



Beni Boonon: Braiding jute and magic

Beni, or braids, invoke in my mind lustrous locks of hair, strands intertwined, to make intricate artistic patterns. The same idea translates to beautifully textured rugs, at Beni Boonon – worked on by 300 women artisans in a cottage industry in Savar.

The golden fibre has lost much of its lustre in the past few decades, since most of us now associate with it dull brown doormats and rough-hewn hessian sacks, or the simplistic side bags that are stereotypically carried by aspiring poets and literature nerds.

And yet, the delicate, eco-friendly plant fibre found inside the jute plant is deceptively strong, and durable, and thus a great choice for home décor items too! What better time to get your hands on one of these hand-crafted rugs than now, since many of us are home-bound for far longer than usual, and changes to the ambience are thoroughly welcome? From large floor rugs to small dining table place mats, Beni Boonon offers all, in designs created with the convergence of traditional craft and modern aesthetics. The best part? Customisation. Braided with dexterity and artisanship, with tasteful designs and luxurious texture reminiscent of any brand promising top-notch quality, is what they offer in their jute mats.

Beni Boonon is the recently patented brand of Bengal Braided Rugs Ltd (BBRL), an award winning exporter of jute goods for nigh over four decades. Their foray into the Bangladeshi market is through the efforts of a team of young people, who decided to give their local market a taste of export quality goodness.

In this vein, Saadul Islam, Director at BBRL, says that his target is to build Beni Boonon into a bona fide brand, and that is

what motivates the team to provide top-notch service. This includes presentation, customer service, design development, and customisation.

"I want to develop a relationship with my patrons, so that they remember us," Saad said.

Also, to make the venture future proof, Saad says they ensure that the production facility meets all compliance regulations,



and ensures a good working environment for the artisans, many of whom have now been with them for over 20 years.

The main attraction to jute products was sparked by his father's legacy, but the idea of locally selling their products had the veteran exporter a little hesitant, disappointed by past experiences. And yet, over many conversations around the dining table, his father Shahedul Islam, Managing Director of BBRL, came up with the lovely name that is now going to become their brand identity. And considering the costs and various technicalities of launching a brick and mortar store, Saad and his team decided to first move with an online venture, with a Facebook page.

But apart from the familial aspect, Saad says that there is more to what inspired



him to take this project up so passionately. Intrigued by the products and their sheer diversity, even though at the moment they only deal with braided rugs, Saad claims to have been fascinated by the process. In his own words, he approached the work in a very hands-on way to understand it, and then worked closely with their foreign buyers to learn about designs and colour combinations, over the past few years.



Saad also spoke enthusiastically about getting to know different kinds of customers, and trying to cater to their needs with sincerity. "We confirmed an order for a large 10 feet by 14 feet floor mat in about five minutes, and other times, it can take hours to finalise much smaller orders."

"As part of good service, we want to

ensure that the products delivered are exactly as shown in the pictures, and will even offer the option of returns. We also work to make the pictures and presentation a notch above the rest, as for an online business, presentation is key," he added.

Jute needs to be maintained well, and rugs can be somewhat on the expensive side compared to synthetic items, and we initially thought our response would be affected by that. But ever since the launch of the Facebook page, we have seen a variety in orders, and customers. Surprisingly, even during the pandemic, sales have been steady, and an interestingly varied customer base has emerged. It seems people are buying more home décor items as they are staying home more, if the number of repeat customers is any indication.

As to capacity, Beni Boonon recently supplied 500 table sets, about 3500 items in total, to a large multinational company, in just about a week. The biggest advantage to his venture, is the established factory, and the existing ecosystem, thanks to his father's extensive work in this area, Saad added.

The team at Beni Boonon is also enthusiastically looking forward to partner up with good local brands to enhance customer satisfaction, and plans to launch a dedicated website soon. Keeping with the international trends, Beni Boonon will also launch a website soon.

What do I say to that? All the good luck!

By Sania Aiman
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