



The honesty of a white Panjabi

The finely woven sheer kurta comes out of the drawer every Friday morning. Blued at the laundry for the desired snowy-white appearance, the panjabi is stiff and comes neatly folded. The fabric crinkles as one separates the layers glued from the dip-starch, and as one walks towards the masjid chanting the takbir, the all-white ensemble complemented with a whiff of rose water completes the sanctified aura of Jumu'ah.

Talk comfort and white shines as the colour of choice in our ruthless Bangladeshi summer. Spring is yet to bid us adieu, but the thermometer reads otherwise. And from what is apparent, the mercury shall only continue to shoot north, and up!

Summer fashion in Bangladesh is predominantly cotton. That has been ingrained in our culture, our tradition, and our heritage. The finesse of Muslin is now a legend in history books; khadi, once a popular weave that struck another fine balance of comfort, style and affordability, is near extinct. Truthfully, the options are zeroing in on the inconsequential production of handloom cotton, and heavy import of fabrics.

Post millennial fashion chronicles however speaks of a turnabout in our collective mindset. Suddenly we observe a whole-hearted effort to revive Muslin, re-introduce khaadi to its former glory, and making best use of our local looms that are still at our disposal.

The sari is once again a daily wear, and something not strictly set aside for formal occasions, parties and weddings. Men, possibly after decades of 'wandering helplessly to find their own style identity' have for the first time in our fashion history, succeeded in striking the balance between eastern roots and western trends.

The 'grameen check shirt' has come and gone; the 'fatua' had its stint, and the repulsive concept of 'fatunji' (whatever it was!) turned out as a complete failure. And in this epoch of seeming confusion, the panjabi came to rescue, and that too in astounding whites!

Not quite an office wear, (yet!) but certainly an everyday one. If women have the glory of donning taant, kota, or the savvy prints in georgette, Bangladeshi men now have their own quintessential statement — a panjabi in simple everyday white!

Perhaps it is the apparent simplicity that does the trick. In local cotton sans ornamenta-

tion or embroidery, the white version of this timeless garb has now gone beyond somber milads and memorials services to casual glam. To take it a notch higher, one just needs to play with fabrics and their myriad texture, abundantly found in the alleys of Gausia, Chadni Chawk, Town Hall, Mouchak, Old Dhaka's Islampur, and others. The retailers now see a new breed of clients apart from the

"White is not a mere absence of colour; it is a shining and affirmative thing, as fierce as red, as definite as black. God paints in many colours; but He never paints so gorgeously, I had almost said so gaudily, as when He paints in white."

- G K Chesterton (1874 - 1936), writer and philosopher

'Wonder Women' of the nation they had catered to for decades. Why? Because it's good business. Simple!

As the only shade you are toying with is white, the selection of fabric is of utmost importance. If comfort is your concern, the various cotton mixes are there. To twist and turn it into the perfect fit for cocktail, silk comes to your rescue. Imagine — raw, motka,

eri, tassar...but be prepared to bid farewell to comfort!

There are cynics who still find whites drab. Without compromising on the timeless appeal, they seek a certain level of flamboyance. Embroidery and delicate ornamentation are widely used, and when done to perfection, makes a man stand out in a crowd. This is one way for local wildlings to take their personal touch and stamp their individuality on whatever they put on.

Coming to the matter of cuts, the prototypical panjabi has undergone a metamorphosis that now takes it beyond a garb once worn solely for comfort. The whole idea is to break free from stereotype — let there be fusion in the form of shirt collars, loose sleeves that can be folded up to the arm, and rounded hemlines of tunics falling just above the knee.

Bring back the collarless 'plains' — loose, comfy, and paired with khakis, or jeans. And why not chinos? Just twist the concept, keep the top simple and experiment with various makes of trousers and footwear, from Espadrilles to driving shoes! If you covet a more formal look, just switching to kilts might do the trick.

Once traced back in history, white, despite its humble beginning, graced royals, literatures, and commoners alike. Even in the Indian subcontinent, where culture boasts a flare for colours in every aspect of life, white shines with grace and elegance.

Those who proclaim panjabi is stagnant fashion, do so with reason. And those who follow fashion trends know it's temporary. Style, on the other hand, is forever! And possibly that is the honesty of the humble white, and the modest, white panjabi.

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