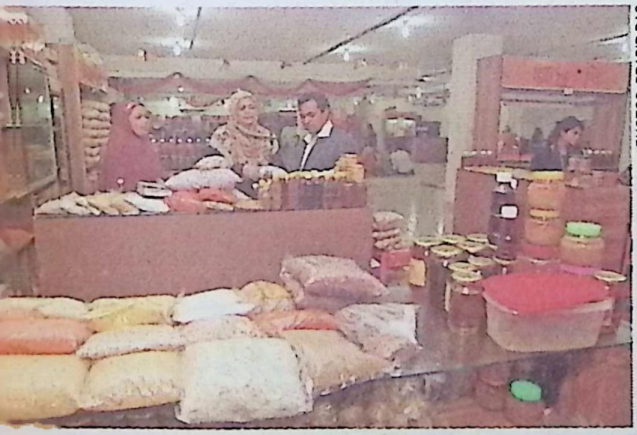
"Organisation is an important step for voice representation", says Md Shamsul Alam who is working on deputation in Joyeeta as an Accounts Officer. "But it is not enough to be organised unless such organisation is effective, one that is truly representative of its members and their work; Joyeeta attempts to do that."

"Joyeeta's stalls are operated by registered women's associations following corporate culture and with the motto of profitability," Alam says.

There are 16,000 women's associations in Bangladesh that are engaged in various handicrafts and food production. After conducting a survey among all of these organisations the primary consultant board of Joyeeta selected 180 of them, based on their nature and standard of craft production and also through a lottery.The project was under intensive supervision of a consultant team consisting of five members - experts in different sectors like designing, product quality, marketing. The Government's role is to facilitate the initiative by providing physical facility, training and technical knowledge support and publicity. The rent of this 24,000 square feet area of Rapa Plaza is split among the government and the entrepreneurs, where the government pays 60 percent of the rent while the stall owners pay the rest.





PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

Joyeeta offers handicrafts made by women from all over the country.

At the time of inauguration on November 16, 2011, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina envisioned that gradually every district and sub district would house a Joyeeta to support and facilitate the grassroots women entrepreneurs to showcase and market their own arts, crafts, products and services. In order to translate the dream into reality, the Government is working on establishing "Joyeeta Foundation" so that joyeeta gets a legal and constitutional shape. "We have already registered with RJSC (Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms) as a foundation, however we are yet to get our own land to establish our outlet," Alam opines. "Also, we need manpower and an extensive fund to make Joyeeta into a foundation, we are still working on it. Every member-stall had to give 50,000 taka in two installments as a member fee which has been preserved for the foundation."

Joyeeta boasts of a stable supply chain between the suppliers and the buyers, "Previously most of us used to market our products through an intermediary party or to different urban boutique shops. We had to wait for fairs to display our works, but now we own our respective shops and can claim a fair price."

However, most of the shop owners share the same concern regarding publicity and marketing of Joyeeta. "During any religious festival we are overwhelmed with customers, however around the year we don't have too many of buyers, mostly because people don't know about this shop's existence," informs Bibi Fatema, a stall owner.

"From agriculture to traditional crafts, rural women sustain the informal sector in a variety of ways," says Samia Hasan, a school teacher who is a regular at Joyeeta. "I believe it is our responsibility to encourage this kind of initiative more and more so that these women can strive to do even better. I often buy household accessories and food items from Joyeeta and encourage others too."

Joyeeta is making a journey towards preserving and promoting traditional crafts with the message "Made in Bangladesh." Joyeeta not only provides its members a space to exhibit their products, it also provides them training to brush up their designing skills to increase the aesthetic appeal of their products. ■