

by Archana

IF PAULA Sengupta were an author, she would have easily penned a bestseller with her acquired memories of conflict in the subcontinent, from the fault lines that now divide South Asia into three tension-prone countries. She isn't a writer, though, but an artist, who has created a bestseller, albeit in a medium that she understands best.

Sengupta tells the story of the conflicts that have shaped present-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh through her multi-media works of art which employ local artistic idioms like embroidery. The art works are on display at Gallery Espace in an exhibition, titled *Lv, Pomy*, a sequel to her last show in Mumbai, *Rivers of Blood*.

"The *Rivers of Blood* was more focused on the partition of Bengal while this one is inspired by emotions and memories of those who fought in the 1971 war," says Kolkata-based Sengupta, who is currently an assistant professor in printmaking at Rabindra Bharati University. What makes her art interesting is the incorporation of colonial as well as local stitches, to tell stories of what people went through, and what became of their land as a result of the war. Some works, resembling cushion

Subcontinent's conflicts find a resonance in its shared art



Kolkata-based artist Paula Sengupta



covers, even come inscribed with Rabindranath Tagore's lyrics of *Amar Shonar Bangla*, a symbol of Bengali cultural identity that was adopted by Bangladesh as its national anthem in 1972.

What helped Sengupta in giving a personal touch to her project were two facts — that her father served in the Indian army, and that both her parents hailed from Bangladesh. Since 2008, when she first set foot in Bangladesh on a four-day workshop, she has travelled from east to the west of the country, absorbing as much as she could about the past and present of her parents' erstwhile home.

While the east is more or less assimilated in Sengupta's art, the western front remains to be explored. She has tried going to Pakistan twice but in vain. Her next trip, for a residency in Karachi beginning this September, would hopefully materialise. And then, her tapestry of the conflict in the subcontinent would become complete.

— The exhibition is on at Gallery Espace, 16, Community Centre, New Friends Colony, till August 20; 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (Monday to Saturday).
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(Top) An art work made with Nakshi Kantha, an embroidery style from Bangladesh. (Left) A covered cushion that is inscribed with random thoughts on war in both handwritten text and print.