of appreciation for not just the craft but also the real faces behind their beauty and intricacy. We spent time with the artisans, understood about their living conditions, day to day life and the various problems that they face. There are a number of women who are master artisans and are further training other artisans.

We conducted a number of interviews to analyze various aspects of their lives. We understood that these handcrafted pieces took a lot of time to be produced with the utmost care and intricacy. There are times when a *Kantha* saree takes a year to be completed.

Santiniketan is the center of creativity with Kala Bhawan and Vishwa Bharati University situated here. Tagore's Santiniketan is "An abode of learning unlike any in the world". It's a beautiful city that houses a large number of skilled artisan and craftspeople. We even got to know the transition of *Kantha* over a period of time from traditional to contemporary and the problems faced by the artisans while discussing the future of the craft.

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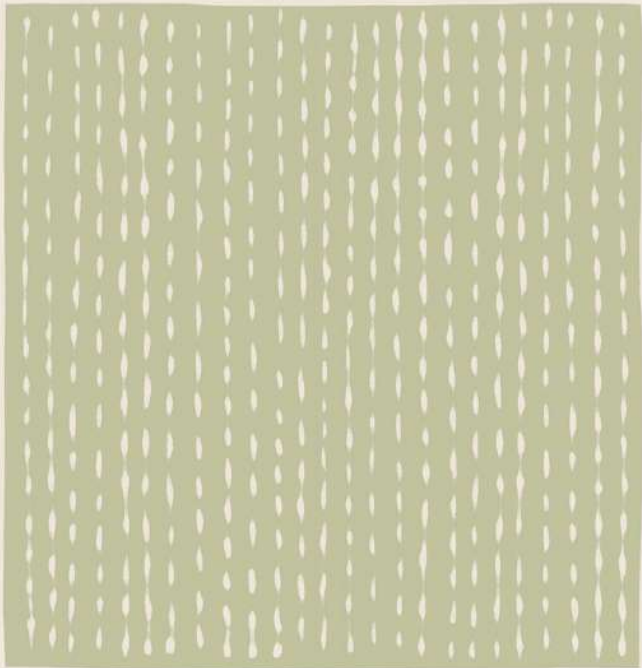
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Photograph by Devanshi Mittal



Glossary:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Maash</i> - | a month |
| 2. <i>Chele</i> - | boy/son |
| 3. <i>Meye</i> - | girl/daughter |
| 4. <i>Kaaj</i> - | work |
| 5. <i>Oshuvidha</i> - | difficulty |
| 6. <i>Silai</i> - | stitch |
| 7. <i>Becha-kina</i> - | a term used to denote the buying & selling procedure |
| 8. <i>Shuvidha</i> - | help |
| 9. <i>Byatha</i> - | hurt/pain |
| 10. <i>Poriborton</i> - | development |
| 11. <i>Nijer</i> - | by myself/own |
| 12. <i>Shomoi</i> - | time |
| 13. <i>Onek</i> - | many |
| 14. <i>Bari</i> - | house |
| 15. <i>Shokal</i> - | morning |
| 16. <i>Bikal</i> - | afternoon |
| 17. <i>Dayitton</i> - | responsibility |
| 18. <i>Rong</i> - | colour |
| 19. <i>Banshi</i> - | flute |
| 20. <i>Gopichand</i> - | ektara (musical instrument) |





Background



The Bengal region of South Asia, located between Bangladesh and India's West Bengal, is known for its traditional quilts like the *Nakshi Kantha*. Bengal, the physical and historical environment in which *Nakshi Kantha* is located, has a history of allowing diverse ethnic groups—including Hindus and Muslims—to coexist peacefully while upholding their own cultural and religious traditions.

Rural ladies sew together rags adorned with various threads to create elaborately embroidered quilts and include themes and designs specifically inspired by the maker's own environment. The way the motifs are put together makes the artisans' perspective clear, turning them to become the maker's autobiography.



Fig. 3. Group of Artisan's working in their natural environment
Photograph by Devanshi Mittal



Fig. 4. Artisans flaunting a Blue Kantha embroidered Saree
Photograph by Apoorva Kumari

Using cotton and silk threads, the artisans create extremely ornate surfaces by stitching together scraps of sarees, that have been embroidered with many running stitches to make motifs and designs.

These embroidered quilts commonly referred to as "*Nakshi Kantha*," or "decorative quilts," have offered rural women a platform to showcase their talent and creativity as well as a chance to communicate themselves.



Bolpur

The Bolpur subdivision is situated in the district of Birbhum's southern boundary. Bolpur was a tiny village under Supur Porgana about 150 years ago but now it has evolved into a global metropolis. In the past, Kalikapur, a well-known Bolpur location, served as the village's starting point. Around the village, paddy fields were seen. There was "*Lalmati*" (red soil) everywhere. Bolpur's border line included several settlements with the names Sian, Dihipara, Khosakdampur, Paruldanga, Goalpara, Ballavpur, Bandhgara, Surul, Supur, and Raipur.

In Bolpur, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore founded the center for religious mediation. Visva Bharati Vishwavidyalaya was founded by Rabindranath Tagore. These were the primary causes of Bolpur's enormous expansion, growth, and popularity. Provincial names showed Bolpur's impending steady growth.



Fig. 6. View from the Lakeside of the village
Photography by Avantika Sharma



Fig. 7. Children in Shantiniketan
Photography by Avantika Sharma

According to Hindu mythology, the forests of Bajrabhumi (west Birbhum) were the epicenters of their "*tantric*" activity. The inaccessible, remote woodlands were the perfect setting for the venerated Hindu rites. The sages practiced "*tantra sadhana*" or "*Shakti*" Worship in a hermitage in the interior. To engage in tantra sadhana, several temples, or "*Shakti Peethas*," were founded by *tantric* (performers of the *Shakti* rites). The well-known tourist destinations Tarapith, Bakreswar, Nalhati, and Labhpur were formerly important *Shakti peethas*. Seasonal changes provide their hues and beauty to Bolpur, Shantiniketan through several festivities. Numerous festivals throughout the year, including Pous Utsav, Basanta Utsav, Barsha Mangal, Rabindra Jayanti, and many more, create a pleasant atmosphere.

Santiniketan

Santiniketan has a special gentle touch because of its own culture and traditions. Bhubandanga was the previous name for Santiniketan (named after *Bhuban Dakat*, a local dacoit). The word "Santiniketan" means 'the abode of peace.' Family Tagore acquired ownership of this property. Santiniketan was founded in 1863 by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore, who was drawn to this location by its beauty. As a result of his extensive education in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and many other Western languages, he eventually decided in 1901 that Vedic teaching was superior and that simple Hinduism was insufficient for the community. Like the people of the Vedic age, he began worshipping "*Nirakar Brahma*," or the God without a face. Vishva-Bharati University, the open-air schools of Shantiniketan created by Tagore, and the famous handicraft industries are the most interesting things to explore here.



Fig. 9. View in Nanoor
Photography by Avantika Sharma

*She is our own, the darling of our hearts, Santiniketan,
In the shadows of her trees we meet in the freedom of her
open sky. Our dreams are rocked in her arms. Her face is a
fresh wonder of love every time we see her, for she is our
own, the darling of our hearts."*

Rabindranath Tagore



Mahidapur

Mahidapur is a village gramin area in Santiniketan. The workmanship in the village is well-known. For the people, it is their sole source of income. They work on the *Kantha* embroidery while seated together. They have been linked to SHGs. Many visitors from outside the area stop by and look at the artisans' creations. Different products are created by artisans and sold in the neighborhood markets. In other societies, artisans get together while the labor-intensive tasks are handled by those in charge. They then trace the designs onto which they stitch *Kantha* cloth.



