

SPOTLIGHT

Kaftans – the forever fashion statement

What exactly is a kaftan? The simplest definition of a 'kaftan,' according to Vogue, is a narrow cut, long robe with full sleeves, either with a deep open neck, or fully open to the floor, and sometimes buttoned. It is a symbol of a bohemian lifestyle. The word kaftan itself is a Persian word, and the style is believed to have originated in Ancient Mesopotamia, now the Middle East and North Africa. Kaftan shares similarities with the abaya or djellaba, or even the panjabi, which is the most common outfit worn in these areas, and of course, Bangladesh.

Kaftan is a genuine style symbol. It all started with the Ottomans, who wore lavishly decorated ones. It can be as simple as you want it to be, but also as stylish and statement-worthy as you want it to be. It can be made from almost any fabric, silk, wool, or cotton, and can be paired with, or without a sash.

Even though, as history suggests, kaftans were worn by men, but as we moved forward in time to a more equal world, both men and women are into it. It travelled across Iran, through North Africa, and into West Africa, and now, making its way into Asia. It even infiltrated Europe and North America, as well as Russia, where they use fur instead of cotton!

Kaftans, as mentioned has been around for a while, but during the 1950s and early 1960s, this particular style of dress began appearing in high fashion. And guess who made it happen? The French, of course. In the 60's, Yves Saint Laurent's obsession with Marrekesh, combined with Diana Vreeland's love of travel and exotic dresses, which featured prominently in the pages of Vogue, the Kaftan had officially arrived.

YSL had started a revolution. Fashion and music became inextricably linked when the free loving, rock 'n roll movement adopted the must-have Kaftan, starting from The Beatles, to Bianca



Jagger to Anjelica Huston, embracing the effortlessly chic look for day and night.

Later, other French master couturiers, i.e. Cristian Dior and Balenciaga introduced the Kaftan as a new form of loose-fitting evening gown, or a robe over matching trousers. YSL though, were the ones who made kaftans the must-have high end fashion trend.

The kaftan made itself well into the fashion trends of the next decade, and the next, and the next, right into 2019. Kaftans were always some form of statement, be it for the upper class, or the symbol of flower power for the hippies during the 70s to the 80s.

In the late 90s, Tom Ford shortened the kaftan to micro-mini length. Designers were then dabbling into the 'orient,' and lo and behold, they rediscovered the versatility of the kaftan. From Temperley and Matthew Williamson, to Naeem Khan and Elie Saab, the kaftan has been continually reanimated and brought back to the red carpet.

The bold and graphic silhouette of the kaftan enables designers to each put their unique spin on it, while maintaining the comfort and modesty that make it so appealing to women and men worldwide.

I don't believe that kaftan was ever out of fashion, or will ever be. It comes back in one way or the other, and in Bangladesh, it's been around for ages. Trendy or not, once people start adapting anything in terms of clothing, it will become trendy. And in all honesty, why not kaftans?

By Kyoko Bhuiyan

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha

Model: Chadni, Maruf

Wardrobe: LS Desk

Makeup: Farzana Shakil's Makeover Salon

Jamdani treasure hunt

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and a grand exhibition of the saris was organised at Shilpakala Academy. The exhibition generated a huge buzz, reviving interest in Jamdani. The exhibition attracted significant attention, and a new buzz was created in the younger generation regarding this magical craft. It made them consider Jamdani for their significant festival attires, and many young women started to choose Jamdani saris as their wedding attire. Aarong was a major partner of the Muslin Festival 2016, and many other similar initiatives since then.

The new customer attitude paved the way for Jamdani workers to think about the Jamdani production on a long term basis with renewed confidence and hope.

A precious part of the culture of a people was resuscitated, and it began to flourish again.

A second, two-year long initiative began in 2008, to put together a collection of 130 new Jamdani saris. A huge exhibition was organised, again attracting significant attention, particularly among the younger generation, and young women embraced and embellished the Jamdani, making

it a part of their coveted wardrobes. A wardrobe without a Jamdani became an unremarkable one.

Next was the search for 'phuti karpas,' the original fine muslin cotton plant from which Jamdani was originally woven. Aarong was a major part of the Muslin Festival 2016, which put the forgotten story of phuti karpas under the spotlight for all to marvel at.

All Aarong stores carry a covetable Jamdani collection. In addition to saris, Jamdani material is incorporated into items from home decor textiles to scarves, to

shalwar-kameez.

This October, Aarong is participating in the Jamdani Festival 2019, jointly organised by the National Crafts Council of Bangladesh and Bengal Foundation. Over the next week, however busy you might be, take a break and get in touch with a part of Bangladesh's heritage that brought Bengal global fame. Admire the finest Jamdani textiles produced in generations, made with the motifs brought home in that grand treasure hunt all those years ago.

Content and picture provided by Aarong