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# Local saris make a comeback

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

**T**HE glory of local saris, the most extensively worn apparel of Bangalee women, is back after withstanding an invasion of Indian saris, say industry insiders.

The customers are now leaning toward the local saris mainly for swinging popular tastes, improved quality, diverse designs, and competitive prices.

Even in the early 1990s, the number one choice of women of the middle-class families of Bangladesh was Indian saris. "With the improvements attained by the Bangladeshi sari producers in quality and designs, the customers now favour the local saris," said Mohammad A Momen, director of Pride Group, owner of the brand Pride sari.

The customers started buying local saris when the manufacturers started giving incentives like taking back and changing the purchased articles in case the customers wanted so, he said.

Now, the retail environment has returned in the sari market and the customers have a plethora of choices from diverse designs at affordable prices, Momen added.

The manufacturers are trying to blend in the local cultural motifs while producing, printing and designing saris, articulating different vibrant ethnic cultures across the country, he said.

Momen believes this is one of the prime reasons for increasing demand of the local saris.

"Everybody loves to see his own culture reflected widely in every walk of life," he said.

The manufacturers make saris these days targeting different seasons and occasions all the year round, following the demands from all segments of the customers, he added. "Saris are becoming more and more festive and we are adding more values by introducing new designs," said Momen.

The number of customers of the printed cotton sari is more than any other saris, as these are widely preferred for affordability, comfort, and flexibility in wearing. Other varieties of saris are worn occasionally.

In the domestic market, the price of printed saris of varying qualities and designs range from Tk 250 to Tk 5,000 apiece, manufacturers said. "We sell our products through our own



Local saris are on display in a shop at Bashundhara Shopping Complex in Dhaka. The local sari industry is making a mark in fashion.

AMRAN HOSSAIN

outlets across the country," he said.

But the manufacturers are not aware of the total market size, growth rate and investments in the local sari industry for lack of research on this particular industry.

The booming sari industry also faces some threats as people's tastes are changing with shifting trends in the fashion industry.

Now, majority of the urban women, especially the outgoing women prefer wearing salwar and kameez rather than saris. Salwar, kameez and dopatta (SKD), a combination of three pieces of non-stitched printed cotton garment for females, seem to be more convenient for the working women, the manufacturers said.

As a result, some sari manufacturing units have already introduced new apparel products which are popular among the customers. The manufac-

urers brought in the SKD for the new customers, especially the urbanites.

"The outgoing women prefer SKDs and we are focusing on this product," the manufacturers said. The prices of SKDs range from Tk 800 to Tk 2,000 per set.

Moreover, a significant number of modern girls -- students, or corporate officials in local or multinational companies -- prefer to wear the convenient jeans and shirts. As a result, the local sari industry is somewhat under threat regarding future expansion, the industry people said.

The recent hike in yarn prices due to worldwide increasing prices of raw cotton caused a price spike of saris in the local market. "We have adjusted the prices of saris with the changing prices of yarn in the local market," said a manufacturer.

A senior official of a local sari pro-

ducing company Pakiza said the domestic market is more or less controlled by the local manufacturers because the demand for Indian printed saris in the country is declining following a boom in the local sari industry.

Now, the customers can buy quality printed saris at reasonable prices, said the Pakiza official, whose main targets are the mass sari users.

Majority of the India saris happened to be smuggled in, bypassing legal imports, but over the years, the local industry owners have developed the sari craftsmanship and reached a viable state.

Mamun Miah, proprietor of MN Silk House at the Bashundhara City Mall and a seller of both Indian and local saris, said the demand of Indian saris peaks during special occasions like the Eid or Durga puja.

"I do not import directly from India. I purchase Indian saris from the importers. The demand for Indian saris has been on the decline as the local manufacturers have successfully produced saris of various novel and attractive designs," he said.

He said the customers of Indian saris choose brands, not products of the mass market. The female customers fall for the Indian branded saris as they watch Indian mega-series on the TV. "As a result, in most cases, we sell Indian branded saris," he said.

A sales executive of Chaiti, another brand for saris and SKDs, said the demand of local saris is higher than the Indian brands. "We have collections of Indian brands also, but the sale of the local saris is higher," said the executive.

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# Taking pride in a brand

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**A** change in lifestyle is best displayed in women's clothes. Now the majority of women prefer salwar-kameez to traditional saris, pushing garment makers to shift their attention to the changing fashion trend.

Mohammad A Momen, director of Pride Group, the country's first brand in sari business, shared his ideas and thoughts on the latest fashion and sari business with The Daily Star.

Pride has noticed a transformation in fashion, and introduced salwar-kameez along with its brand sari in all its 70 outlets across the country, Momen said.

Momen, also the chairperson of the Executive MBA Programme of the Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University, said the company has also started manufacturing quilts, bed sheets, bed covers and towels as demand is surging.

It was a long journey for him to develop Pride into a brand. His father Halimur Rahman started sari business in 1950 by establishing Pride Textile. In 1991, the company opened its first showroom in Eskaton area.



Mohammad A Momen

masses. We are developing our brand as a premium brand," the official said.

Pride is now a popular brand in

protected cotton saris, and the group always nurtures the brand to be bigger, he said. "If the local brands are not

protected, they will not survive in future."

In its move to be a brand for all ages,

Pride has already introduced new product lines such as Moda and Urban Truth for its customers.

Moda, made with local fabrics, with its ethnic design can be best fitted as festive and party wears. "Urban Truth is meant for the young, an everyday street wear with western touch," he said.

The company also plans to expand the number of outlets across the country. "We manufacture our saris from our production units in Savar, Narsingdi and Tangail. We sell the saris at our outlets as no sales agents are involved in the process," he said.

Pride has a talented team of designers who always experiment with design and form to ensure the brand's originality and uniqueness, he said.

The prices of cotton-printed saris range between Tk 550 and Tk 1,200 apiece, he said. Crafted silk and half-silk saris are priced between Tk 1,500 and Tk 5,500 while a set of Pride salwar-kameez can cost Tk 800 to Tk 2,000 depending on quality, he added.

The group employs more than 1,200 workers in its sari units, Momen said. But he declined to comment on the company's sales volume and annual turnover.

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