

Kantha

Stitched to perfection



Kantha, the stunning embroidery work from the state of Bengal, actually means embroidered quilt. The Kantha art has evolved and sustained the interest of textile connoisseurs since many a decade and for good reason.

Since the dawn of civilization, man has felt the need to provide ornamentation to textiles through weaving, dyeing, printing and embroidery. Embroidery, according to means, is the addition of pattern or other ornamental effect to textiles by the use of the needle and thread. The art of embroidery is ancient and it evolved from the process of plain sewing. The different kinds of embroideries popular in India include *Phulkari* of Punjab, *Chikankari* of Lucknow, *Kashidakari* of Kashmir, *Kantha* of Bengal and many more.

Meaning of *kantha* - The Sanskrit word *Kantha* means 'rags'. It is one of the most pleasing and best-known forms of the folk art of Bengal, which, in English, could mean 'Patched cloth'. There are two types of embroideries - first, in which the old and discarded cotton *saris* or *dhotis* are piled up on top of each other, quilted and embroidered, while the other type is quilted by using the discarded cotton bed spreads and the pictorial embroidery is done with tussar silk threads. The colours used for this embroidery are black, deep blue and red, symbolizing the three basic aspects of nature i.e., earth, sky and space.



Common motifs used in *Kantha* - The real *Kantha* embroidery is 'Dorukha'. 'Dorukha' has a strange contradiction, for here is an object made out of worn out and old textiles, transformed into objects of rare beauty. *Kantha* comprises the simplest stitch in the language of embroidery - the running stitch. It is the way in which this stitch is used, in different arrangements, that forms the complex vocabulary of *Kantha*. Some of the common motifs used are *Vajra*, chariots, *Palkis*, floral scrawls and creepers. Everyday life motifs like combs, mirrors and umbrellas also feature in this embroidery; other common motifs being heterogeneous objects like various types of lotus flowers, trees, creepers, foliage, floral scrolls, animal figures, human figures etc. The motifs used in *Kantha* embroidery have a great influence of Portuguese and European traditions. The earliest works of *Kantha* dates back to early 1800s and is embroidered with blue, black and red threads that were unraveled from *sari* borders. Because they were salvaged from used garments that had been frequently laundered, the colours tend to be muted.

The *kantha* embroidery of West Bengal is famous all around the globe. The old *Kantha* designs are rare possessions and are now flaunted on sleek shawls, *saris*, bags, letter holders and other fashionable items. The village woman spends many months on a single piece, covering it with intricate folk motifs by a simple running stitch.

Origin of the art form - Though its origin is uncertain, *Kantha* is an example of strange contradictions. An endeavour of thrift as much as the re-using of old fragments; it is at the same time a product expressing the devotion and rare skills

Contd.

Cultural Calendar for June

- June 1** Carnatic flute & Bharatha Natyam Recital
by Ms. Jayapradha Ramamoorthy & her students & Ms. Geetha Ganeshan & her students from Uttaraa Centre for Performing Arts, Hyderabad, India
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- June 9** Lecture on Evolution of Carnatic Music
by Prof. Gnanaa Kulendran, Former Professor & Head Dept of Music & Centre for advanced Bharatha Natyam, Tanjore Tamil University, India
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- June 15** An exhibition of paintings
By Mr. Nuwan Nalaka, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata
Venue & Time: ICC 11.00 a.m.
Exhibition dates: 16th & 17th from 10.00 a.m. to 6.00p.m.
- June 20** Kathak dance & Tabla recital
By Ms. W. M. Veronika K.Dassanayake & Mr. Asish Devangan Bhatkhande Music Institute Lucknow
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- June 23** Film: Vedham Pudhithu
Language: Tamil
Directed by: Bharathiraja
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- June 26** Film: Kal Ho Naa Ho (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Nikhil Advani
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- June 30** Film: Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Karan Johar
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs

(Admission to all programmes is free on first come first served basis)



of the maker.

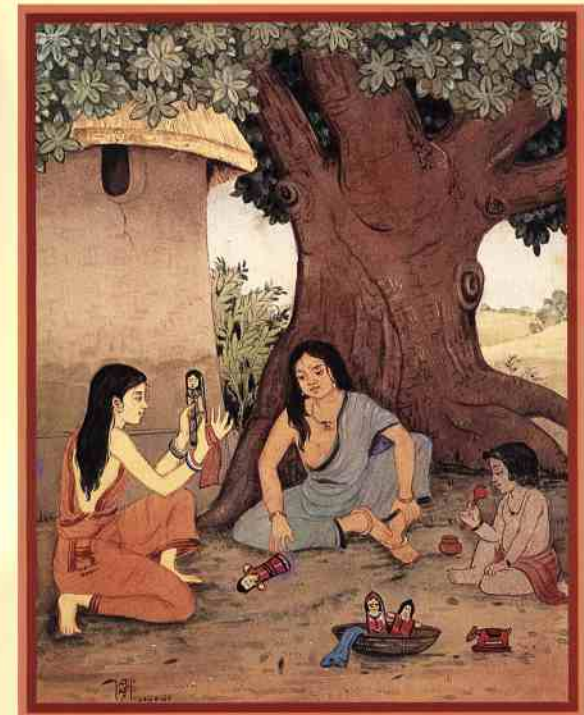
Almost a recreation of order out of chaos, *Kantha* is an invocation to the Gods, and protection from the evil eye. As with other areas of folk forms, the beginning of *kantha* embroideries must of necessity rest on inferences from folklore, from ritualistic and literary sources, from ancient songs and the stories spun by bards. Endeavours by present day researchers to establish origins of the craft from descendants of the embroiderers, invariably bring a reply from the simplistic folk artist, "It is a very old skill, my grand mother's great grand mother used to make such lovely *kanthas*."

