



The nine lives of BESPOKE FASHION



Rukhsanara Begum fondly remembers her college days in Habiganj, a time when she dextrously stitched her shalwar kameezes and her sisters' frocks. "My mother taught me the skill herself and the intricacies of the embroidery I mastered from one of my aunts," revealed an ailing Rukhsanara, now a grandmother of two beautiful twin girls.

While speaking to her, we also learnt that tailoring and embroidery were general amusement for young girls back then because there were no other major alternatives. "We used to collect magazines and get cut-outs from them to follow recent trends. Sometimes we also watched movies and ardently followed the fashion trends of heroines," Rukhsanara recollected.

Fast forward several generations, we talk to Shehreen Islam, who studies at a renowned private university in Dhaka. Shehreen is someone who simply cannot even imagine stitching her own clothes! With the availability of many clothing brands selling fast fashion churned out at dizzying speeds, bespoke seems almost like a painstaking process to her.

"Customising and ordering clothes is too hectic for me; I simply can't imagine

myself as a designer. I'd rather leave the entire process to someone else, especially when there are so many ready-made variations available in the market," admitted Shehreen.

We talk to a few more people to find out whether the once popular bespoke trend in Bangladesh was already a dying medium or not.

Nazneen Islam, a busy housewife with three children assures us that bespoke is still very much alive!

"I simply can't imagine buying directly from the stores. I love going to the fabric market at Gausia or Chadni Chawk every now and then with friends to get eye-catching materials and ask my tailor to make garments for me and my children," she said.

We also talked to Shams Miah, a tailor master in

Mohammadpur, who admits that business has been booming and especially before Eid and the wedding season, it peaks. Shams Miah also tells that he continued with his father's profession, but business in those days were slow as most women knew how to tailor themselves.

"Abba used to go to clients' homes and collect clothes from ladies behind purdah, then he used to make clothes based on assumed measurements or a sample that was provided to him. Today things are

very different; women know exactly what they want. They give us the exact specifications sometimes even sending the image via WhatsApp or Bluetooth," reveals the tailor.

Things are no different in the case of designer houses and upscale couturiers' as many of them revealed that customisation is their first and foremost priority.

Luna Akhter, owner of a high-end online couture shop said that customers came in many different shapes and sizes and a made-to-order clothes line was the best way to take care of their varying needs.

While the waiting game is the hardest part in bespoke fashion trend, as most custom-made items take several days to produce, yet most women still believe the outcome is worth the wait.

A upside to dealing with bespoke fashion is the expense. Contrary to popular belief, not all custom-made fashion is expensive. With a rather competitive fabric market available all throughout the country and supply and demand supplanting each other equally, personal tailoring becomes a bargain worth venturing into.

So, we can finally wrap our story with the following few lines – as long as our beautiful country has working human hands as assets, bespoke fashion will continue to live, and thrive. As worthy citizens, we may as well find out innovative ways to turn each small enterprise into a large medium of business.

By Chavous Mehrin
Photo: LS Archive

Certain names in the article have been changed upon request.