

Fabrics of Heritage

#HERITAGE

The heritage of Bengal is intertwined with the fame of the majestic Muslin and the intricate weaves of the floral Jamdani. Scrolling down the pages of history, we can identify the glorious period when the famous weaves were collecting accolades from the courts of the mighty Mughals to the blueblood Europeans. Anybody who had an upper-class upbringing was familiar with the exquisite garb that was so fine, that it could be magically stored inside a matchbox. Today, it is hard to imagine, that we had such gifted artisans, who could make such unique fabric, just with their bare hands.



Model: Borno
Wardrobe: Nakshi katha from Aranya

MEHRIN MUBDI CHOWDHURY

Farfetched as it may sound, this is the truth — this is history. Eventually with time, our grandeur subsided. Maybe there were forces acting against us or maybe it was our own short-sightedness that led to the demise of an incredible craft.

However, today, a few centuries later, in a sovereign Bangladesh we are trying to build a link with our lost heritage. With the announcement of GI (Geographical Indication) for Jamdani — that it is our own, the announcement that Sonargaon be considered as World Craft City by The World Craft Council and the intense research into reviving the wonder cotton — karpash, we are getting closer to the idea, of reviving a lost culture. But can we say the same about all the other textiles that also took a part in writing the story of our nation?

What about the Tangail taant or even the Rajshahi silk?

Here, in this article, which has been divided in a three-part series, we delve into the lives of the fabric artisans throughout our nation. Trying to understand the standpoint of heritage fabrics in today's Bangladesh. Where the country has been successful and where it is on the verge of trailing behind.

The magnificence of the nakshi katha

On the way to the borders of Meghalaya from Dhaka, we are faced with miles of scenery within the national borders. With small hills and forests filled with timber, the depiction is close to the definition of tranquillity. Amidst these very green laden forests are tiny mud huts and modest single storied brick houses where the women are busy taking care of their families.

It's a typical lifestyle for these women from the Jamalpur and Sherpur region, except for the fact they are also regarded as a national asset with their exceptional talent in crafting art such as Nakshi

Kantha, on a daily basis.

Daluara Begum, proprietor of Dipto Kuthir in Jamalpur Sadar, used to be one of these ladies. Today, she runs an industry providing employment opportunities to other people, both female and male, in her area. Begum gets excited upon meeting us and proudly shows us all her trophies, especially the one she was personally gifted by the Prime Minister.

She speaks of a brighter future, especially with the establishment of the proposed Sheikh Hasina Nakshipalli project, in Jamalpur involving an expansive budget of Tk 722 crores. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) there are some 261 handloom families living in Jamalpur and Sherpur districts while there are also some 76 Nakshi entrepreneurs and 3,985 Nakshi artists in Sherpur only.

And this very project approved by ECNEC with a possibility of 1st phase completion by December 2021 will further patronise the crafts and encourage more to join the trade. In an era when handicrafts are valued globally and many countries of the world are using handicrafts as one of their main items of trade, this is certainly a valuable move that sees a profitable future.

Nargis Khatun from Krishno Nagar, Jessore agreed. "I got involved with the trade because of my mother. I learnt the craft and the fine skills from her and today, I take pride in training other girls, get involved with Nakshi, as it brings prosperity and pride to those who know the craft. There are so many girls who work under me today. I just give them the tracing, the fabric and the matched thread and they do the fine work," said Khatun.

Upon further discussion Khatun opened up to this correspondent that once upon a time, especially at the beginning when women started doing the Nakshi business, the men were slightly sceptical because of existent, and archaic culture of patriarchy.

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