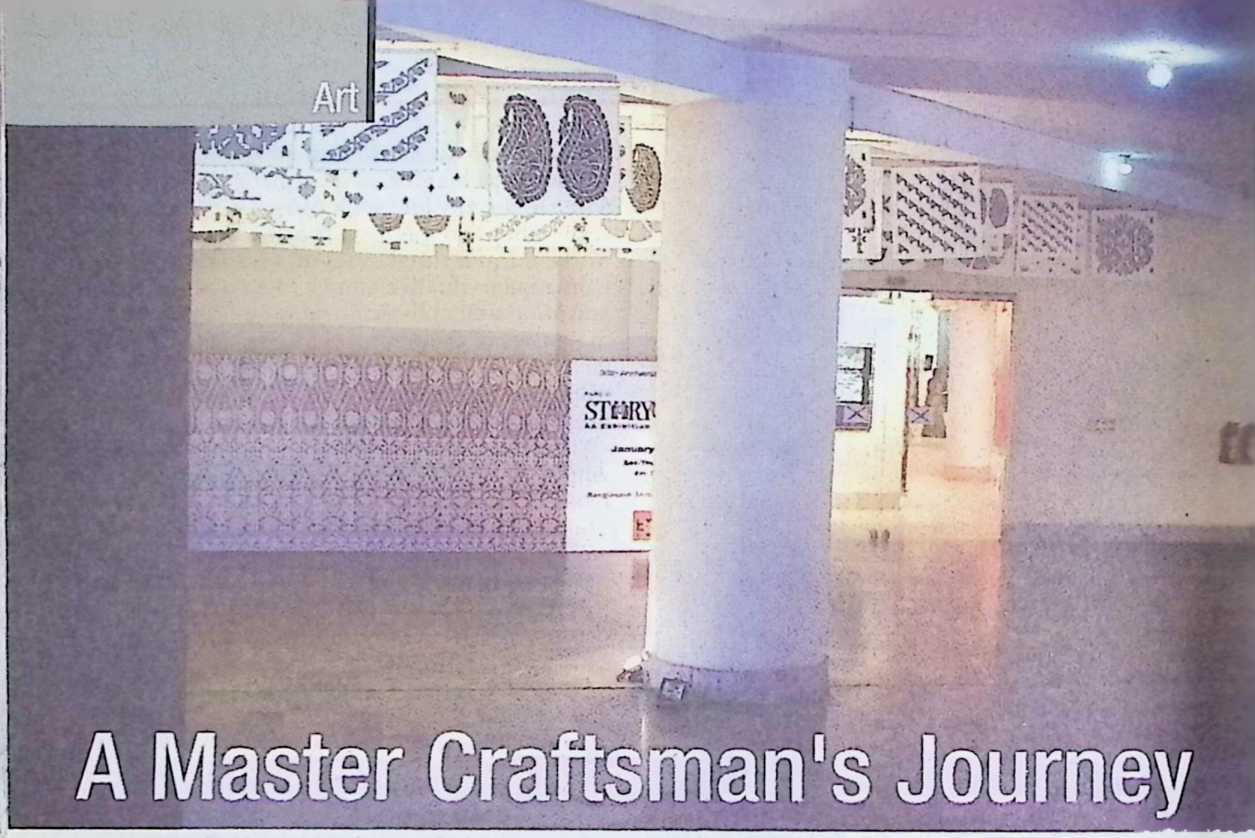
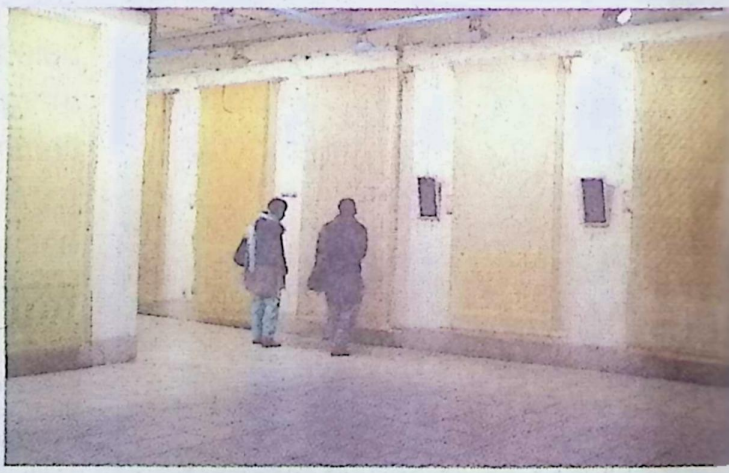


A Master Craftsman's Journey

FAYZA HAQ



It has been a long journey of experimenting and perfecting designs on the most coveted of handlooms, creating works of art that have taken the fashion scene by storm. Chandra Shekhar Shaha was one of those early designers who have used their artistic training to come up with designs that retain traditional motifs but are palatable to contemporary tastes.

In 1981, after completing his bachelor's degree from Institute of Fine Arts, DU he became the main designer for Aarong, the biggest outlet for Bangladeshi handicrafts. He stayed with Aarong for two decades after which he started freelancing with various organisations such as SME (Small Medium Enterprise) Foundation a semi government organisation as well as various fashion houses -Nogordola, Nipun, Bibiyana, Rong, Jatra—along with Aarong. "I don't work full time anywhere. I go once a week to each of the places. There is no element of boredom in my work."

Chandra Shekhar does not believe in staying idle at any time. Apart from his designing consultancies he is busy learning more about this profession. "I take some Master's degree classes at Santa Marium University," says Chandra Shekhar. "There is a section called 'Designing Three' at the Architecture Section. I do international programmes too. For instance I worked for the European Union 'Jute Diversified' at the Dhaka Art Centre."

The designer has also collaborated on a book with Mashrur Mamun Mithun, an architect, on various traditional crafts that have utility value. These are crafts that make life easy – from the *kula* (rice sifter) to the *jharu* (broom) is defined and illustrated. The clay water-carrier is described in detail. Who invented these items and how long have they been used? Such facts are told in *Droper Ontorale* an 'Behind the Product' the names of the book which is bilingual.

Who were his teachers? At the Oriental Department, there was Hashem Khan. Earlier at the