Fig. 10. Cow dung cakes on wall; Mahidapur
Photography by Devanshi Mittal



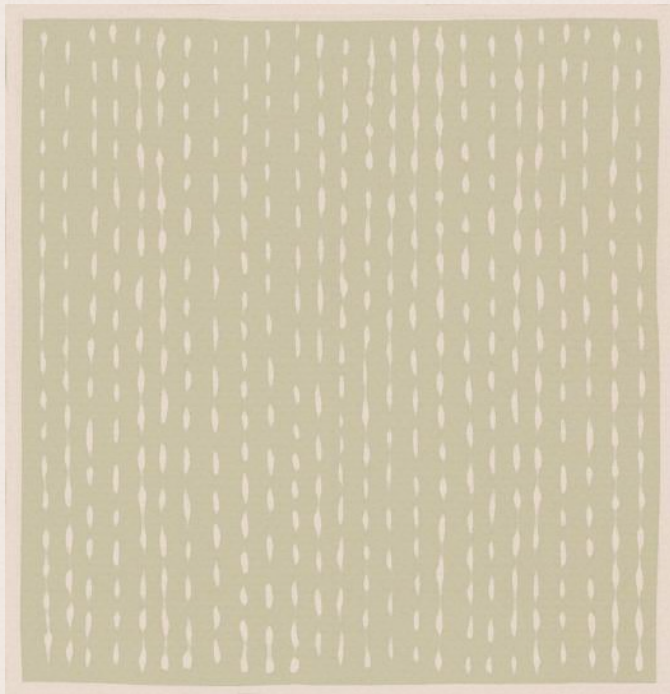
Nanoor

Nanoor is a village situated in Santiniketan. Artisans who practise *Kantha* embroidery do so in their own houses in spare time. Artisans utilize the *Kantha* embroidery to create new products. Many of the artisans families are below the poverty level. The artisans get the chance to interact with individuals from many nations. These individuals travel to Nanoor to observe the way of life and place of employment of the artisans. Several well-known international designers are assisting the craftspeople in using the ancient *Kantha* technique to create contemporary conveniences. There used to be a weekly market known as hat in the past. In addition to agriculture, there were other necessities like pottery, wood, iron, baskets, seeds, etc.



Fig. 11. Veranda; Nanoor Photography by Dipti Jain





About the Craft



Kantha, or *Nakshi Kantha* as it is now more frequently called, broadly refers to the particular kind of embroidery utilized. Simple, straight, running stitches, like the kind used on *Kantha* sari, scarves, are the earliest and the most fundamental *Kantha* stitches. *Kantha* is a name for patched clothing. *Kantha*, which is Sanskrit for “rags,” because common people at the time did not have easy access to thread and fabric, so the Bengali women began to upcycle old saris or dhotis. They began by using a strand of thread from the saris’ vibrant border. The Bengali term *Naksha*, which describes creative patterns, is where the name *Nakshi Kantha* originates. The themes used in *Nakshi Kantha* are influenced by religion, culture, and the lives of the women who sew them. India has a long tradition of producing amazing and motivational needlework. Beginning at an early age—typically about six years old and customarily following the loss of their first tooth—young girls were taught to embroider. They received instruction not only to help them learn practical skills but also as a type of education and to help them learn to notice the world full of lovely flora and animals by drawing and stitching them.



Fig. 13. Top View of an Artisan working
Photography by Dorothy Lalrinsangi



Fig. 14. An Artisan embroidering on Saree
Photography by Dipti Jain

Origin - *Kantha* embroidery was a kind of art practised by the impoverished and was not recognised as such. The poem “*Nakshi Kanthar Math*” by poem Jasimuddin has the most lyrical allusion to *Kantha*. The book contains the first mention of Bengal *Kantha*. The “*Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*” by Krishnadas Kaviraj, which was written about 500–600 years ago. The second most accurate reference can be found in Zaman’s book on the famed craftsman Abanindranath Tagore, who seems to have known a lady in a town in the Bangladeshi province of *Srihatta* and who documented her history in her *Kantha* spanning a period from her marriage to old age.

The warm *Kantha* cover is supposed to have been the attire of monks throughout the years, whether they were dressed like Lord Buddha, Mahavira, Chaitanya, Jain holy persons, or Sufi authors. The book “*Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*” by Krishnadas Kaviraj, which was written precisely 500 years ago, has the most accurate and thorough chronicle of Bengal *Kantha*.

Kantha was practised by women of all classes among Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. Some exceptional *Kantha* samples from

the nineteenth century have been discovered in the districts of Jessore, Khulna, Barisal, and Faridpur (areas of present-day Bangladesh), as well as in the districts of Hugli, Birbhum and the 24 Parganas of West Bengal. The two main communities, Hindus and Muslims, have made significant contributions to the motifs and forms used in the craft over the centuries.

Kantha tradition is deeply rooted in the land of Tagore's Shantiniketan Bolpur in West Bengal 's Birbhum district. And a small stretch can be found in Orissa and a few districts in Bangladesh. However, Shantiniketan represents Nakshi Kantha and the Kantha Stitch represents Shantiniketan's cultural and artistic values to a great extent.



Fig. 15. Group of Artisans working together
Photography by Baibhav Saikia

Even though *Nakshi Kantha* embroidery is not strictly symmetrical, a good piece will typically feature a lotus as the central focus, with stylized birds, plants, fish, flowers, and other sceneries surrounding it.

Textile manufacturing was historically one of the most labour-intensive sectors, and as a result, textiles had a high economic value. Thus, recycling well-used clothing that had been reduced to rags was a logical step in the global lifetime of textiles. Since this recycling involved home-based labour, it was typically up to the women of the community to prepare, cut, and sew the rags to breathe new life into old fabrics. Old cotton saris, lungis, and dhotis that had become extraordinarily soft from usage were traditionally used to manufacture Kanthas, with the sewing thread being taken out of the cloth itself.

Five to seven fabrics would be placed together, using lighter fabrics on the outer to make it easier to see the stitching and pattern. The stitch would completely enclose the fabric. Women would be skilled in stitching Kantha in practically every rural household. They would do this in their spare time while caring for the home and children. Tending to animals, and during the long monsoon days. One Kantha could take months or even years to finish. Grandmother, mother, and daughter could all work on the same Kantha as they pass down the stitching through the centuries.



Raw Materials - The surplus saree fabric that is the core of *Nakshi Kantha*, fulfilled two crucial purposes. Initially, people believed that by wrapping babies in it, they would be shielded from the evil eye. Second, a saree has an incredibly smooth feel after being worn as regular clothes for a long period and being washed several times throughout that time. Even if it is only thought to be suitable for rags, it may nonetheless offer remarkable softness. The length of the saree is another aspect that could have influenced the decision to use it as the main material, in addition to these two important considerations. Because it is 6-7 metres long, throwing it away would be a waste as limited resources are accessible to rural women.



Fig. 16. Embroidery hoop
Photography by Apoorva Kumari



The second essential element is the thread, which is used to stitch the ripple pattern, embroider the designs, quilt, and make the borders that seal the four sides of a Kantha. In addition to the two crucial elements (thread and cloth) mentioned above, other resources include a needle, circular frame, tracing paper, marker/liquid color/pen, and pattern templates.

Usually, muga, tussar silk, or pure silk are used to make Kantha embroidery. Sometimes synthetic materials are also utilised to reduce expenses. The business owners purchase the fabric and threads for embroidery in bulk from wholesale markets. The local marketplaces and Kolkata are where the raw materials are gathered (Bara bazar). Additionally, commodities from Bangalore, such as silk fabric, are occasionally imported.

Anchor embroidery threads

No. 9 needle

Adda/Bamboo frame

Fabrics (Cotton, Mulmul, Silk, Tussar, Chiffon, Georgette and other fabrics according to orders)

Tools - For Kantha embroidery the tools are as follow as:

Needle - *Sonamukhi sui* are used to do the embroidery.

Threads- cotton threads used.

Tracing paper- It helps to trace the design and motifs on the fabric.

Black powder - With the help of kerosene mixed with black powder (Nil ink) to get the effect on the fabric.

Frame - Round wooden or plastic frame to hold a particular place of the fabric from stitching.



Fig. 17. Fish motif embroidery
Photography by Dorothy Lalrinsangi



Techniques of Production - A skill that is passed down through the years, making Kantha embroidery has historically been taught and learnt in a way that is closely related to daily life. After the sarees have been strung together to the proper size, layers are first spread out on the ground to create a *Nakshi Kantha*. When the garment is flattened, there are no longer creases or wrinkles to be seen. At the beginning of the process, the rags are kept level on the ground by checking that their corners are straight and then adding weight to make sure that they are not moving. The rags are then stitched together using a straightforward darning method. After that, a running stitch should be used to sew the *Nakshi Kantha*.



Fig. 18. Filling colours in the design
Photography by Baibhav Saikia

The fabric is typically covered in many small, free-flowing threads, giving the entire *Kantha* a faintly wavelike appearance that is immensely intriguing to see. On traditional *Kantha*, designs and motifs are first drawn out with markings (typically a pencil, pen, or fibre pen) before being embellished with needle and thread. The techniques for running stitches, which are most common in *Nakshi Kantha*, are quite simple: the needle glides forward while passing through the rags in an up-and-down motion. A modern variant of Kashmiri *Kantha* stitches is the arrowhead stitch, which is widely used. The ripple effect on *Kantha* can only be achieved by using this natural flowing stitch in its backdrop, which also ensures the durability of the *Nakshi Kantha*. Then a magnificent composition follows this one.



