

LIVING

Clothes at a Bargain
by Muneera Parbeen



RECENT times have been a boom for handicrafts and the readymade garments industry. The quality of locally made clothes have improved so much that now we can proudly claim that our products top can compete side by side with any such foreign products.

The increase in demand of readymade clothes and hand embroidered sarees and salwar kameezes have led to an increase in the number of independent boutiques and other small workshops in the city. Competition has led to more innovation and prices too have now stabilised more or less of these products. The interest in 'desi' products is now a respectable fashion, and therefore, their product an 'in' profession.

The Coalition Cottage Printing Project is one such organisation which is dabbling in small scale production of locally made and designed clothes. This project was initially started as a side-project of the Women's Health Coalitions Brands in Mirpur, to provide income-generating work for poor women. It has since become a self-sufficient and independent section with its own staff.

Sarees, salwar kameezes, bed-covers, cushion covers, shawls, tablecloths etc. are the main products of this organisation. Sarees are bought as wholesale fabrics and then dyed, block printed and embroidered according to their very own design. The same is done in case of salwar kameezes and bed-covers. Although the fabrics are all patterned and embroidered by the project's own designer, a lot of work is done as per the clients' orders. A fair portion of the organisation's sales are to shops on Bally Road, Eastern Plaza and other boutiques around the city. Individual pieces are also sold from their premises. The project also participates at most exhibitions and 'meena bazaars' around the city and was also in the WVA's own affair recently.

The sarees and dresses are primarily very ethnic in their patterns and designs. Some dresses are also designed as per the season's demand, as heavily embroidered ones around the Eid festivals etc. The sarees are beautifully patterned, the block-printed sarees which are also hand embroidered are especially one of their better attractions (and

more popular). The detailed embroidery is done in vibrant colour. These sarees are first blockprinted and then embroidered, the dual work giving the sarees a very elegant outlook. Rabeya Khanam is the enigmatic lady overlooking this entire project.

She is assisted by Mowri Sultana who is actually the project's accounts officer but in effect involved in all other work as well. Rabeya herself designs all the patterns and embroidery done on the sarees and the dresses and also deals with all the clients and outgoing orders. The quality of the materials used and the quality of the finished goods are factors to which most attention is given, according to Rabeya and she proudly claims that they never have had any complaints regarding the quality of their products.

At present the Coalition Cottage Printing Project has 15 permanent staff who do the block printing, dyeing and tailoring at their premises at Mirpur. Work, especially of hand embroidery, is mainly done by the temporary staff who are paid for each piece of work they complete. Rabeya said that the project at all

times have around 200 to 250 'temporary' people (especially women) working for them. The advantage of this kind of work is that the women take the materials and fabrics home with them and do the work at home.

One of the best attractions of this project is that the prices of all their products are very reasonable. Sarees are available here from Taka 375 up to Tk 600 for the variety of 'tie-n-dye' and block printed sarees, depending on the designs. The hand-embroidered sarees are priced between Tk 650 and 1200, again depending on the designs. salwar kameezes (some 2-piece and some 3-piece) range between Tk 475 and Tk 2000. Shawls and kotees are also available here, their prices also between Tk 200 and 350 for the former and 190 and 300 for the latter. Individual orders are also taken here for sarees, salwar kameezes, bed-covers, cushion covers, etc and the charges are extremely reasonable. Unfortunately, the project does not have a separate showroom but then products are displayed and sold from their own premises at House No 10, Rd No 4, Mirpur Section 10.

The Market is a Bad Master

Despite the glorification of the free market-place in today's political and economic rhetoric, it remains a false god, says Hazel Henderson.

DESPITE its glorification in the rhetoric of political and economic pundits, the free market of today is a false god.

While markets are necessary in human decision-making, they are not sufficient to coordinate all our interactions and those markets that lie beyond price. Markets require rules and regulations in order to function efficiently and even Adam Smith taught this lesson.

It is being relearned today in Russia and other societies shifting from socialism to market economies.

Smith said markets function to allocate resources only when buyers and sellers meet in market places where each person has equal power and information and where no harmful effects are inflicted on innocent bystanders. Smith's clearly stated, rules are still necessary conditions for markets to function today.

In fact, markets never were 'free'. They always relied on rules of human interaction: the reciprocal cooperation, trust, and moral obligation that accompanies any free, uncoerced exchange between people. Otherwise markets could have never developed as the civilized means of exchange they became.

