

Carpenter Gobindra Chandra Halder can't sit or cook a meal for himself, but he pursues his livelihood with enthusiasm.



treatment by a local healer, a *kabiraj*. All that was forty years ago.

"Our family has suffered for a lifetime from concern over his injuries," says Kitish Halder.

Gobindra proved courageous. In pain and with difficulty he completed his SSC examinations. But after that he found it impossible to continue his studies. Nor when the time arrived was he able to marry.

There's been a gradual deterioration. Our carpenter requires a walking stick to move about. He cannot turn his head. He cannot bend. Mostly he lives in pain. He dines at either his sister's or his brother's house as he cannot cook a meal. But Gobindra has never stopped trying – his furniture is evidence of his determination.

From a young age he had demonstrated a talent for carpentry. It allowed him to develop his small business and manage a meagre livelihood, in the company of flowers, birds, trees and people, in the medium of wood. He can earn around 5,000 taka per month, but his work gives much more than that: a sense of purpose.

"I never had lessons in carpentry," Gobindra says, proud of his achievements, "The designs come quite naturally as I start to draw."

He makes all kinds of furniture including sofas, showcases, wardrobes, beds, *alna* clothes racks and chairs. But for his condition it would be no problem to work in building construction as well, he says.

"Big items like almirahs and larger beds are difficult for me now," he says.

Each piece takes time to complete. Gobindra is unable to sit in a chair and needs to take regular rest, lying down for greater hours than he is able to work. Nonetheless his customers are usually pleased with the results. "They often pay more than the agreed amount when they see a piece completed."

He should really go to Dhaka. Due to the difficulties in finding suitable transport and more so the cost, it's unlikely that he will. But it would be interesting to know what forty years of progress in medicine could do for him. He might find there are treatment options now. His affliction might at the very least find its name.

But this is not his complaint. "People don't order the most intricate items anymore. They are too expensive." He wishes there were more flowers, birds, trees and people for him to measure and bring to life.

Yet, when asked what sort of design he enjoys most, he says "It's like football. The best enjoyment is not for the players but for those who are watching."

And all around Rajapur people are watching. Many houses in the area feature his work. In each sofa, showcase, wardrobe and bed is an arduous journey of his, most often seen in an everyday and taken-for-granted way – a journey hoping to reach the twin destinations of functionality and beauty. Yet it's never been easy for our carpenter who cannot bend.