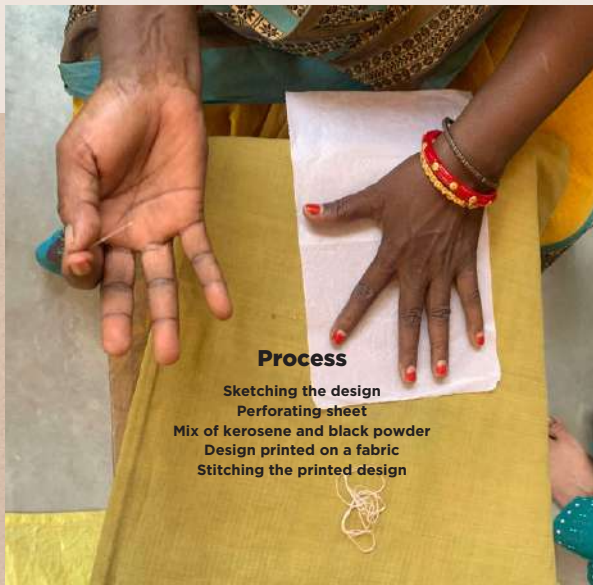
Fig. 19. An Artisan exhibiting her work
Photography by Dipti Jain

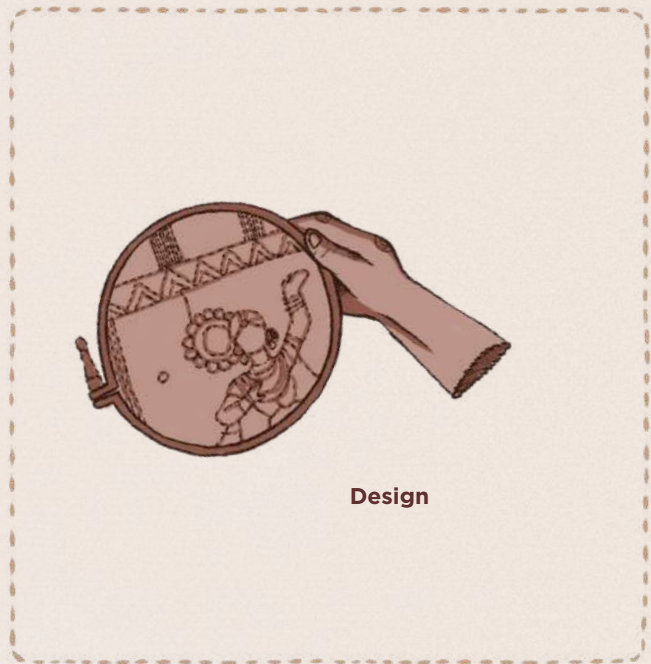
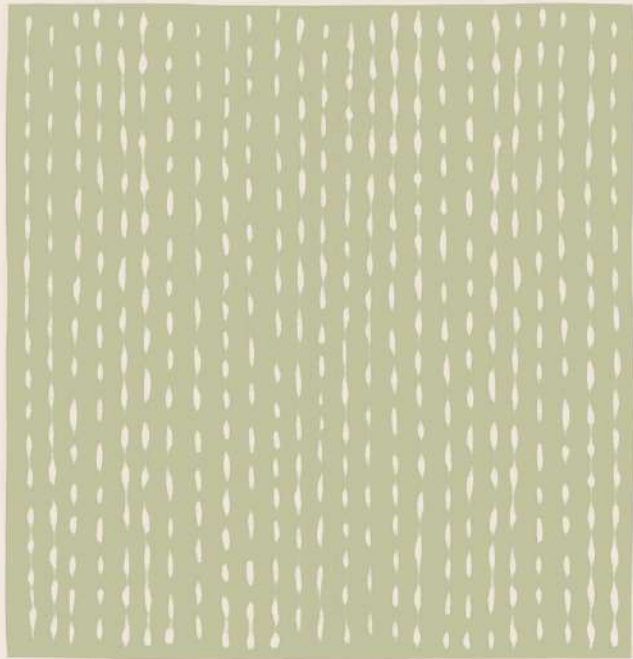


A golden point that frequently has a lotus or other floral pattern and is filled with thread follows this arrangement. Four motifs with a similar look are usually used by the *Nakshi Kantha*'s stitching four corners to produce a balanced pattern. Then, more patterns may be added to further adorn it. Instead of using old sarees as their primary material, a variety of textiles are used in modern *Nakshi Kantha* manufacture. Additionally, occasionally extra fabric or inferior fabric may be used for the layers. The conventional *Kantha* has many layers.



Fig. 20. Colourful embroidery
Photography by Avantika Sharma





Design



Motifs - The quilts are transformed into exquisitely made paintings by the *Kantha* artisans as they weave the motifs and create *Kantha* embroidery using their sentiment, beliefs, and objectives. The *Kantha* was occasionally made for religious purpose, to show social rank, to express emotion, to connect with the artisan's loved ones, or even to provide a seating arrangement for a visitor who could not buy pricey sofas.

Lotus

Particularly in terms of religion, the Lotus design is significant. As opposed to certain *Kantha* specimens, which have 108 petals, it normally has 100. The 108 petals of the lotus where Hindu Lord Brahma lives are also seen on the lotus of the Hindu goddess *Sati* (who has had 108 incarnations). The artisans had a great need for stability in the past, and their financial status was often unstable. They believed they were offering a sacrifice to the Goddess Laxmi, who is reputed to bestow wealth onto people who adore her, by decorating their *Kanthas* with different lotuses.

Infinite Tree of Life

The continuity of life is symbolised by the tree of life. The tree resembles a pipal tree (banyan tree) in essence, and Lord Buddha is said to have acquired enlightenment beneath a pipal tree. The tree is also a symbol of fertility.

Moon

For Muslims and Muslim communities, the moon's emblem, in especially the crescent, holds a special significance. They follow the lunar calendar, and the majority of their festivities and holidays are based on the moon's phases. In the Muslim Prayer *Kantha*, a crescent and stars are prominently shown.



Fish

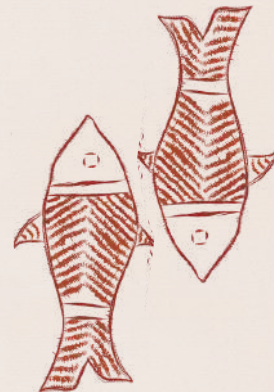
The value of fish is enormous in rural Bengali cultures. Fish play a significant role in the staple food and are widely available in Bengal's rural rivers, canals, and ponds. Additionally, fish have been used as a fertility symbol. To facilitate the growth of additional fish, the fisherman stops capturing fish at a specific period of the year. A fish also lays and hatches a lot of eggs at once, which may be why the fish is a symbol of fertility. Based on the type, you can tell whether it has been embroidered with a baby girl's or a newborn boy's wish. The *Kantha* artist maybe making a carp or other large fish if she wants a son.

Sun

The Solar Motif is closely related to the sun. Sun motif In the centre of a *Kantha*, the lotus and sun themes are frequently combined. The solar pattern represents the sun's ability to sustain life. The sun was one of the first gods worshipped by early humans, and some evidence of this may still be seen today. Fire plays a prominent part in Hindu rituals, religious and matrimonial.

Kalka

The Kalka motif is a significant design element. It is a cone- or mango-shaped motif that is stitched alongside spiral whirls, a wide band of circles, and lotus- or heart-shaped foliages. The motifs originates from the Mughal era. It has been compared to a stylised leaf, and also to a mango, who's shape it resembles.



Vajra theme

A tantrik motif known as the “vajra” or “thunderbolt swastika” was also used to symbolise the endless life cycle. Another significant pattern is the kalka, a cone- or mango-shaped design that is stitched alongside piral whirls, broad bands of circles, and lotus- or heart-shaped foliages.

Wheel design

Both Hindu and Buddhist art in India frequently uses the wheel as a symbol. It's popularity is also partly due to the ease of its embroidery.

Water Theme

The surface of the *Kantha* itself has ripples that represent the waves on the water's surface. Jessore and Jamalpur *Kanthas* are known for their use of border designs that resemble waves, such as the bek and sagar. The wave motif inspired the name “*lahori*” for the Rajshahi *Kanthas*.

Swastika pattern

The Swastika is a symbol that has been used in Indian art since the Indus Valley Civilization. This motif has been found engraved on Mohenjo-daro seals. It frequently conjures up images of a turning wheel. Most people view it as an auspicious indication or lucky charm. The symbolism has a significant impact on Hinduism.



Colours:

The genesis of the colour is linked to the integrity and completeness of rural women's daily life. The majority of the sarees used to create Nakshi Kantha were worn and torn. Muslims and Hindus both associate white with purity. Yantras claim that in Hinduism, white denotes both male and female dominance in the world. The Yantras, a meditational pattern that depicts the god, and the colours have affinities with a number of deities. Traditional Yantras often utilise three dominant colors-white, red, and black-to symbolise three different natures.

