



As we approach yet another Pahela Baishakh celebration, the world around us is still reeling from the effects of a pandemic — a struggling health sector, a weakened economy, low morale and worries for loved ones all around. Although Bangladesh as a country has managed to survive the pandemic and its implications to a large extent, the so-called new normal is still not a constant, the uncertainties loom large as ever.

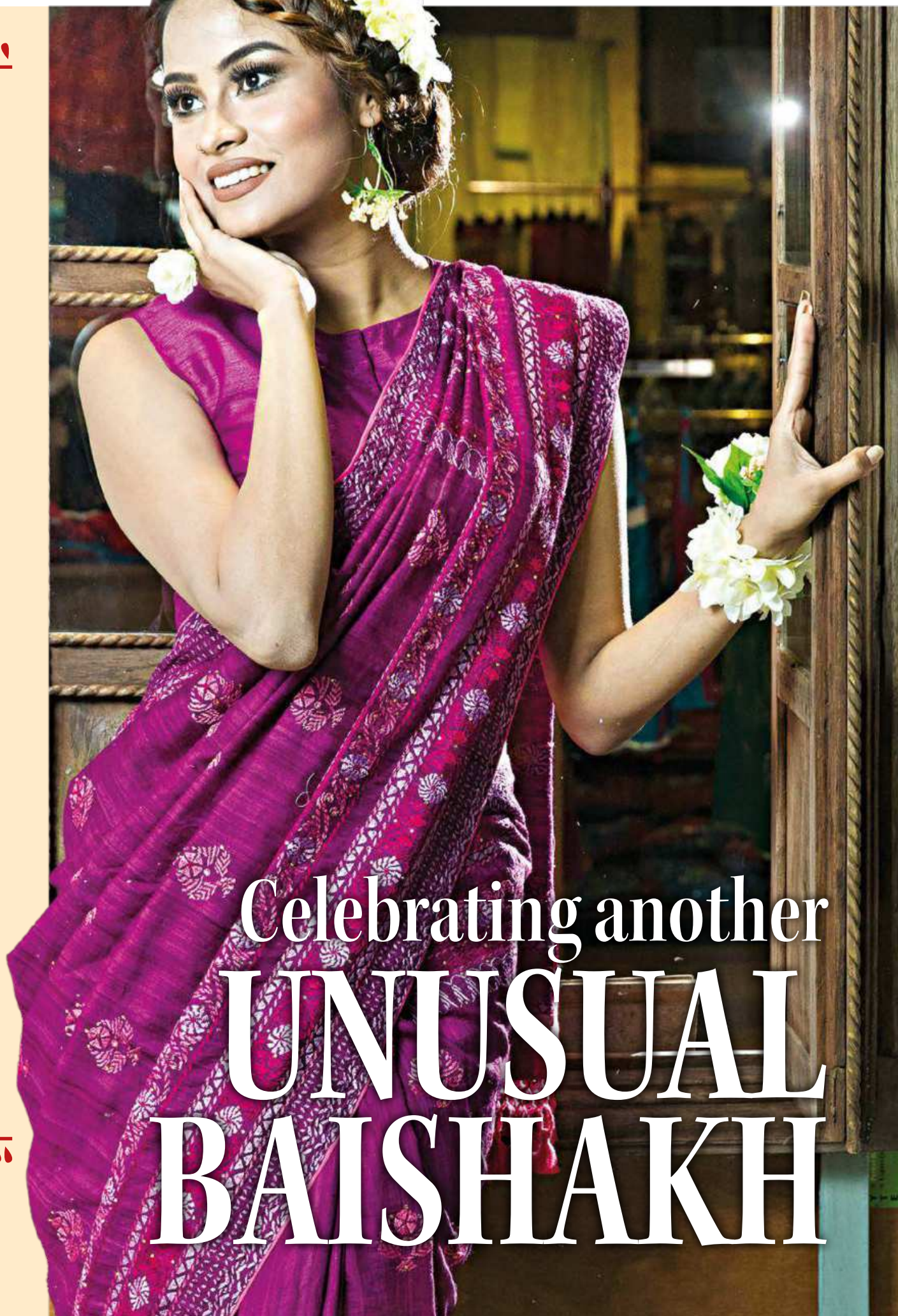
Although it remains the responsible way to stay socially isolated and keep gatherings to a minimal, limiting the number of people we interact with at a minimum, it does not imply that we cannot celebrate.

