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Tales and traditions: Textile heirlooms take centre stage in Delhi

Weaving together stories from the past and present generations are the works displayed at the Aina exhibition. It showcases the artistry and love that goes into creating and preserving the cherished textile pieces over the years.

Updated on: May 16, 2023 4:55 PM IST
By Manvi Singh , New Delhi



A couple admires the phulkari dupattas preserved in the family of Lajwanti Devi since 1900. (Photo: Gokul VS)

No matter how full is our wardrobe, that one piece of cloth that has been passed down through generations always finds a special place. Whenever pulled out, it refreshes memories of the time gone by. Weaving together all those stories, from the past to the present, are the textiles exhibited at the ongoing exhibition titled Aina.

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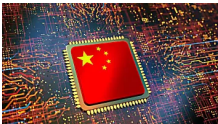
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A kinkab lehenga preserved by Veena Gupta. It originally belonged to her mother. (Photo: Gokul VS)

Showcasing the artistry and love that goes into creating and preserving each thread, for years, the displayed works are no less than timeless heirlooms. From delicate lace dollies to vibrant handwoven rugs, each exhibit narrates a unique tale of the family's heritage. This is evident when Veena Gupta, one of the contributors to the exhibition, looks at the kinkab (glittering weave of golden and silver threads) lehenga embroidered with zardozi, and says, "My wedding lehenga was and is still a prized possession that makes me feel my mother's presence whenever I see this heirloom piece. It was passed onto me by my mother, on my wedding day. Continuing the family legacy, I would like to pass it on to my future daughter-in-law."

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This purple coat embroidered in zardozi was bought in 1894 in Sikar (Rajasthan), and belongs to Shobha Bhandari's father. (Photo: Gokul VS)

The sentiments attached to these heritage pieces only intensifies with the number of years for which they have been preserved. "My father first wore this coat in 1894 when he was nine years old," shares Shobha Bhandari, talking about the purple velvet coat with intricate embroidery done

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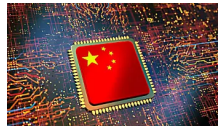
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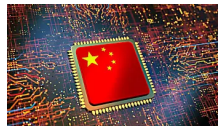
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in sequin and zari. "This was bought by my grandfather, and is a family jewel because it's not only a rare piece to find but every bit of it seems to contain the very essence of my father, whom I lost years ago. It's a symbol of our family's identity. Unfortunately, looking at its condition today, I only hope that there is some museum who comes forward to help us preserve it," adds Bhandari.

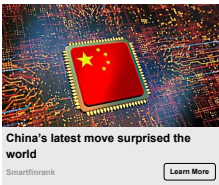
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"The exhibitors who have contributed to this exhibition are regular people who loaned me their heirlooms; some of which are almost a century old," informs Sareekah Agarwal, curator of the show, sharing how the idea to document the emotions behind textile heirlooms is "heartfelt and warming" for her. "Textiles are storytellers in themselves. Besides technical documentation of a textile, one should also document the personal connection that someone has with a piece of clothing," adds Agarwal.

The stories of love and loss that have become involuntarily attached to these attires are touching a chord with the visitors from across NCR. Abir Mukherjee, a Gurugram-based lawyer, who visited the show recently, says, "The way people have preserved these heirlooms, especially the sarees, is phenomenal! I believe every house has a trunk full of lineage sarees. This showcase makes me wonder what would happen to these now, as people hardly wear sarees on a daily basis."

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Catch It Live

What: Aina

On till: May 21

Where: Art Gallery, Kamaladevi Block, India International Centre, Lodhi Road

Timing: 11am to 7pm

Nearest Metro Station: Jor Bagh on Yellow Line and Khan Market on Violet Line

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