Another encouraging reason for the Nakshi Kantha's preponderance of white may be that the rainbow threads on a white surface and the needlework appear vibrant and contrasted against the white background. Rags in various colours and cotton saree designs are occasionally used. Red is among the most often used colours in contemporary Nakshi Kantha, although there are other shades as well. The embroidery's vibrant colours also stunningly contrast with the cream background. Black, white, and green are a few of the extra colours used.



Motifs origin & Evolution

There are parallel trends in Kantha embroidery now. There are women who still traditionally make Kantha – three layered old fabric with various motifs and quilting. There are layered Kantha made from new materials and there are Kantha of single layers of fabric that have a particular kind of embroidery. Earlier, Kantha making did not have a commercial angle. Traditionally they were made as gifts for a daughter or any close or loved person. When we discuss handicrafts, if we maintain an orthodox view of keeping the art form 'pure', the form will gradually decay and disappear in this world of globalization. We need to make Kantha saleable and maintain demand for the products. The use of new fabric will make them long-lasting.

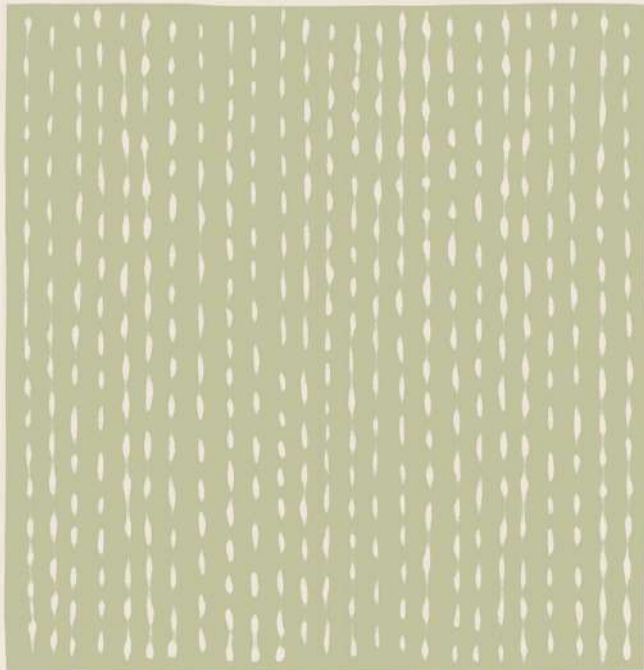


Fig. 24. Two Artisans showing embroidered work on a cloth
Photography by Dorothy Lalrinsangi



The art is in the embroidered imagery that holds the layers together, creating a new, stronger fabric in the process. As a humble running stitch, its simplicity is deceptive, for it is difficult to execute well. Skill and practice are needed to create evenly spaced stitches, the sign of an experienced *Kantha* maker. Easy to learn, and quick in execution, a little bit of thread can go a long way. This was important in earlier *Kantha* that were made using thread pulled from sari borders. Today, embroidery floss in a myriad of colours is commonly used. The surface is filled with stitches pulled lightly, resulting in a characteristic rippling across the surface, with a unique texture and drape. Lastly, the stitch lends itself easily to design, leaving a world of potential open and allowing the stitcher to 'draw' over the surface of the *Kantha*. Pure cotton malmal or markin is favoured for its softness and is sometimes pre-washed before stitching.

Today, designers employ many *Kantha*-makers, and are primarily responsible for the appearance of commercial *Kantha* items, deciding on materials, colours and designs. Because of this, the makers have lost much of their influence on *Kantha* design. The influences can be – but are not always – determined by market demands, Western trends, and the urban elite customer who can afford these often costly pieces. The rich Indian craft tradition remains an integral part and very relevant aspect of the design.



Significance



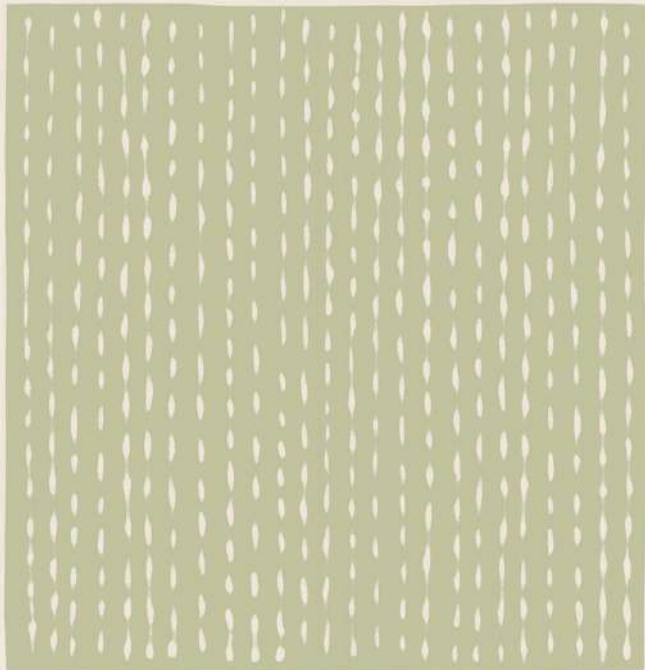
The kind of *Kantha* may typically be determined by the motifs since they represent the craftsmen's tools and methods of production. The Lotus, Tree of Life, Conch Shell, and Kalka motifs, for instance, can be expected to appear in a Hindu ritual Kantha because they are highly religious and frequently depicted in Hinduism and Hindu mythology.

On the other hand, a Muslim religious Kantha (prayer Kantha) frequently has themes that are directly related to Islamic interpretations, such as the moon, star, Muslim architecture buildings motif with a tomb on top of it, floral motif, geometric patterns, etc.

There are taboos against using some designs in Bengal's rural areas. For example, employing animal motifs might bring bad luck and be considered sin by Muslims, yet utilising other motifs can also bring good fortune to both the maker and the user. Even though there are several controversies surrounding Islam's prohibition of icons, rural Muslim community typically does not choose animal pictures in their prayer materials, despite the fact that animal themes are prominent in both forms of religious Kantha.



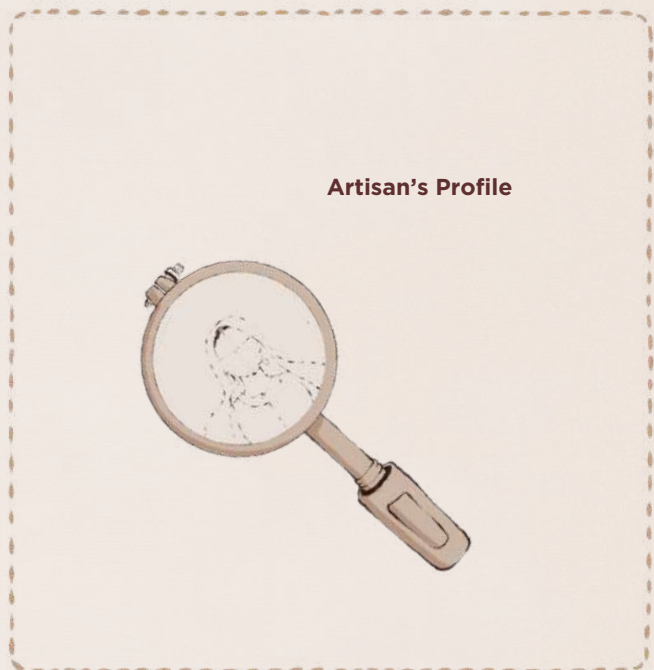
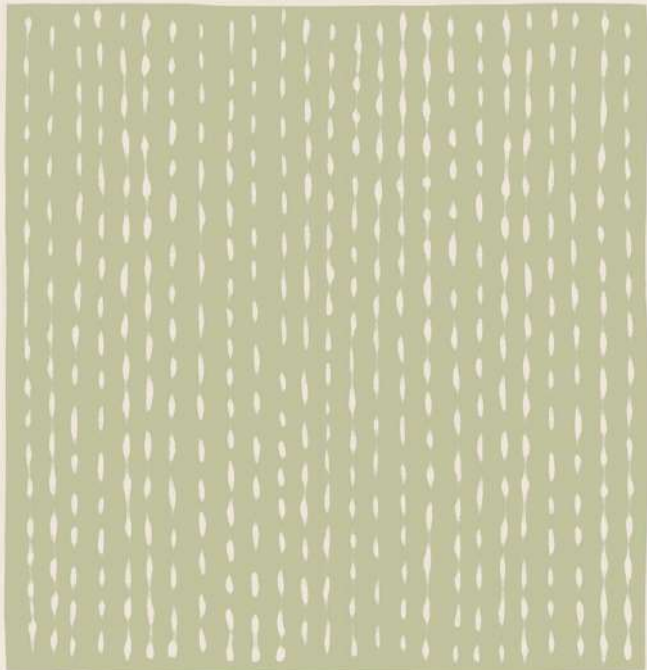
Depending on how the *Nakshi Kantha* is being used, the colour will change. White, red, yellow, or saffron hues are frequently found on Hindu prayer mats or on the throne of a deity. For people who adhere to Islamic religious beliefs, however, green, black, brown, and white are prioritised. Both religious groups—Muslims and Hindus—coexist in rural Bengali society and may have impacted one another's way of life and cultural practises. *Kantha* “expresses the ideas and the customs shared by the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal,” according to (Ghosh, 2009, p. 81). Because of this, we may observe the utilisation of both natural and religious aspects in traditional *Kantha*. *Nakshi Kantha* is characterized by their commitment to the environment and their values.



