

SHOP SPECIAL

Revolution in the making: A jute story

Our legacy

The geography of Bangladesh is perfect for jute cultivation, and Bengal historically has been known as a formidable player in the global jute industry.

In the year 1912, when describing 'trade at the (then) present day', B C Allen wrote in 'Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers: Dacca' that, "the principle article of export is jute, Narayanganj being the great centre of jute trade in Bengal..."

The remarkable trade history of jute is elaborated in Sharif uddin Ahmed's book, 'Dhaka: A Study in Urban History and Development 1840-1921': "The East India Company had recognised the potential of the fibre as early as 1795..." The trade was so profitable that "... by 1877 the Magistrate-Collector of Dhaka... argued that the returns from jute alone had been enough to pay the whole rental of the district, and still leave a surplus..."

Jute and its trade is our heritage, a legacy. Today, Bangladesh still exports large quantities of jute, but the plight of jute mills reflect the decline this sector has suffered.

A designer's destiny

As a child, Rangan had witnessed this plight with his own eyes. "My father worked for a jute mill, and I used to study in the jute mill-endorsed school," he recollects. "My classmates' parents, similarly, were employed in the jute sector. And I saw many of my friends working during the tiffin-hour to earn a little cash. I saw them in torn clothes and without any shoes."

Many a time, young Rangan skipped classes and wandered about. He thought a lot about the condition of his poor classmates. It dawned upon him that this financial misery could be wiped away by making jute factories more prosperous.

The seed had been planted, and his destiny - what was to become of him - had been sealed.

Rangan studied fine arts and grew up to be a fashion designer. And it was only a matter of time before he brought his focus on jute. After much experimentation, he was determined that he could use jute as a fabric to make clothes. It was an exciting possibility. "Currently, jute is used to



Md Amir Hossain Rangan

make sacks, bags, ropes, etc," Rangan said. "But we must explore other prospects and discover the full potential of our golden fibre."

Striking gold with the golden fibre

Jute, as we all know, is labelled as 'the golden fibre of Bengal'. Nature has bestowed this gift; whether we utilise it well is up to us.

For Md Amir Hossain Rangan, Managing Director of Khiyoo Fashion House, jute is an inexpensive fabric by which he can make designer clothes. He already displayed his works in the exhibitions he undertook.



From jackets to coats and from tops to pants, Rangan has brilliantly designed these attires. They come in a large variety of colours, and with trendy cuts and chic buttons and chains, the clothes reflect today's styles and trends.

"The world is keen on greener alternatives, and jute is an eco-friendly, biodegradable product," Rangan discussed the immense opportunities.

An obvious question that comes to mind is whether the attires are comfortable enough. "Currently I am engaged in making warm clothes," the fashion designer informed. "These attires are fully wearable, and the lining inside makes them even more comfortable. In fact, a few generations ago, men used to wear lungi made out of jute. And I have successfully reduced the coarseness to a large extent, too, and it is even possible to make fine and thin clothes with jute."

Man on a mission

Currently, the clothes are not for sale. But Rangan is a man with a plan. "The target market for now comprises of countries where winter lasts for several months," he said when explaining his export strategy. "We need to raise awareness and create demand abroad, and this we plan to do by taking part in trade shows and fashion shows in different countries"

His ultimate ambition is as novel as it is noble. Again, the artist looks at the resources in his disposal. "Bangladesh can produce jute in abundance. And Bangladesh has many jute mills. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has a strong RMG sector. My vision is to combine all these together."

Once demand is created overseas, orders should pour in. And there are readymade garments factories to take those orders. Consequently, these garments factories would turn to jute mills for supply of jute. The wheels of the jute mills would then spin in full gusto. Finally, the jute mills are going to encourage farmers to cultivate and sell more and more jute.

And in the process, Rangan would have solved the distress he saw among his school friends and also bring a smile to the farmers' faces. "I struggle and strive for economic freedom of the people," Rangan says.

While Rangan's father was a jute mill worker, his mother used to be a teacher coaching people on making garments. Clearly, both his parents have influenced him, and his dream is to bring jute and garments under one umbrella.

Paving the way forward

Rangan says that Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) has shown interest in his jute products. "I have showed the attires to Mafruha Sultana, Vice Chairman and CEO (Additional Secretary), Export Promotion Bureau in a meeting, and she was very excited about this project, praising the work," he informs.

"I would personally urge our honourable Prime Minister to look into this," Rangan appeals. "To take it to be next level, we need government support for promotion, research, and funding."

With government's help, there could be revival of the glory of jute mills, and with it, a social and economic revival.

A revolution is in the making.

By M H Haider

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Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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Wardrobe: Khiyoo Fashion House

Make-up: Farzana Shakil Makeover Salon

