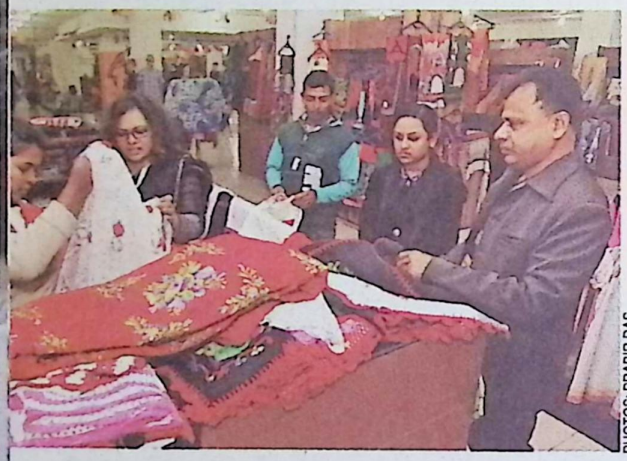
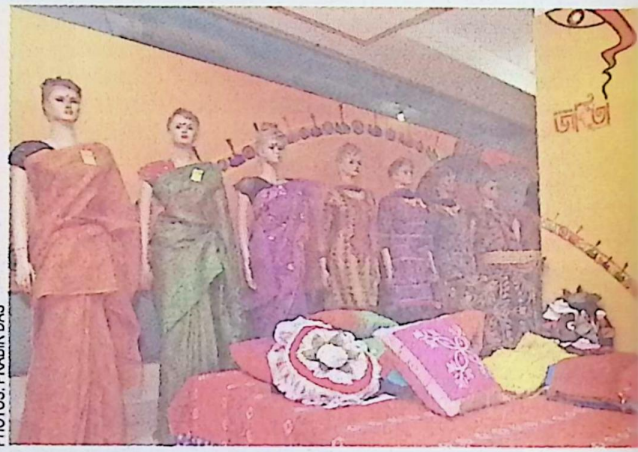
MADE IN BANGLADESH





PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

Joyeeta – an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Children affairs attempts to empower women by giving them a platform to exhibit their handmade crafts and products

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

Sitting among the red hot chilli pepper, yellow turmeric and brown cumin, Selina Akhter looks like the mistress of the spices. Living in the outskirts of Rajbari, Selina and her team produce different spices, puffed or dried rice (muri, chira, khoi), pickles, ghee and many more ingredients that are crucial to good cooking.

If you want to enjoy this service, you can consider paying a visit to *Joyeeta*. "We run a small women's organisation called *Antaranga Mohila Samity* where we used to produce different agri-commodities and supply them to various vendors around the country", says Selina while packing some turmeric and chilli powder for her customers. "At last we have a platform through *Joyeeta* where we can sell our products directly, not through any intermediary."

Like Selina, Shima Akhter from Manikganj also holds her own corner at Joyeeta offering different handmade and hygienic food and spices for the customers. "We work with a small organisation called *Esho Kicchu Kori Mohila Shomity* where we produce most of these food items and spices back in Manikganj. Some items which we cannot produce for example, brown sugar, we collect it and keep it in our store so that our customers can get a one stop solution in Joyeeta.

Joyeeta's tagline is 'Bangladesh under one roof'. It is a venture launched by the Bangladesh Government where products made by creative women from across the country are displayed and sold under the supervision of the Department of Women Affairs of Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs.

"Like the tagline my stall offers products from all over the country-*nakshikanthas* from Rajshahi and Jamalpur, cushion covers from Kushtia, bags and dresses from Mymensingh", says Rubiya Helal, while she opens up a nicely adorned *nakshikantha* before her customers.

Occupying the top two floors of Rapa Plaza in Dhanmondi, it is a shop where you can get products that are made using traditional techniques and skills. Joyeeta has an extensive collection of deshi products, which includes jute, paper, glass, bamboo, cane, wood, metal, leather, home textiles, home accessories, clothes and food. On the top floor, it has a food court which serves sweet and savoury snacks and also a kids' zone where you can leave your children to play while you shop.

Joyeeta is a Bengali word which connotes victory of women. It links over 139 craft based rural women's organisations and give them access to modern urban markets, thereby creating an opportunity for sustainable rural women employment, and preserving country's traditional handicrafts. All of the products you see around this outlet are natural, craft based and affordable.