Traditionally, *Kantha* were the quilts made but as the craft underwent changes according to the changing demands of the market, it also offers contemporary products as follows:

Saree
Dupatta
Bag
Shawl
Scarf
Table cloth
Blouse
Palazzo
Kurti and kurtas
Boxes
Bedsheet
Files etc.





Artisan's Profile



Name : Sahima Khatun
Age :25
Languages known : Bangla
Level of Education : Illiterate
Income : 1000/m
Assests : Pakka house
Occupational hazards : Back/Neck pain
Self employed : Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience : 2years



Name : Mili khatun
Age: 21
Phone number : 7318822702
Languages known : Bangla, Hindi Level of Education : 9th
Income : 1000/m
Assests : Pakka House
Occupational hazards : Neck/Back pain
Self employed :Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience : 2yrs



Name : Manjhusa Saha
Age: 38
Phone number : 8918586396
Languages known :Bangla, english, hindi Level of Education :Secondary
Organization : SHGs
Income :1300 - 1800/m
Assests :Pakka House
Occupational hazards : Neck/Back pain
Self employed : Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience :10 – 25 years



Name : Hasiba Bibi
Age: 50
Phone number : 7797603285
Languages known : Bangla
Level of Education : Illiterate
Organization: SHGs
Income: 1000/m
Assests: Pakka House
Occupational hazards : Neck/Back pain
Self employed: Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience : 2 years

Kantha : Threads of Creativity



Name : Aparna Bagdi
Age: 27
Phone number : 7679257073
Languages known : Bangla, English, Hindi
Level of Education : Secondary
Organization: SHGs
Income: 1200/m
Assests: Pakka House
Occupational hazards : Neck/Back pain
Self employed: Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience : 8 years



Name : Fatima Bibi
Age: 28
Phone number : 7698092358
Languages known : Bangla
Level of Education: Primary
Income : 500 - 1000/m
Assests : Semi - Pakka House
Occupational hazards : Neck/Back pain
Self employed : Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience : 5 - 10 years



Kantha : Threads of Creativity



Name : Marufa Bibi
Age: 34
Phone number: 9647864899
Languages known: Bangla
Level of Education: Secondary
Income : 500 - 1000/m
Assests : Semi Pakka House
Occupational hazards: Neck/Back pain
Self employed: Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience : 5- 10 years



Name : Parveen Khatun
Age: 23
Phone number: 8145286750
Languages known: Bangla
Level of Education: College
Organization : SHGs
Income : 2500 - 5000/m
Assests : Semi Pakka House
Occupational hazards : Neck/Back pain
Self employed: Yes
Months that have a high demand for the craft : Sept, Oct, Dec, Jan
Years of experience: 10 years

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTH

- Rich in Human Resources.
- Most of the artisans are well trained.
- The sustainable factor of the craft. It requires very minimal number of equipments, hence making women of every household self reliant.
- The female counterparts earn for their family
- While the crops in the fields stands as an outcome of labor of the men folk,
- Kantha is a vehicle to channelize the skill of women, which would have been unrecognized
- Women pass the skill to their daughters.
- It can be practiced even in the smallest corner of a poor man's house.
- With modernization of Kantha it has attracted quite a lot of viewers and as a result it is now recognized worldwide.
- It is not weather dependent.

WEAKNESS

- The Kantha artisans of Nanoor and maheedapur don't know how to trace a design neither they are allowed to do so.
- They are not well educated which leads to communication gap therefore women here don't have any control over the trade and money.
- The trading and marketing is mostly male dominated.
- The artisans do not know the actual value of the work.
- Lack of communication skills.
- Artisans in shantiniketan are well conversed in Bengali language only.
- It is impossible to communicate with them in any other language.
- Illiteracy and lack of undersanding technology keeps them chained to the four walls of their Village.
- Inadequate market Information.
- Lack of creativity.
- They work for long hours in between household chores, and get paid very less that does not meet their daily requirements.

OPPORTUNITY

- With modernization growing demand of this craft both nationally and internationally open up opportunities for women.
- The art of Kantha was almost lost for a few years is again making a comeback and is being accepted by the international market.
- The girls of the next generation are persuing education, which will make then aware of the market and the value of the work.

THREATS

- Lack of communication/ communication gap between the third party(traders, retailers or wholesalers) and the artisans.
- Machine embroidered and printed products are the main threats.
- Factories copy the look of Kantha.
- Pervasiveness of child labour
- Lack of understanding of modern technology
- The artisans don't know how to use social media for their own benefit even though most of them have mobile phones.
- vvThe educated girls of next generation are unwilling to invest time in the ill-paid craft and want to do a job, build a career.



Research Method Used-

The research method used was a combination of survey and questionnaire as survey was having more closed ended question which was in use for the analysis of the data of artisen on a wider scale but for indepth research about the problems faced or the scope of the craft in future, we did some interviews having open ended questions with the artisans.

Questionnaire

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Artisan's Name _____
2. Contact Number _____
3. Artisan's Address _____
4. Artisan's Age _____
5. Artisan's Sex
Male () Female ()
6. Education level of artisan
Illiterate () Primary ()
Secondary () College ()
7. Languages known
Comprehend () Read () Write ()
8. Size of the family unit
Male _____ Female _____ Children (below 13 yrs) _____
9. What craft are you associated with?
10. For how many years the craft has been practiced by family?
0-5yrs () 5-10yrs () 10-25yrs () 25-50yrs () beyond 50 yrs ()
11. Family members participating in craft - Male (), Female ()
12. Average number of hours devoted to the craft per week -
Male () Female ()
13. No. of months for which artisan is involved in craft related activity:
1) 3 - 6 months () 2) 6 - 9 months () 3) Throughout the year ()
14. Are you engaged in any other activity apart from the handicrafts?
1) Yes () 2) No ()
If yes, specify the occupation _____



15. Any month /months in the year that is high in demand for craft -
16. Has there been a change in the location or area of the craft?
If yes, specify original → _____
17. Are you a member of any of the following organizations?
1) SHGs () 2) Cooperative ()
3) Society () 4) any other () 5) None ()
18. Are you planning to train your children in your traditional craft practices?
1) Yes () 2) No ()
Give reasons for your choice _____

INCOME RELATED QUESTIONS

19. Current monthly income of the artisan:
1) Rs. 2500 - 5000 () 2) Rs. 5000 - 7500 ()
3) Rs.7500 - 10,000 () 4) More than Rs. 10000 ()
From other source _____
20. Do you have a saving account in the:
1) Bank () 2) Post Office () 3) Any Other () 4) No ()

ASSETS

21. Dwelling

1) Own House () 2) Rented House ()

22. Type of House

1) Kachha () 2) Pucca () 3) Semi-Pucca ()

23. If own house, did you

1) Purchase () 2) Constructed () 3) Inherited ()

24. If rented house, what is the monthly rent _____

25. In the last two years, have you purchased/changed or added any of the following:

- Land ()
- Cattle ()
- Two-wheeler ()
- Four-wheeler ()
- Electronics (TV/Radio/Mixer/Grinder/Music System/etc) ()
- Mobile ()
- Gas Connection ()
- Computer ()
- Any other item ()
- None ()

MEDICAL FACILITY

26. Are there any occupational health hazard/diseases, linked with your craft practice?

1) Yes () 2) No ()

If yes, please specify _____

27. Do you have health/ life insurance policy?

1) Yes () 2) No ()

**DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY**

28. Are you working on-

a) Traditional Design () b) Latest Design ()

d) Market Demand Design ()

29. Who gives the design?

1) Own () 2) Trader/Agent () 3) Old Patterns () 4) Designers ()

