

# Jamdani

## Festival 2019

### The way forward

The Jamdani has come a long way. We need not remind you that our very own heritage textile received UNESCO's citation in 2013 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and also the National GI Certification, in 2016.

Bangladesh Jatiya Karushilpa Parishad, or National Crafts Council of Bangladesh (NCCB), is organising a five-week Jamdani Festival in collaboration with the Bengal Foundation at Bengal Shilpalay.

Beginning 6 September, 2019 the event will highlight and celebrate Jamdani, and commemorate the hard work of artisans who have nurtured and kept this tradition alive for centuries.

We spoke to Luva Nahid Choudhury, Director General, Bengal Foundation for a better understanding on what became the driving force for undertaking such a gargantuan task.

Our rendezvous touched upon myriad inquiries regarding the past, the present, and what the future holds for Jamdani. And Luva Apa, as we respectfully address her, responded to all our queries with patience, and more.



**LS: In the case of Jamdani, why are primitive designs so important. Aren't the contemporary motifs worth an effort? Is the history associated with Jamdani almost lost with time?**

To address the question appropriately, I must revisit pages of history. We all know about the famous Muslin and the brilliance of the yarn produced in the regions of Bengal.

While working on the Jamdani project, I came to know that the magnificent fabric gained prominence during the Mughal era, as did many other things because of the Mughal rulers' particular inclination for finesse and grandeur. It is said that artisans were brought in from Persia to work on Muslin.

With the amalgamation of the Persian influence, figured designs were incorporated right into the textile design, and no longer appeared as topical embroidery.

The Persians brought in with them, refined motifs, ideas and experience. Eventually, an interesting mix of motifs emerged — a beautiful confluence of both cultures. And hence the creation of Jamdani — the incorporation of woven motifs into Muslin. Those were the golden days, after which the downfall came slowly under colonial rule.

The new rulers favoured industrialisation and import

of British textiles, as a result of which local weaving became less competitive. Muslin production declined greatly to the point that the exquisite weave became almost extinct.

Although skilled and renowned for their intricacy, the artisans with their pit looms could no longer compete with the power looms. Thus, our age-old legacy was practically lost within just a century.

Sadly, what we are left with today are more affordable versions, the so-called 'Jamdanis,' which are nowhere close to the famed fabric. These cannot and should not be mistaken for the original ones, because they are nothing close to the exquisite pieces that was once produced.

Jamdani per se has to be that 'fine a craft' and that 'fine a weave' to be attributed to its name; so when these substandard products are called Jamdanis, it is certainly a loss of perception to what an actual piece used to be!

With this festival we are hoping to reinstate that very realisation by celebrating the outstanding skill of the artisans and creating a context for the revival of fine Jamdanis.

**LS: What is NCCB's and Bengal Foundation's ambition with Jamdani?**

National Crafts Council of Bangladesh (NCCB), partic-