Various forms of *kantha* in different regions - *Kanthas* are produced in Hugli, Patna, Satagon, Jessore, Faridpur, Khulna and other parts of East and West Bengal.

Contd.



June 2006



Lalit Prasad Shaw, Under the tree, Tempera, 25x31cm, 1955

Indian Cultural Centre

133, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 4, Sri Lanka

Telephone: 2500014, Fax: 2598674

E-mail: icc@sltnet.lk

ICCR Website: www.iccrindia.org

In Retrospect

28th April

Hindustani Vocal Music Recital By Mr. R.M.P.Chandika



Mr. R.M.P.Chandika, visiting lecturer at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts captivated the audience with repertoire of Hindustani classical music. He commenced his recital with Vilambit Khyal set to Ek taal and continued with Madhya Druth set to Theen taal, Druth Tarana set to Theen taal and concluded with Thumri. The evening

was very well enjoyed by the audience gathered at the Centre.

NEW COURSES

YOGA

Course will commence : 1st August 2006
Class days : Saturday & Sunday
Age limit : Over 12 years
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.250/= + 6 months fee
Rs.1800/=)
Registration : Will commence from 4th July 2006

BHARATHA NATYAM

Course will commence: 1st June 2006
Class days : Tuesday & Friday / Wednesday & Saturday
Age limit : Over 6 years
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.250/=
Monthly fee: Rs.500/=
Registration : Commenced from 1st May 2006

KATHAK

Course will commence: 1st June 2006
Class days : Monday & Thursday
Age limit : Over 6 years
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.250/=
Monthly fee Rs.500/=
Registration : Commenced from 1st May 2006

New Courses Contd.

CARNATIC VOCAL MUSIC

Course commenced : 1st March 2006
Class day : Saturday
Age limit : Over 6 years
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.250/=
Monthly fee Rs.300/=
Registration : Commenced from 1st February 2006
Vacancies exist

TABLA

Course commenced : 1st March 2006
Class day : Saturday
Age limit : Over 7 years
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.250/=
Monthly fee Rs.300/=
Registration : Commenced from 1st February 2006
Vacancies exist

Films in June

Vedham Pudhithu (with English subtitles)
Language: Tamil
Directed by: Bharathiraja
Starring : Sathyaraj, Saridha, Raja & Amala



Kal Ho Naa Ho(with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Nikhil Advani
Starring : Sharukh Khan, Preity Zinta & Sayid Ali Khan



Kuch Kuch Hota Hai(with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Karan Johar
Starring : Sharukh Khan, Kajol & Rani Mukherje



LIBRARY

Recent Library Accessions

Business super brands : An insight into India's strongest business brands
London: Superbrands,2005
137p
002470
658
BUS

Story of Asia's Lions
Divyabhanusinh
Mumbai: Marg Publications,2005
259p
002468
639.9
DIV

To the Nation: for the Nation : Selected Speeches of Dr. Manmohan Singh
New Delhi: Academic Foundation,2006
89p
002474
324
TOT

Three Plays: Naga-Mandala, Hayavadana, Tughlaq
Kamad,Girish
New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1999
221p
002401
891.2
KAR

Golden age of Travel
Williamson, Andrew
Peterborough: Thomas Cook Publishing,1998
128p
002475
910.9
WIL

Seven Cities of Delhi
Hearn, Gordon Risley
New Delhi: Aryan Books,2005
173p.
002471
934
HEA

New Instrumental Compositions for North Indian Music
Mihiripenna, Anil
Battaramulla:The Author,2006
479p
002472
780
MIH

Time and Again
Khisha, Mukur K
New Delhi: Macmillan,2004
237p
002460
F
KHI

Kantha ... Contd.

Distinguishable forms of embroidery began to appear regionally, and just as the material varied depending on the loom cloth available in each district, the winter temperature of each area, the influence of ritual and custom in household life, and the leisure time available to women of various classes, so emerged the types of *Kantha*, from the smallest 'arishilata' (cosmetics wrapper) to the magnificent ceremonial 'nakshi kantha' prepared for the bride and the bridegroom.

The boundary of *Kantha's* shape is perhaps the only constraint to the embroiderer; all else is left free to her imagination – to use language and imagery from the store house of memory and fancy. Thus, in some older *kanthas*, are embossed figures of Company soldiers on horses, or *Nawabs* smoking *hookahs*. The *kantha* embroider's own dreams are patterning in the form of the sun image, flora and fauna, and sometimes, the maker acknowledges her work by signing her name or stitching a proverb on one side.

Nidhi Malhotra, Incredible India