30. Has there been an adoption of new techniques in development of craft because of any change of location?

If yes, specify _____

31. Have you developed any new products in last two years?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

32. Have you explored new raw materials other than traditional?

Yes () No ()

If yes specify reason -

1) Better pricing () 2) Non availability () 3) Creative persuasion ()

4) Market Demand () 5) Any other _____

33. If yes, are the new products more profitable than the old products?
1) Yes () 2) No ()
34. Identify the skill level of the artisans (as per the artisan's perception), with respect to the handicraft only:
1) Unskilled () 2) Semi-skilled ()
3) Skilled () 4) Master craftsmen ()
35. Are you self employed
Yes () No ()
If no, specify place _____
36. Which are would you like to strengthen for your growth
1) Production () 2) Design () 3) Packaging ()
4) Marketing () 5) Any other _____
37. Have you received any training recently for upgrading your skills?
1) Yes () 2) No ()
If yes, specify the kind _____
38. Are these kind of training good for your work opportunities?
1) Yes () 2) No ()
39. Do you need further training?
1) Yes () 2) No ()
40. In which of the following areas would you want to be trained?
1) Marketing 2) Capacity Building 3) Design Innovation
4) Better Quality 5) Skill Development 6) Any other _____



41. Do you know how to use Computer?
Yes () No ()
42. Do you use Internet?
Yes () No ()
If yes, what do you use it for?
1) Personal () 2) Business Purpose () 3) Both ()
43. Have you benefited in any way by the use of Internet?
1) Yes () 2) No () If yes, specify _____

PRICING

44. Who or what decides the pricing of your products?
1) Raw Materials () 2) Trader/Agent () 3) Local Market Demand ()
4) Self () 5) Labour Cost () 6) Any other _____
45. Are you satisfied with the present system of pricing?
1) Yes () 2) No ()
If no, then give suggestions _____
46. Where do you procure raw material from?
1) Local Market () 2) Agents ()
3) Nearby Markets () 4) Far away markets ()
47. Do you have any problem in buying of raw materials Yes () No ()
If yes then specify - 1) Often (), 2) Sometimes (), 3) Rarely ()
48. How can this problem be eliminated? (Give suggestions).

49. Do you get any subsidy from the Govt. while procuring raw materials?

1) Yes () 2) No ()

If yes, specify _____

MARKETING

50. How do you sell your products?

1) Directly to customers () 2) Melas & Festivals ()

3) Dealers/Agent Network () 4) Local Markets ()

5)Exports() 6) Trade fairs () 7) any other _____

51. Are you facing any difficulty in marketing your products?

1) Yes () 2) No ()

52. If yes, what are the main reasons?

1) Distance from your unit to market () 2) Transportation ()

3) Middlemen/Agent () 4) Lack of domestic/local market ()

Any other () _____



Fig. 26. Students taking Artisan's interview
Photography by Dorothy Lalrinsangi

Sample Interview Questions -

- 1) Do you want to let your kids to learn this craft?
- 2) What are your expectations from this craft?
- 3) What more can be done to increase the price of the product?
- 4) Do you want to work under anyone or start your own work?
- 5) How training has affected your skill sets?



Kantha : Threads of Creativity

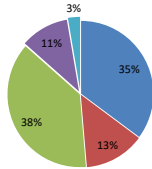
SL NO.	ARTISAN'S NAME	AGE	SEX	CONTACT NO.
1	SAHIMA KHATOON	25	FEMALE	
2	NIVA BIBI	25	FEMALE	9749886038
3	MANJUSHA SAHA	38	FEMALE	8918586396
4	MILI KHATOON	21	FEMALE	7318822702
5	SIPMULI HAZRA	39	FEMALE	7363829662
6	HASIBA BIBI	50	FEMALE	7797603285
7	APARNA BAGDI	27	FEMALE	7679257073
8	SALIMA BIBI	30	FEMALE	9002292221
9	FATIMA BIBI	28	FEMALE	7698092358
10	MARUFA BIBI	34	FEMALE	9647864899
11	ASHIMA SAHA	31	FEMALE	8927039790
12	PARVEEN KHATUN	23	FEMALE	8145286750
13	DIPA BAGDI	22	FEMALE	7679867614
14	SIPRAT BAIRAGYA	35	FEMALE	8759765829
15	TOPOTI BAIRAGYA	45	FEMALE	8509898036
16	TIYA BAURI	35	FEMALE	7872283164
17	KUSUM BAURI	31	FEMALE	7602658849
18	BANDANA BAURI	30	FEMALE	6294408766
19	TAPASHI DAS	38	FEMALE	6296491462

Kantha : Threads of Creativity

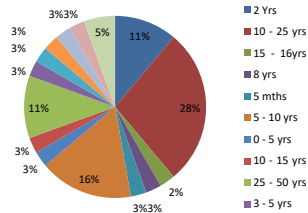
ADDRESS	EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE	LANGUAGE	MONTHLY INCOME
MAHEEDAPUR	ILLITERATE	2 yrs	BANGLA	1000
MAHEEDAPUR	SECONDARY	2 yrs	BANGLA, ENGLISH, HINDI	2500 - 5000
MAHEEDAPUR	SECONDARY	10 - 25 yrs	BANGLA, ENGLISH, HINDI	1300 - 1800
MAHEEDAPUR	9th	2 yrs	BANGLA, HINDI	1000
MAHEEDAPUR	ILLITERATE	15 - 16 yrs	BANGLA	1000
MAHEEDAPUR	ILLITERATE	2 yrs	BANGLA	1000
NANOOR	SECONDARY	8 yrs	BANGLA, ENGLISH, HINDI	1200
MAHEEDAPUR	PRIMARY	5 mths	BENGALI	1000
MAHEEDAPUR	PRIMARY	5 - 10 yrs	BENGALI	500 - 1000
NANOOR	SECONDARY	5 - 10 yrs	BENGALI	500 - 1000
MAHEEDAPUR	PRIMARY	5 - 10 yrs	BENGALI	BELOW 2500
NANOOR	COLLEGE	10 - 25 yrs	BENGALI	2500 - 5000
NANOOR	PRIMARY	0 - 5 yrs	BENGALI	2500 - 5000
MADA	ILLITERATE	10 - 15 yrs	BENGALI	BELOW 2500
MADA	PRIMARY	20 - 25 yrs	BENGALI	BELOW 2500
NANOOR	ILLITERATE	10 - 25 yrs	BENGALI	BELOW 2500
NANOOR	PRIMARY	10 - 25 yrs	BENGALI	BELOW 2500
NANOOR	ILLITERATE	10 - 25 yrs	BENGALI	BELOW 2500
NANOOR	COLLEGE	10 - 25 yrs	BENGALI	2500 - 5000

EDUCATION

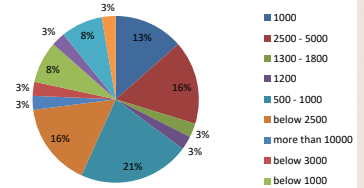
■ ILLITERATE ■ SE CO ND ARY ■ PRIM ARY ■ CO LLEG E ■ 9th



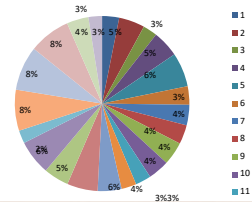
EXPERIENCE



INCOME



AGE



Kantha stitching, an epitome of true craftsmanship, sustainability and creativity. Craft cluster was an exposure to the long established craft and its craftsmanship with the opportunities and threats faced by the artisans. The place itself was an exhibition of craft as living people, the place where few people instill art in themselves and the lucky others witness that. Proportions of the motifs are much different from the conventional ones. Meeting the artisans behind such mesmerizing craft was a moment of life with lots of experiences. The first thing that we saw in the cluster was the women leading the craft. The place was far from the market area, so it took the sourcing part out from the hand of the artisan and even the direct contact of the artisan and consumer never happened. This lack of connectivity was making the mediator to make most of the benefits. Thread and fabrics were provided to the artisans and even the motifs were given to the artisans, which eventually limits creativity. The commercialisation of *Kantha* stitching took its beauty of making over a period of year with affection. Now, 3-4 artisans work on the same piece of saree at the same time leading to inconsistency in the needle craft. As asked upon, most of the artisans wanted to experiment with their own colour, shape, motifs, designs and fabric rather than just following the command of their master artisan or maybe the traders. They also believe that this step of being creative, freely can enhance their craft and income both.