The economic slowdown since early 2020 has wreaked havoc on our fashion industry. This is thus a time for all of us to band together and choose all things local — from clothes to accessories to food and everything related to our modern lifestyles. The matter of pride is that now Bangladesh does locally produce practically every item needed for a smooth and modern life, and all we have to do is remain conscientious in our choices and ways of celebration.

I hope the new year brings with it the joy and felicitations we sing about every year, and the coming Baishakhi sun ushers in a dawn free of the pandemic, so we can all find a stable new normal, and get life back on track as usual.

Shubho Nababarsha!

— Mahfuz Anam



The prodigal son of Bangla literature

MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DATTA

While the great playwrights of various cultures wrote drama, Bengal Michael Madhusudan Datta truly lived it in his single-minded, flawed, but ultimately successful odyssey to greatness.

Known as “Modhu Kobi,” this literary giant of Bengal was born in Sagardari, Jessore, where even now, the poet’s birthday is marked by the Modhu Mela every year. Michael was a precocious and brilliant child, born into and imbibed the grandeur of a wealthy, traditional, and grand zamindari, and perhaps that is what influenced his dreams of greatness of a different kind.

My introduction to Madhusudan was in class six, when I was to memorise the poem “*Roshal o Shornolotika*” as part of the Bangla curriculum. It was a long poem, with a lot of unfamiliar words, and daunting, to say the least. Yet, this poem in some ways opened my eyes to the beauty of “old school language,” which we also called “*shadhu bhasha*,” which to children appears quite staid and arcane. Yet, the way the poem flowed as my father recited and helped me understand the words, etched in my memory, the words still alive in my mind, the moral of humility, forever learnt—

“*Haraiya Ayu-shoho Dorpo Bonosthol-e!*
Urdho-sheer Jodi Tumi Kul Maan Dhon-e;
Koriyo Na Ghrina Tobu Nich-sheer Jon-e!”

Michael was multitalented, writing prose, poetry, plays et al with equal flair, and is credited for introducing satire as well as the sonnet to Bengali poetry. He was also the first to use the blank verse in Bangla poetry. Not only that, along with Bengali, English, French and Italian, in which he was well-versed, he was conversationally fluent in about a dozen languages, including Hebrew, Telugu and Sanskrit.

Michael possessed a singularly talented and obstinate mind from his very childhood, which eventually pushed him to leave behind his beloved father, religion, and country, in pursuit of greatness as a poet. Fascinated by the cultural renaissance happening around him, and much like youth anywhere, Michael was enamoured by the courtly and formal conduct of the British. He chose to pursue English poetry as his passion, and dreamt of becoming a famous English poet, idolising Lord Byron.

While his early work was published in the English language publication in British India, he aspired to a global acceptance of his talent, and sent off his work to publications in England, to be snubbed. Whether it was for the quality of the work in the editors’ judgement, or the prejudice against a brown man writing in English, can never be ascertained for sure, but Michael took it to heart that to get that coveted recognition, he must go abroad and make that name for himself there. He felt that English language and literary traditions were far richer than Bangla, and that his talent would be properly valued and recognised only if he pursued literature in English. For a long while, he remained bewitched by that concept.

In brashness typical of a proud and ambitious young man, he also felt he knew what was best for himself in terms of matters of marriage. The common custom for an upper caste and wealthy Hindu bachelor was to marry whichever suitably upper caste and wealthy girl the parents chose. But Michael believed that it would be horrific to fall into that trope and to marry without love or a proper courtship, a true tragedy.

Thus, with an aim to avoid an arranged marriage, and to make it easier for himself to go abroad and

pursue greatness supported by a westernised name, Madhusudan converted to Christianity and added Michael to his name at just nineteen. This decision earned his erstwhile indulgent father’s permanent ire, lost him his place at the Hindu College, and lead him to a path of hardship and greatness at the same time. It ultimately also lost him the support and wealth of his father, who paid for his education, but seeing that Michael would not revert to Hinduism, finally disowned him, despite his being an only child.

Being removed from Hindu college on account of his conversion, he now continued his education at Bishop’s College, firmly set in his love for English literature, and his pursuit of fame.