So why have we forgotten this essential, cooperative basis of markets?

The exaggerated rhetoric of 'free' markets so prevalent today is part of an adolescent yearning for irresponsibility. Nothing could be more dangerous than truly free, irresponsible markets, the consequences of which are forever represented in the Wall Street crisis of the 1920s.

Only the calamitous crash of 1929 that devastated millions of people spurred intervention and government regulation, with the creation of the Securities and Exchange Commissions. Even so, it took many years to rebuild the trust and confidence of Americans in banks and securities markets.

So why do economic textbooks teach that markets and regulations are opposites? They cite Smith's observation about the human 'propensity



that we have an equal propensity to make rules.

Economics textbooks left the study of rule-making and interactions in communities and families to a branch of mathematics called 'Game Theory'. Game theorists literally study the games people play, along with psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists.

In 1994, game theorists, focusing on these rules of human interaction, won all three Nobel Prizes in economics.

All economies today are mixtures of markets and regulations that can only be understood from such broader perspectives. It is culture that provides the rules that govern all economies and not the other way around as economic textbooks still state.

For example, Russia, in adopting obsolete Western economic textbooks, unleashed a 19th century form of capitalism rather than its 20th century regulated forms now operating in Europe and North America.

Few Russian economists ever visited the United States or any of the advanced industrial countries to see how 20th century capitalism had already evolved within contract law

state, and national levels of government.

The Russians now are learning the hard way, as their society's trust, cooperation, and confidence have been eroded in search of the false god of free markets and irresponsible individualism.

The have experienced everything from stock market scams, bribery, corruption, inflation and unemployment, to soaring domestic violence and the breakdown of traditional values.

The US and European debate about what to regulate at what level of government is important. In too many cases tax codes and government regulations have been subverted to benefit the powerful few: financial, corporate and other special interest groups.

The efforts of US voters to form a third party are clearly based on this loss of trust in governments now cited by 76 per cent of the American people, according to a recent survey by the Americans Talk Issues Foundation of Washington, DC.

Europe's 'social markets' and welfare safety nets are also in tatters, as they are in the United States and Canada. But attempting to solve the problem by entrusting it to the

worse. The deregulation of financial markets in the 1980s accelerated the erosion of national sovereignty, environmental standards, and domestic policy options to present job security and maintain safety nets. Corporations and financial players were allowed to escape national regulations and migrated into the global fast lane and its as yet unregulated financial markets.

National politicians, however honest and democratically elected, now ruefully tell voters they are powerless to fulfil their campaign promises and manage the domestic economy because of 'global competition'.

Today they must deal with hordes of bond and commodity traders and the daily tidal wave of around \$1 trillion or more that sloshes across their borders and can attack the value of their currencies at a moment's notice. Footloose corporations seek ever cheaper labour and unprotected environmental resources worldwide.

Instead of countering the rhetoric of false markets, politicians shrink from a vital debate about the complementary role of regulation, both national and international. Some are caught in the false polarity between globalism and isolationism. All are traumatised by taxes.

But only when we recognise that markets and regulations are essential to prosperous, orderly economies can we end the polarisation of post-Cold War politics. National politicians pushed to the wall by global financial markets will soon learn these lessons.

Voters are demanding that politicians address irresponsible global markets and competition by spending more of their time on international agreements to regulate these unstable markets. Something akin to a global Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is now necessary to bring order and restore both confidence of investors and the trust of voters in all countries.

I am sure after one month of fasting you must be either in control over your eating habits or going berserk. By now you definitely know neither starving, nor overeating is for you. Moderation is the key.

Are you reading this and getting angry? Getting sick and tired of body fascism and dopey diet programmes? It is not OK to be fat. Your extra body fat puts you in a high risk category for a wide range of illnesses — diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and some cancers. Fat causes more illnesses than smoking and drinking. The latter two will add to your problems. Being fat may not be a sin, but it can threaten your health, happiness and life span.