Some common health issues faced by nearly all artisans was that their eyes get affected by working under insufficient light for long hours and they even suffer from neck pain, back pain and headache. On asking the artisans, they told us that they can work even more if they were provided with sufficient light and proper seating arrangement as sitting in same body postures for long hours hurt. On the very first day, our group headed towards Mahidapur Craft Cluster and we almost panicked as the artisans only understand Bengali language but our group had no Bengali speaking members. That moment made us realize how difficult it would be for the artisans to communicate to their customers from all over the country even if they got in contact anyhow. It takes atleast 3 months to make a *Kantha* stitched saree. Artisans work for atleast 5-6 hours per day for a month and what they receive is only Rs 500 to Rs 1500 a month, but still they work to earn surplus amount while having the flexible work schedule. A *Kantha* stitched palazzos is sold at ₹350 while a *Kantha* diary is sold at ₹200, with this we can understand the product diversification is helping artisans earn more with less efforts but product diversification with freedom of creativity can lead this craft to heights.



Kantha : Threads of Creativity

Our observations about the two clusters is that at Mahidapur, artisans were used to what they were doing and were less enthusiastic and experimental while at Nanoor, artisans were enthusiastic about starting something of their own. There were more experienced artisans as Mahidapur than Nanoor and the struggle made it evident that they do not want to try anything new. The artisans who were trained told us that the workshops made their work even more better and they want to attend more of that. Some of the artisans were having one or two smartphones in their family and they use Instagram, Whatsapp and other social media, but just for entertainment purpose. They lack the actual knowledge of technology and the usage of smartphone to make their craft better or to sell what they make. As workshops helped them and they are ready to attend more, there can be more workshops organized for technical, communicational and entrepreneurial support. Even as communication students, we can be a part of these workshops. Talking about the future of the craft, artisan on being asked said that they don't want their kids to practise this craft in future because of the above discussed health issues, low income and long working hours.

Comparative analysis of *Nakshi Kantha*

Traditional *Nakshi Kantha* shifted from its indigenous roots to modernity to ensure its continuity through commercialization. Human culture runs on the fluidity of changes, and cultural studies shows this as an intrinsic part of a changing world. The change happens not only to the people, it also happens to objects related to the people and their culture.

When traditional cultures are modified, they interact with contemporary cultures and take a new form, "indigenous modern culture." (Hoshagrahar, 2005, p. 8) refers to this situation as "indigenous modernity" in which the material is going through continuous development and people live their daily life. The traditional Kantha quilt of Bengal has followed a similar path that has undergone a shift from a personal cultural object to a consumer item, affecting its popularity, use, aesthetic quality, skill, and other dynamics.



The traditional *Kantha* we found in museums are imbued with different importance. The collection of *Nakshi Kantha* we saw in Victoria and Albert Museum were classified as two coverlets, a mat, and a wrapper. Mostly they were made between 1900-1950 in Bengal. the *Nakshi Kantha* in the collection can be divided into two different categories based on the motifs used on them – iconic (with motifs like fish, bird, lotus, human figure, paddy, tree of life, animals, leaves, steams etc.) and non-iconic (with different patterns and shapes). Iconic motifs like lotus, tree of life, mandala, swastika, and shatadal are basically inspired from Hindu mythology, and often their representation on *Nakshi Kantha* can separate it from other types of *Kantha*. One of *Nakshi Kantha* with iconic motifs that is displayed in the Victoria and Albert Museum is basically an "Ashon Kantha."

An *Ashon Kantha* is used for a sitting arrangement as an alternative of sofa. *Nakshi Kantha* are displayed in the Victoria and Albert museum to give viewers an image of how artisans using a needle as a primary tool of embroidery used to decorate an ordinary surface of rags into a beautiful artifact full of visual vocabulary. The hard work of the artisans can be imagined through a closer look at them. The ripple effect is clearly visible, which gives *Nakshi Kantha* an extra dimension. Previously, the purpose of making these embroidered quilts was usually for personal use, and this material culture had nothing to do with profit. The artisans used their creativity to represent what the artisans preserves, their social life, and their aspirations; in short, their sentiment was generating millions of stitches comprising the various motifs in the surface of the *Nakshi Kantha*. The use of motifs, composition, design, materials and techniques have changed to meet profit-oriented success.

There are motifs of Bengal tigers, lions, elephants, plants, flowers, but at the same time, it has motor cars as well. This coexistence of different motifs is an excellent example of dwelling between traditionality and contemporality.

Government Schemes

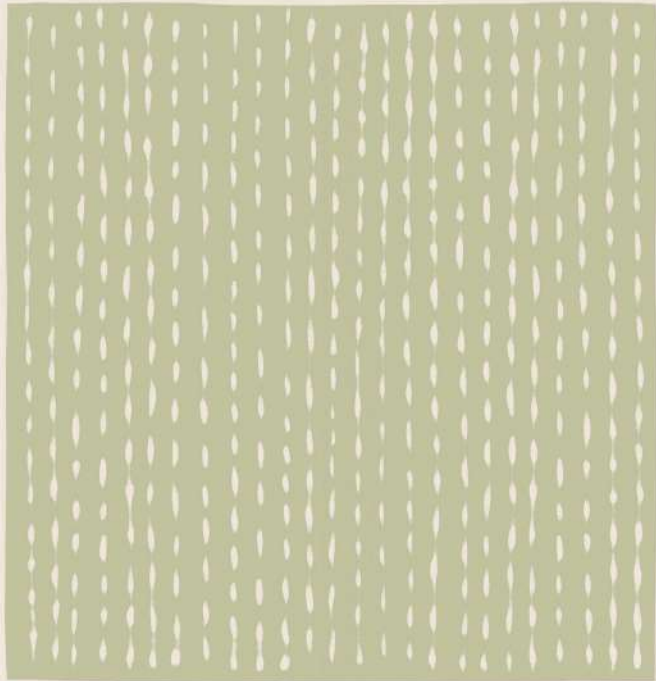
1. The West Bengal government dedicated a museum to showcase state's rich art of '*Kantha*' (embroidery) and puppetry, besides reflecting upon its tribal heritage by allocating a section on 'ethnography'. Housed at the Cultural Research Institute (CRI) complex in Kankurgachi area, a combined museum with three sections were launched by state Backward Classes Welfare Minister Upendra Nath Biswas. The puppet section displays work on relevant social themes by about 20 contemporary puppeteers, belonging to backward class, from three districts – Nadia, West Midnapore and South 24 Parganas. The minister also inaugurated a three-day workshop on 'Arts of Banga: An Ethnological Heritage Re-Appraisal 2015' on puppetry, '*Kantha*' and woodwork.

2. The government introduced a new scheme called the Design Resource Centre. This scheme would help and provide a platform for the development and concept of weave, colours, designs of handloom product.

3. In order to meet the skill gap in the industry, Ministry of Textiles is implementing Samarth Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector. The objective of the scheme is to provide demand driven, placement oriented skilling programmes to supplement the efforts of the industry in creating employment in textile and related sectors, covering the entire value chain of textiles, excluding Spinning and Weaving in organized sector. The upskilling of the handicrafts artisans in these adopted clusters are being done through providing technical and soft skill trainings under SAMARTH scheme to enable sustainable livelihood either by wage or self-employment. Samarth Scheme is being implemented in association with State Government agencies, sectoral organisations of Ministry of Textiles, Manufacturing Industry, Industry Associations and MSME Associations. This scheme is helping the artisans, technicians and weavers to acquire knowledge which would help them in adopting latest technological advancements. It aims to upgrade their knowledge base to equip them for better employment opportunities or self-employment. They will also be able to upgrade their skills through this scheme which will improve their earning capacity.

4. The handloom sector has a unique place in the Indian economy and plays a vital role in terms of providing employment, cloth production and value addition while at the same time preserves India's rich cultural heritage. The sector provides direct and indirect employment to more than 43 lakh weavers and allied workers, mostly from the SC/ST, backward and minority community.





Market Survey





Sonajhuri Haat

Through the tangle of sonajhuri or acacia trees, Shonibarar Haat or Sonajhuri Haat would reverberate. The spot in Bengal's Khoai region was dubbed Sonajhuri after the trees would come to life. The bauls arrived later in the afternoon with their own group and quickly took over the concourse with their ferocious musical energy. The bauls' main musical instrument, the ektara, was accompanied by the harmonium, tabla, and flutes. The bards kept reading Bengali folktales while plucking an ektara's one string. Men, women, and people of all ages danced while raising their hands in the air. Red dust clouds rose in response to the tourists' thunderous footfall. Visitors are not required to pay the entertainers anything; they perform for free.

Visitors are welcome to leave anything they want on the baul's mat; the performers don't ask for money in exchange. A display of genuine Bengali workmanship was on display at the weekly market. Unusual jewellery, saris and other garments, purses, shoes, paintings, wooden goods, bamboo, cane, jute, and terracotta objects for culinary use and home adornment were on show over rugs beneath the shade of trees. The Bolpur area is known for its handicrafts, which may be found across the world. Here, the craftspeople themselves make up the majority of the vendors.