From his birth to 1856, his focus remained on English literary practices, and after an initial struggle, he turned around his fortunes while working as an editor of various publications in Madras, where he also met and married both his non-Indian wives.

Only upon the death of his estranged father, Madhusudan returned to Kolkata, and upon the urging of his friends and members of the literary circles, felt the need to explore his potential in Bangla

well. And unexpectedly, this is what brought him the greatness he had sought for so long. He ultimately made it to the land of dreams, on the pretext of studying law, had his heart broken by financial struggles and racism, and came back to India.

That is another long story.

But this brilliant and permanently rebellious man did achieve greatness he so desired. Once his interest in Bangla was piqued, he broke rules and crated things anew in everything he put his hands on. From poems to epics, from satire to plays, everything he wrote, even his letters, were ground-breaking and introduced hitherto foreign aspects to Bangla literature. He was truly a great moderniser, ushering Bangla literary practices into the modern age.

The epic Meghnad Bodh is perhaps his most celebrated work, called a “Mohakabba,” might be what he most known for, but he also wrote the truly first authentic and original play in Bangla literature, called *Sharmishta*. Michael was among the first to show themes of latent feminism in Bangla writers, his heroines always self-aware, unabashed in their womanhood, and vocal about their rights, like his versions of Jona and Koikeyi, the well-known characters of Ramayana, which he used as the source material for his epic poem Meghnad Bodh.

Madhusudan also used metaphors with abandon, and was not afraid to voice his opinions, case in point his satires— “*Ekei ki boley shobbhota*” and “*Buro Shalik er Ghar e roun*.” The first was a critique of the alcohol and drug abuse by the young and educated young Bengalis, ironic in the sense that that was once his very own lifestyle, and the second criticised the heavily hypocritical and ritualised ways of the traditional Hindu society, which he found largely devoid of morality.

In his poem *Bongobhumir protti*, written at the later stage of his life, there is a clear indication of regret, of ignoring his motherland, and for thinking of her charms as inferior. There is pleading for forgiveness;

“*Rekho Ma Dashey-re Mon-e*
Shadhite Mon-er Shaadh
Ghot-ey jodi Promad
Modhuheen Koro Na Go Tobo Monokokonod-e...”

Another poem he begins,
“*Nij Agar-e Chilo More Omullo Roton Ogonno*
Ta Shob-ey Ami Obohela Kori,
Ortho-lobhey Korinu Deshey Deshey Bhromon,
Bodorey Bondorey Jotha Banijjo Tori...”

To end with:
Nij Grihey Dhon Tobo, Tobey Ki Karoney,
Bhikhari Tumi Hey Aji, Koho Dhon Poti?
Keno Niranondo Tumi Anondo Shodoney?

Michael was Bengali literature’s flamboyant prodigal son, the one who returned. He died tragically young, at just 49, and in severe financial hardship due to his eccentric and irresponsible nature, and betrayal by relatives. Forever swimming against the flow, a pioneer, a man after his own heart, Michael Madhusudan Datta stands tall as a legend in Bangla literature, a harbinger of the new and the novel — his stature cemented in time and infallible to challenge.

By Sania Aiman
Photo: Collected



Born into considerable wealth, Madhusudan was a proud young man. He is known to have been eccentric. It is said that while he was a student, he would go home before every class and change his outfit, a new western suit every time. With fashionable long sideburns, and neatly coiffed hair, he was always immaculately turned out. Imagine this brilliant, flamboyant, and a brash hot-head of a poet, and you get Dutta. This preference of a brown man for British fashion even created waves later, at Bishop’s college, with undertones of racism. It is said this man was so brilliant, he could dictate four different types of literary works to four scribes, simultaneously. He was unabashedly aware of his own potential too, declaring to his father upon being disowned, that one day the father would be known by the son’s name instead.

The legend of Isa Khan

Fable and reality effortlessly mingle when it comes to the adventurous history of Isa Khan Masnad-e-Ala, the valiant hero of Bengal who fought against the military pursuits of the Mughals to subjugate this land.

In love with this soil, Isa Khan built resistance and led his fellow zamindars — collectively known as the Baro Bhuiyan — against any campaigns the Mughals conceived to conquer Bengal in the late 16th century.

Our memory of this distinctive chapter in history — where we see the mighty Emperor Akbar desperately trying, and failing, in his attempts to annex Bengal to the Mughal Empire firmly and permanently — is rather hazy and shrouded with numerous legends.