You must choose either high or low intensity workouts 3 times in a week. Choose activities that make your pulse race and your body sweat and leave you feeling tired and ex-

fitness royale

with rani padamsee

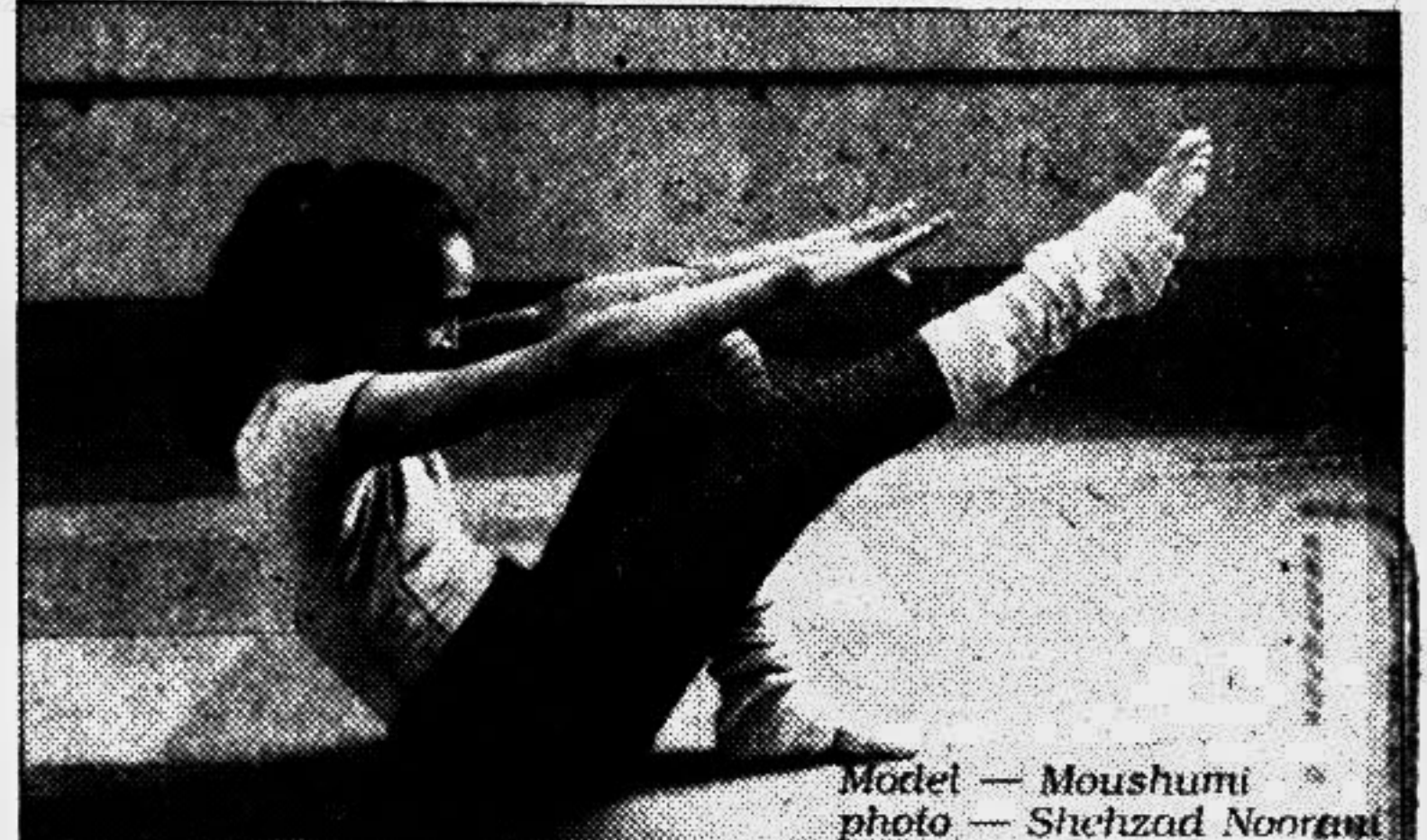
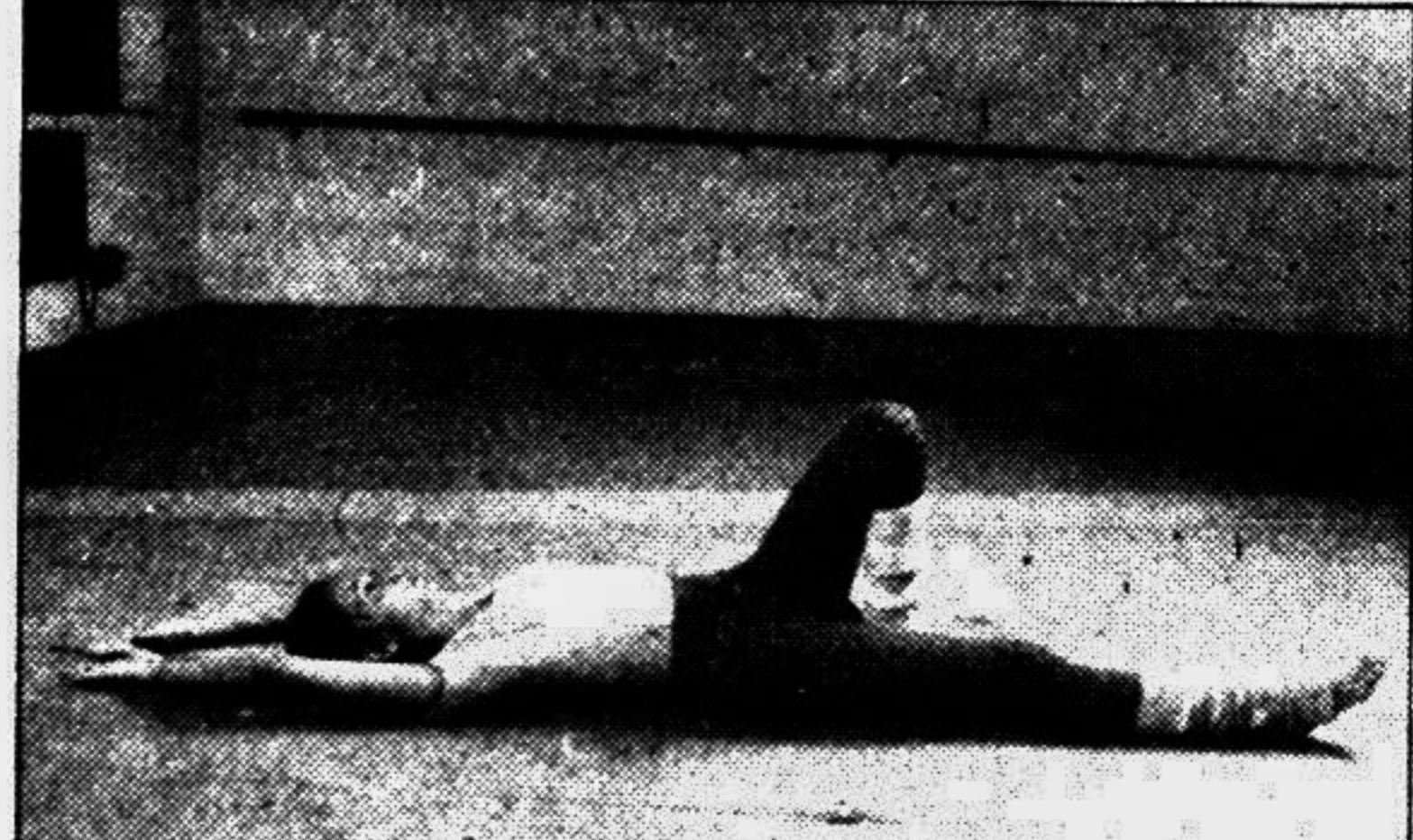


