Textile tales

Sudarshan by Aavaran and the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation bring Udaipur's rich cultural tradition to life through a textile installation

Spirituality and craftsmanship found a rendezvous point with 'Sudarshan' at The City Palace in Udaipur. The 12-panel artwork, created by Aavaran, a Udaipur-based fashion and lifestyle house that has championed the indigo and *dabu* traditions of the region for the past two decades, in partnership with the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation, was also an invitation for culture and spirituality enthusiasts to view this unique collaboration up close at the historic palace in the City of Lakes. **t2** was there.

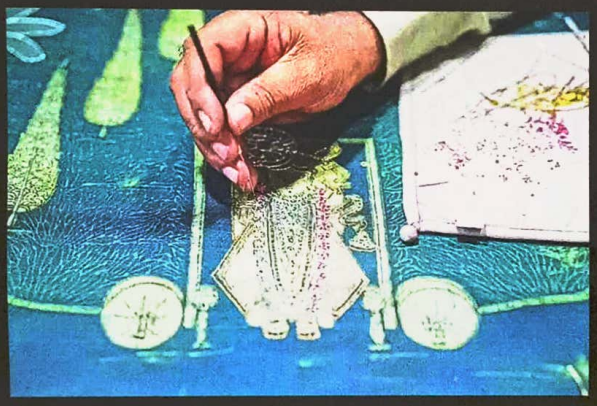
The six-day exhibition, which began on October 27 and concluded on November 1, offered a glimpse into the cultural landscape of Nathdwara, the devotion that its people carry in their hearts and souls for Srinath*ji* or Lord Krishna, and how a living tradition pays tribute to this sentiment, integral to Mewar's cultural heritage.

Conceptualised more as a *bhav* than an artistic representation, the 12 panels document Krishna's arrival and journey in Nathdwara through indigo-drenched textiles. Depicting the 12 months of the Hindu calendar, the panels begin with Magha, as winter draws to a close and Srinathji arrives, before moving on to Chaitra, Jyeshtha, Shravan and other months, bringing to life the different avatars of the deity. At the centre of Sudarshan are two panels that recall the episode of Govardhan Parbat and anchor the artwork. The panels also bring to the fore various rituals, including the offering of mangoes, scenes from Krishna's *lila* and more.

In terms of artistic language, Sudarshan follows the Pichwai painting tradition, native to the region, bringing moments to life with accents of zari work. The mountains, trees, birds and stream running across all the panels depict the landscape of Nathdwara, while the figures stand out against the rich blue and green backdrop with zari detailing. *Dabu* work plays beautifully with the pigmented background, lending greater depth to the artwork. Subtle embroidery in colourful threads, depicting flowers, fruits, birds, garlands and more, adds vibrancy to the panels.



The 12-panel textile installation on display in one of the rooms at The City Palace in Udaipur.



A glimpse behind the scenes of the panels, made by Aavaran's artisans at the brand's atelier in Udaipur.



The panel, which took more than a year to create, was meticulously put together by a large team at Aavaran.



We explored the process of indigo dyeing using vats, a completely manual process. The *dabu*-printed fabric is dipped into the indigo vat and then dried in the sun.



Abhijeet Karwa, architect and art curator, led a walkthrough of Sudarshan on October 27.



Curated by Abhijeet Karwa, the panels draw on Hindu scriptures to depict Lord Krishna's journey in Nathdwara, Rajasthan. The region's landscape is brought to life through dabu work on indigo-dyed panels, outlined with *zari* work in silver and gold. This panel depicts the month of Bhadrapad, one of the monsoon months leading up to Krishna's *lila*.



After visiting the exhibition, we also explored the processes of dyeing and dabu printing at Aavaran's atelier.



This section introduced us to the different wooden and metal blocks stocked at the atelier, and showed us why precision is key to block printing.



This panel depicts the month of Jyeshtha, when summer is at its peak and mango trees are laden with fruit. The scene depicts the Snan Yatra, a cooling ritual, alongside the offering of 1,25,000 mangoes to the deity.



Alka Sharma, proprietor of Aavaran, said: "It's a privilege for us to be part of Sudarshan and present it in collaboration with the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation. The project is very close to our hearts. It is not just a textile artwork but also represents so many aspects of Udaipur and its culture. The 12 panels are also a *seva* for us."



"I would like to congratulate Aavaran, a Udaipur-based organisation dedicated to reviving and promoting the traditional art of dabu printing of Mewar. Through its sustained efforts, this indigenous craft has gained renewed recognition and is reaching audiences at both the national and international levels. As the 77th Custodian of the House of Mewar, I am committed to the belief that The City Palace Museum, Udaipur, should serve as an open platform for organisations such as Aavaran that are working towards the preservation, revival and contemporary interpretation of Mewar's traditional arts and crafts," said Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar, chairman and managing trustee of the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation.

Farah Khatoon

Pictures courtesy: Aavaran