Well known as a shopper's paradise, the place was a treat to the soul of shopaholics. When we reached the haat, we were welcomed by the tribal dancers and were asked to join them while dancing. The enthusiasm and vibe of the place was completely different. They did not force us for money but was on our wish to contribute for them. The open market was full of tribal jewellery, wooden products, musical instruments, cane products, kurtis, palazzos, dupattas, hair pins, bangles, sarees, toys, diaries, notepads, pencil boxes, hand fans and other gifting items etc. The transportation mode used was toto. The market was having lot of colours but in harmony with each other looking like a beautiful painting. It was also located amidst the forest. Most of the carys were selling fruits and juice, but it was a bit expensive. Talking about the price range, different stall owners were offering different price for the same product. The best option was to visit most of the stalls and compare the price and then buy. The price range of some of the products were as follows: Gopichand for ₹50- ₹150, Kantha stitched kurti for ₹250, hand fan for ₹50- ₹55, Kantha motifs printed diary for ₹90, Kantha stitched fabric covered diary for ₹180- ₹250, tie & dye saree of khadi for ₹550, hair pin for ₹50, earrings for ₹50- ₹150. The prices were non uniform throughout the market area.



When political prisoners were later freed from prison, Amar Kutir was established as a haven for them. Young revolutionary freedom warrior Susen Mukhopadhyay was motivated by Tagore's freshly launched rural rehabilitation scheme, which was being implemented in Sriniketan. He acquired 100 acres of property to realise his goal with the assistance of Aswani Kumar Sarkar, who had ties to the local landowner. He was also motivated by Mahatma Gandhi, and he blended their respective ideologies to form a commune that engaged in crafts including block printing, hand weaving, and leather work.

The primary goal of Amar Kutir has been the restructuring and revitalization of rural and cottage handicraft enterprises that adhered to Rabindranath Tagore's self-help ideology. At the Shyambazar Works in Kolkata, Mukhopadhyay hired the first group of trainees for the creative leather crafts of Shilp Sadan and began commercial production for the market. Even now, the design and reputation of these leather goods set the standard for the sector. In order to create a self-supporting non-governmental organisation based on Tagore's concept of "Rural Organization for Rural Reconstruction," the eminent independence fighter and social activist Pannalal Dasgupta registered the current Amar Kutir Society for Rural Development in 1978.

All's well that ends well, this was the case with us. The last day of the trip was dedicated for the analysis of the market and the products offered by them. So, first we visited Amarkutir for some shopping and observation while doing that. The place was an unexpected delight as it was located in the mid of the forest. Totos were the most preferable mode of transportation to visit that place other than that rented vehicles or personal vehicles can be an option.

When we entered the place, it was looking like an exhibition of craft where different intricate crafts were displayed and the best part was that although you have Rs.10, you can still have a dhokra ring or a key chain. And if you are a collector of *Kantha* stitching, you also have highly detailed *Kantha* stitched saree worth Rs. 25,000-35,000. The products offered were wall hangings, diaries, notepad, ring, neckpieces, earrings, show pieces, keychains, bracelets, boxes, paintings, musical instruments, bangles and sculptures and handkerchiefs etc. The food court of Amarkutir had less options for eating and the price was a little on the higher side. To enhance the visitor's experience, some local artists were playing musical instruments and were singing local songs. The price range of some products are as follows: leather bags for Rs. 800 with a discount, notebook for Rs.70 to Rs.160, diary with *Kantha* stitches for Rs.157, skirt with tribal motifs for Rs. 600- Rs. 700, bags with *Kantha* stitches for Rs. 150- Rs. 200, earrings for Rs. 150 and shirt with embroidery for Rs. 140- Rs. 240 etc.

Market Analysis

All's well that ends well, this was the case with us. The last day of the trip was dedicated for the analysis of the market and the products offered by them. So, first we visited Amarkutir for some shopping and observation while doing that. The place was an unexpected delight as it was located in the mid of the forest. Totos were the most preferable mode of transportation to visit that place other than that rented vehicles or personal vehicles can be an option. When we entered the place, it was looking like an exhibition of craft where different intricate crafts were displayed and the best part was that although you have Rs. 10, you can still have a dhokra ring or a key chain. And if you are a collector of *Kantha* embroidery, you also have highly detailed *Kantha* stitched saree worth Rs. 25,000- Rs. 35,000. The products offered were wall hangings, diaries, notepad, ring, neckpieces, earrings, show pieces, keychains, bracelets, boxes, paintings, musical instruments, bangles, sculptures and handkerchiefs etc. The chirping of the birds and silence of the forest were complimenting each other. The food court of Amarkutir had less options for eating and the price was on a little higher side.

To enhance the visitor's experience, some local artists were playing musical instruments and were singing folk songs. The price range of some products are as follows: leather bags for Rs. 800 with a discount, notebook for Rs. 70 to Rs. 160, diary with *Kantha* stitches for Rs. 157, skirt with tribal motifs for Rs. 600- Rs.700, bags with *Kantha* stitches for Rs. 150- Rs. 200, earrings for Rs. 150 and shirt with embroidery for Rs. 140- Rs. 240 etc. Our next stop for the market analysis was Sonajhuri Haat, well known as shopper's paradise, the place was a treat to the soul of shopaholics. When we reached the Haat, we were welcomed by the tribal dancers and were asked to join them while dancing. The enthusiasm and vibe of the place was completely different. They did not force us for money but was on our wish to contribute for them. The open market was full of tribal jewellery, wooden products, musical instruments, cane products, kurtis, palazzos, dupattas, hair pins, bangles, sarees, toys, diaries, notepads, pencil boxes, hand fans and other gifting items etc. The transportation mode used was toto. The market was having lot of colours but in harmony with each other looking like a beautiful painting. It was also located amidst the forest. Most of the carts were selling fruits and juice, but it was a bit expensive. Talking about the price range, different stall owners were offering different price for the same product.



The best option was to visit most of the stalls to compare the price and then make a purchase. The price range of some of the products were as follows: Gopichand for Rs. 50- Rs. 150, *Kantha* stitched kurti for Rs. 250, hand fan for Rs. 50- Rs. 55, *Kantha* motifs printed diary for Rs. 90, *Kantha* stitched fabric covered diary for Rs. 180- Rs. 250, tie & dye saree of khadi for Rs. 550, hair pin for Rs. 50, earrings for Rs. 50- Rs. 150. The prices were non uniform throughout the market area. The local market consisted of few malls, a good number of food stalls roadside, small local shops for clothing, jewellery and other necessities. The local people were much into local craft and its products. All the products of the Amarkutir and Sonajhuri were available locally but at a very high cost, even some additional products were also there. The additional products are *Kantha* stitched files, wooden toys, leather art wallets, denim purse with embellished with *Kantha* stitching, shell jewellery, wooden hair clips and different types of bags etc. The price range of some of the products are as follows: denim purse with *Kantha* stitching was for Rs. 60, *Kantha* stitched A3 documents file was for Rs. 170, leather art men's wallet was for Rs. 170 and leather jewellery box was for Rs. 280 etc.

Conclusion

Nowadays, in *Kantha*, old saris are replaced by new cotton fabrics. As this material is normally thicker, two layers of cloth may be sufficient for a *Kantha*. Most of the stitching and embroidery yarns today are purchased separately and are available in multiple colours. While cotton yarn is still in general use, nowadays Bamboo, Rayon and Silk Floss Thread are also used, especially for commercial *Kanthas*.

As the use of natural or sustainable product came into trend, the need of *Kantha* surged. *Kantha* is sustainable in nature, it provided opportunities to reuse the used clothes but in an artistic way. Earlier, it was known as a symbol of affection. The colourful threads used earlier were taken from the border of saris but now threads of different colours are purchased. With an increase in the number of people using social media, the number of conscious consumers has increased. The characteristics of traditional *Kantha* is incorporated with a touch of contemporary.

As the needs and wants of people are changing at a massive rate, people know what to buy and where to buy from, to satisfy their principles or maintain their self image or social status. *Kantha* is done on different fabric to make it more unique and affordable too.



Fig. 37. Group members with Artisans from the village
Photograph by Devanshi Mittal

The technological advancement is one of the reasons because of which now everyone knows what is right. *Kantha* is taking a beautiful turn by being traditional and experimental, all at the same time. One more aspect of *Kantha* revival is it being customized or personalized by incorporating certain personal text or figures on the saree. *Kantha* is homely, attached with emotions and an ocean of diminishing traditions.

The government scheme or workshop are promoting the people to take a lead as entrepreneurs. So, there are high chances to see the products reach bigger markets not only nationally but also internationally.

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