After the Fasting Fatigue

Remember, if you have a weak heart, back trouble, are pregnant or very overweight then always consult your doctor before embarking on a routine of any kind. Try to do everything yourself and keep yourself busy. Walk even the smallest distance. Walking is the best form of exercise for starters.

1) Lie on your back as shown with one leg bent.

Completely stretch the whole body. Keep your stomach in and back flat on the floor. 2) As you rise lift your leg and arms simultaneously. Breathe out as you lift your body up and then in as you go back to position one. Lift leg even higher and touch your toes. This is complete body exercise works on arms legs and stomach. Change leg and continue. Do 10 set each size rest and repeat.



Model — Moushumi photo — Shehzad Noorani

Beggars on the Prowl

by Lavina Ambreen Ahmed

THESE days going about in town is something the prudent Dhakaites seldom looks forward to. Interesting shopping sprees are not what they used to be. Once you reach the entrance of any shopping centre, you will confront an unexpected reception committee, invariably always overzealous at your arrival.

They shower abuses at you, overwhelm you with their litany and even pass you. Yes, they are for want of a 'delicate' word, the beggars; making sure your shopping plan goes wrong from the very beginning. Before you jump to the wrong conclusion, bear with me for a while. I am not being insensitive to the unfortunate masses here. But often their relentless pestering can really prove trying. And that is why veteran victims like myself find it hard to be empathetic with them at all times.

