

FASHION

Why Don't You Buy Local?

RAFIDAH RAHMAN

Fashion: hard to define but is acutely synonymous with glamour, flamboyance and vision. It changes with changing times, giving an accurate picture of the world around us. There was a time when only a handful of people were privileged to indulge in this voyage of fashion, but globalisation has made it accessible to many.

Globalisation has obviously helped break the barriers, but somewhere down the road, hampered individuality. In recent times, Bangladeshi designers have been vocal about their disappointment towards foreign clothes being widely popular in our country. They are unhappy with the latter's overexposure, as they think it's harming local businesses. The foreign clothes taking over Eid exhibitions have long instilled doubts about fairness in the minds of our entrepreneurs.

Indian and Pakistani [women's] clothing are in vogue and have been very popular. People in Bangladesh are particularly influenced by them, thus inducing their great demands in the Bangladeshi markets. What I tried to dig out is, exactly why do young people my age here prefer other countries' designs over ours?

Lack of diversity seems to be a major deciding factor. There are only certain materials and designs that are constantly being used for a long time. They obviously attract a section of young buyers here, but as Umme Marzana, 24, points out, "Fashion conscious young women have always followed the fashion scenes of our neighbouring countries, and rightfully so, since they have exquisite designs. Our designers have to diversify."

As unfortunate as it sounds, some feel that if they don't purchase these foreign brands, they simply don't belong to the "hip" crowd. Bollywood is BIG and people are obsessed with what the young actresses are wearing – going all out, buying the clothes they've worn, in an attempt to look like them. As budding designer Fareha Raida, 24, points out, "Many Bangladeshis are fanatical about Bollywood movies, TV serials, and celebrities. Naturally,

they want to look like their favourite stars."

Quality of the products, and overall finesse are very important. The local designers cannot be blamed, since manufacturing and labour costs are high. Investments are low, taxation is high – demotivating future entrepreneurs. Despite more frequent fashion shows and growing number of fashion houses, the concept of "fashion" is still not mainstream in Bangladesh. Boutiques in Dhaka are taking leaps forward, but the prices are not always within the reach of the majority. Zarrin Tasnim Iqbal, 23, says, "Brands like Ecstasy, Noir and Scicosso are taking bold steps. But they are expensive, thus not for the masses."

Many, however, feel that this problem is only faced by women. According to Junaid Deep, 23, "I think Bangladesh produces better kurtas and shirts at attractive prices. We prefer Yellow or Noir any day over foreign brands."

Leaving the problems aside, almost all of the people I spoke to have lauded renowned local designers like Rina Latif, Humaira Khan, and Bibi Russell for their tremendous contribution to Bangladeshi fashion and for having the courage to stand out. Rina Latif, particularly, is famous for her extensive use of muslin. There are also a few solutions suggested by the same people for better realisation of Bangladesh's potential: better products, more investment, more government intervention in the industry, improved marketing and advertisement campaigns.

Most importantly, as Mashyat Tomory, 21, puts it, "We need more talented designers and more competition in this field. Without competition, no one would feel the need to do better. But most notably, we need awareness of the beautiful things we have. Designers should be inspired by our own things. We need to be proud of who we are, and learn to keep our country and heritage first."

Rafidah Rahman is a teeny-tiny Hulk, she's always angry and she's always hungry. A cynical dreamer and a food enthusiast, she's your everyday entertainment.

Correspond with her at <https://web.facebook.com/rafidah.rahman.39> or rafidahrahman93@gmail.com

