

BUILDING BLOCKS OF TOMORROW

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

LIVING AND LIFESTYLE

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Highlighting our heritage



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Shaha has been in this industry for many decades. Having worked with country's top brands, like Aarong, he believes that diversification is a brilliant way forward. "Nakshi kantha's primary purpose is to cover the body in order to provide warmth. But now you have simpler and cheaper blankets," he explains. "So, along with stitching kantha, we have tried out, with success, creating cushion covers and other life-style products."

Ghuznavi also agrees. "The sari market is relatively small; moreover, women nowadays are not wearing this attire regularly. But Jamdani can also be translated to other products such as fabrics, home textiles, etc."

Cotton-count is an important measure of quality. Most of the saris that you see on the market are, generally speaking, of less than 100 cotton-count. Finer threads and higher cotton-counts would a big step in reviving the previous glory of Muslin and Jamdani.

Keeping up with changing times calls for smart innovation, not mindless innovation.

Innovation and the international platform

Smart innovation is not easy, but it is a process which can contribute to establishing a strong foothold in the international fashion market. For Living Blue, a Bangladeshi brand which focuses on the international high fashion arena, contemporising is essential.

Producing indigo and applying quilting and shibori (a Japanese tie-dyeing technique) to make products, Living Blue exports to countries such as the UK, USA, Japan, Canada, France, Germany, etc.

The brand had participated in many exclusive and prestigious platforms - from Maison d'Exceptions, to Paris Fashion Week's Designers Apartment Showroom, to Berlin Fashion Week's Greentshowroom.

Mishael Aziz Ahmad of Living Blue

had shared his experience in applying for Maison d'Exceptions in an article published in Star Lifestyle, The Daily Star. "Maison d'Exceptions is extremely selective. It is not enough to simply prove yourself as the master of a skill or technique; you also need to show varied applications and uses for it in the contemporary fashion world."

The beauty of handmade products
Maheen Khan, an eminent designer, had worked with heritage weaves like Khadi and Nakshi Kantha. She believes that there is a bright future for handmade, hand-woven, eco-friendly products. "The whole world is looking for items that make a difference in people's lives," she had said at an event of Project Fashionscape (an initiative of Ice Today), held last year, on 23 January. "There is a high end-market for products that are eco-friendly, those that have a story behind it and those that are indigenous and hand-woven".

Eco-friendly and heritage textiles like Khadi, if patronised and promoted properly, are of enormous value in the global fashion world.

Creating craze at home
In recent years, there have been a lot of efforts and campaigns to educate the local consumers to buy 'deshi'. Some have been more successful than others.

Kudos to Bengal Muslin on their month-long campaign in 2016! The Muslin Festival was hosted by Bengal Muslin in collaboration with Aarong and Bangladesh National Museum. Their campaign comprised of exhibitions, fashion shows, tours to weavers' villages, and seminars in order to create awareness among different stakeholders, including the common people. The festival was absolutely brilliant and had been an eye-opener for many.

Bengal Muslin even published a graphic novel to reach out to the younger generation, who may not be customers today, but can surely become a patron of 'deshi weaves' in the future.

Meanwhile, there had also been festivals which did not truly reflect the heritage weaves they aimed to highlight. "If you have a festival of a particular heritage product, but then inject other fabrics and concepts, you are misrepresenting and confusing the people," Ghuznavi complained.

Indeed, festivals and promotional campaigns are great, but they need to be planned out with caution.

Prices too steep?

Heritage weaves may come with expensive price tags. "Historically, Jamdani has always been made for the affluent," Ghuznavi exemplified. "But in current times we are trying to come up with saris which would be more affordable to buy; although the intricacy of

designs on those dresses would consequently be lesser."

Buying what's 'deshi' has its own selling point. And the biggest contribution a citizen of this country can make in taking heritage weaves forward is by actually making a purchase. If you are buying a Jamdani sari, you are essen-

What's in a name?

Heritage textiles are no doubt invaluable assets for any country. The traditional art of Jamdani weaving is enlisted in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It may be argued that there are other textiles too which can get this



tially paying for the bread and butter of a weaver for say, a week, or even a month!

Meanwhile, unfortunately, there is indeed a segment of people who have the affordability, but many among them opt out for imported products - and perhaps this is where branding and promotional activities have a role to play.

recognition.

Last year, Jamdani had earned the Geographical Indication (GI) registration. When a product is linked with a particular region and enjoys a reputation for being of that origin, that product may be applied for GI registration. In our country, the relevant Act was formulated in 2013; the rules were set in 2015; and Jamdani was registered in 2016.

While it is good news, it must be noted that this framework applies only within the borders. India too, had registered Uppada Jamdani sari within their legal framework! Jamdani is uniquely ours; the geography, the skill, and the historical accounts point at that. Now that Jamdani is registered under the national GI, we are in a better position to fight back if required.

Yet right now, Ruby Ghuznavi seemed to eye an even bigger threat. "Some weavers are making saris using automated looms, and by applying Jamdani motifs, they are passing them off as Jamdani," she informed. "These saris are cheaper alternatives, and they are destroying the market. There is no problem in making saris in automated looms, but you should not call them Jamdani."

Fine yarns

Cotton-count is an important measure of quality. Most of the saris that you see on the market are, generally speaking, of less than 100 cotton-count. Finer threads and higher cotton-counts would be a big step in reviving the previous glory of Muslin and Jamdani. "Imported yarns should be made more readily available in order to have more saris on the market with higher cotton-counts," Ghuznavi suggested. "Government organisations, such as the handloom board, may come forward in this regard."

Did you know that Bengal Muslin, after relentless efforts and experiments, had actually produced a fabric of 400 cotton-count? Incredible, isn't it?

Do you know what it means, though? The weavers of this era still possess the skill and capability required to make superbly high quality fabrics which our land had historically been famous for. Of course, a lot of practice will be needed to make this a norm again.

In taking heritage weaves forward, one thing is for sure: our artisans will not fail us. Let us - as designers, entrepreneurs, marketers, and consumers - not fail them.

The writer is a Reporter of The Daily Star and can be contacted at m.h.haider@live.com

Model: Oshin, Doyal
Wardrobe: Tangail Sharee Kutir
Jewellery: Kolors of Kathmandu
Location: Pan Pacific Sonargaon, Dhaka
Makeup: Farzana Shakil's Makeover Salon