The floating alms seekers can be spotted almost everywhere in the metropolis and their age vary from 6 to 60 plus. They hang out near eateries, at the traffic intersections, sidewalks and even at the university campus. But of course their favourite haunts are the market places. It's certainly not an amusing fact that they had had to suffer more than their fair share of miseries. So, it's understandable if they expect financial assistance from the more privileged ones. But must they verbally assault the passers-by? Somewhere along the line the obdurate vagrants have abandoned the 'asking' approach and resorted to the more aggressive one — demanding.

Alas! the poor city dwellers already have to endure a lot in the Dhaka streets. The perennial traffic hazards, escalating street accidents and environmental degradation are enough to drive even the most blasé person crazy. Then overcoming all the obstacles of everyday life when the weary Dhakaites reaches the market premises, another ordeal begins. The beggars accost him even before he can get down from his vehicle. And if you dare ignore them, you will win scathing glares followed by a string of disparagement. What's more, this kind of rough treatment is most often unprovoked and uncalled for. Like, when they appear out of the blue, charge money, curse you, your family and the generations to come, even before you can catch your breath. Let alone give a negative reply! In the face of such blatant hostility, can you be blamed for looking the other way?

Needless to say, the susceptible prey are the female sex. Obviously, the road roamers consider them to be their most persistent pursuers. And as it happens, city women do relate more harassed-by-the-mob tales than their male peers.

In need of Uhu glue and some paper, an architecture student rushed to New Market to finish her model assignment on time. But as good luck wasn't on her side, she was waylaid by those merciless mercenaries. Just as soon as she got down from her three wheeler. Having snared their game, they were determined not to leave empty handed. The poor girl frankly didn't have any small change, or would gladly grant

their wish at that precise moment. One of them was especially tenacious. A 40 something cadaverous man with dreadlocks and multiple rudrakshi necklaces, he approached her and sneered: 'dey balchhi! (give me, I say!) or you will die a miserable death!' A barrage of an equally grim and unpleasant forecast of her future followed. Normally, an intrepid person, she was so worried about her class project, that she let her captor with the menacing look unnerve her. She hurried to the stationers', bought the stuff and took the longer route to let herself out by the 2nd gate. Her encounter with the mendicant had affected her so much so, that she has vowed never to go to the shops alone.

Same goes for Zara, a med student who is petrified of the pagols (madmen) on the loose near the shopping plazas. Incidentally she does seem to attract a lot of really wacky people. People close to her 'back up this fact and muse: do they only sense the fear of them in her — or, does it have anything to do with kindred spirits?

Stalked by a semi-nude loony, another pagol phobic ran to her car and left the market. But mental anguish wasn't enough, she realized her monetary loss when she reached home. While escaping she dropped a bag carrying (sob!) two tapes — 'Real McCoy' and 'Dangerous Minds' soundtrack, some birthday cards and Mars and Kit-Kit bars. What a pity!

There are some common characteristics of the beggar clan. One of them is some-

what puzzling. Try offering any one of them a decent job and he/she will throw the offer right back in your face, give a rude retort and go on cadging for money. They also have another proclivity to help the shoppers. How? Whenever (quite frequently) your good old rickety puller can't come up with the necessary change, the good Samaritans provide it. The catch? To gain a buck or two of course.

After suffering their bad behaviour time and again, one guy decided to give them a taste of their own medicine. While searching his wallet for the change of ten taka, he saw a man with a shy grin, standing beside him showing nine taka. Luckily, he found the exact required fare in his jacket pocket. So, he turned smugly to the hopeful individual and said: 'Spend your nine bucks first and come back to me for more.' That was mean but effective nevertheless. Got rid of the beggar real fast.

Someone quite earnestly suggested hiring a bodyguard (Kevin Costner?) or keeping Alsatians for commuting purpose in Dhaka. Sounds funny right? On a serious note: what are the concerned ones doing about rehabilitating the jobless and often the homeless ones?

The number of beggars is rising day by day. Their sorrows are acute no doubt. The rest of us are also finding it hard to deal with the frustration and animosity of the poverty hardened masses. Yet, like all the other disadvantages of life in the capital, we are learning to live with this particular problem too.

Such is life in Dhaka: do we have a choice?



Bangles to relieve the rigid classic cuts.



Courtesy: Brigitte