

LET CHICKEN FEET SCAMPER ALL OVER YOUR EARTHY KURTA

From a relatively obscure place on the Indian map often equated with gun-wielding separatist tribals, Assam's stunning arts and crafts is a story waiting to be told

Knee-length cotton kurtas for women (Rs 580 each).
PICS/SAMEER MARKANDE

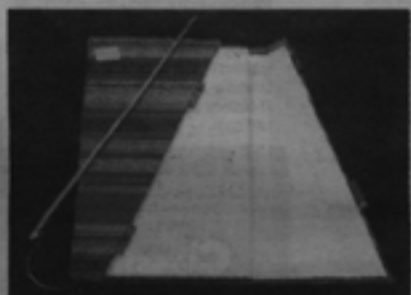
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Priyanka Chakraborty is a skeptical woman. And with good reason. An Assamese by birth, she found it hard not to believe that all the so-called Fair Trade organisations and the countless NGOs that harp about bettering lives were actually pocketing a fraction of the profits themselves. So, this 28 year-old, Mumbai resident who sells eco-friendly handicrafts from around the country through her venture called Craft Vogue, packed her bags and travelled to the interiors of Assam to get first-hand accounts of the villagers' plight.

Last April, during a visit to her family in Dibrugarh (located in the Eastern part of upper Assam), Priyanka made an arduous trek to Bongaigaon (in West Assam), using three modes of transport — train, taxi and rickshaw. "My parents weren't too excited at the prospect of me travelling to the interiors of Assam alone. But I was keen on talking to the Bodo women weavers employed by a weavers' cooperative called Aagor Daagra Afad," she says.

Aagor is run by the Action Northeast



Notebook (Rs 225)

Trust that works at the grassroots level on issues like health, education and alternate income generation. They also educate the people about the rights entitled to them by the government.

The assortment of products made by Bodo (an Assamese tribe) women weavers whose husbands and fathers have abandoned them to join separatist groups or are victims of terrorism, will be on exhibition this weekend.

"I went with absolutely no clue about what to expect, and though it was difficult to communicate with the women since they only speak the Bodo language, the sheer craftsmanship and buoyancy of colours bowled me over," says Priyanka, the force behind the exhibition.

We loved the simple, cotton kurtas available in bright monochromes and varying lengths and sleeves. It is difficult to imagine that contemporary office products like pen stands and memo cubes have been actually made by tribals living in Assam. "They are trained by the organisation to incorporate the latest designs and colour combinations into their work," she reveals. The pocket-friendly range also includes tablemats and napkin sets, coin pouches, wallets, photo frames, cushion covers and bags, made using the technique of extra warp. The women incorporate intricate patterns inspired by nature, woven on their home-made bamboo looms. Trademark to the North East, stoles made from the woolly white Eri Silk will definitely guard against the chill anticipated in the coming months.

Using a robust colour palette, including earthy shades like mustards, rusts, henna, oranges, reds and browns, these products incorporate Bodo motifs like chicken feet (four of these motifs put together resemble a flower), fingers, peacock wink (concentric diamonds with

a single dot in the centre) and bitter gourd (cross-section of the vegetable with seeds in the centre). Usually incorporated on horizontal lines, the linearity lends it a kind of rustic sophistication that you associate with products available at FabIndia (where Aagor retails too).

"These simple-minded Bodo women never imagined that their lives could change by selling something they have been making for generations. Profits from such exhibitions only help instill confidence in their skills," smiles Priyanka.

ON Today and tomorrow, 10 am to 9 pm
AT ABC Art Gallery, Daffodils Society, near Eden Market and Hiranandani Gardens, Powai.
CALL 9029000760

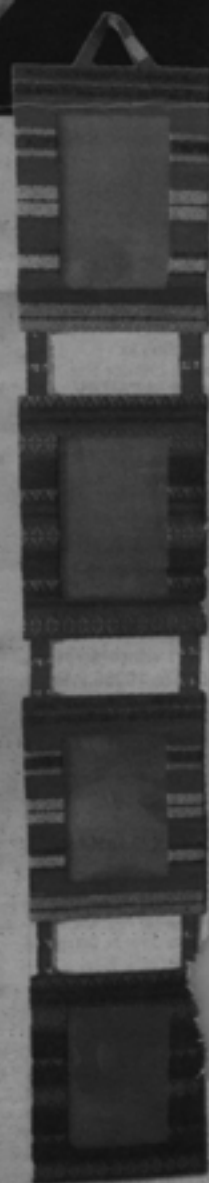


WIN
4 CUTE COIN POUCHES

WHAT IS THE NAME OF PRIYANKA'S VENTURE?

Send in your answer to theguide@mid-day.com with your full name and contact number.

Winners will be picked through a random draw and contacted on phone.



Wall photo frame (Rs 280)