To illustrate, there has been much talk around the identities of the so-called Baro Bhuiyans themselves. Who were they? Were there literally 12 of them, or were there more?

One may explore and take a walk in the labyrinths of history, trying to find the real Isa Khan amidst the haze around him.

I, on the other hand, make no such attempt to find the man behind the legend. I reckon by now, the man and the monument have become one and the same.

Take for example, his fight with Akbar's distinguished general, Raja Man Singh, who was sent to Bengal to defeat the invincible chieftain.

At one point of the battle, Isa Khan challenged him into single combat, to which the general agreed. The fight reached a climax when Man Singh lost his sword, but Isa Khan, in the spirit of chivalry or sportsmanship, offered him one.

The act sparked in the general an admiration for his enemy in the dramatic and strangest circumstances.

This tale has more than one version and how much truth there is in any of it is something we shall perhaps never know for sure, but the noteworthy aspect here is that the story reflects the fascination Bengalis have about this invincible and fearless hero.

Isa Khan is indeed a subject of



fascination and curiosity.

He was once even sold off as a slave, eventually freed by his uncle.

On the other hand, his romance with a widowed daughter of a landlord hailing from a different religion is also a cherished story, and so is her bravery and love, reflected in how, after Isa Khan's demise, she valiantly held the fort against enemies till her death.

A number of ballads have enshrined adventures and marvels of this great hero, painting vivid pictures of valour

and glory — arguably exaggerated, but never failing to capture the essence of his larger-than-life persona.

For instance, a ballad mentioned his ship, built in Delhi, which was colossal in size and swift in pace, moved by thousands of hands working on the oars. The ship drew awe and wonder of people everywhere:

*"Ek nao Delhir sore korilo nirman
Deshe boideshe jar hoilo bakhan."*

The ship's captain hailed from a village on the banks of Padma River.

We also get a vivid picture of Jangalbari, where Isa Khan once settled at. One can imagine the splendour of the city, with large tanks, elegant ghats, flower gardens, etc.

*"Challish pura jomire tai jongol katiya
Purikhani bandhe Dewan joton karea
Boro boro dighi katae shane bandha
ghat*

*Bar Banglar ghore lagae shoner kopat...
Chander soman puri abete rangia
Dewangiri kore sobe tothae bosia."*

The ballads also give us an idea of the grandeur and pomp of the bungalows of the rich during that era, with feathers and mirrors used for decoration:

*"Bhitor anginae mia joto ghor
bandhilo*

*Machua rangar pakha diya chani tate
dilo*

*Aena diya beriache joto ghor khani
Jhilmil kore joto photiker thuni."*

And of course, the ballads describe the man himself.

Isa Khan was indeed a patriot who held this land together as the leader of Baro Bhuiyan, but he could be merciless too, like this instance below, where he placed a heavy stone on the chest of a prisoner as punishment:

*"Eha to shunia Isa kon kam kore
Pathor chapa diya rakhe badshar
nofore."*

Isa Khan had many faces. He was a slave and he was a ruler. He was an adventurer and he was a lover. A rebel and a warrior; a landlord as well. Legends arose, passed on as ballads and folklore, blurring the line between history and myth, and thus ironically making the man who is so much talked about, an enigma!

But we indeed know that there once lived an iconic chieftain, who zealously guarded this land, and that the mighty Mughals simply could not take full control of it during his lifetime. It was only after his death that Bengal eventually saw its local rulers get crushed permanently.

Above all else, he is remembered as a benevolent ruler, one who could make enormous sacrifices for his people:

*"Tarpore malik ailo Isa Khan Dewan
Jan diya pale porja putrer soman."*

By M H Haider

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Model: Ahmed Tuhin Reza

Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha

Make-up: Sumon

Wardrobe: House of Ahmed

The main sources for the write-up are 'Social Life as Reflected in the Ballad of Isha Khan' by Ferdousi Rahman and 'The Romance of an Eastern Capital' by F B Bradley-Birt.

The story of the paar

They say, parallel lines only meet at infinity. The paar — borders of saris running along the two edges — never do. The equidistant designs run along the sari; a magic in itself that works like a charm in the realm of fashion aesthetics.



Initially worn as a two-piece garment, the sari evolved into the present-day fabric with a jomin (the body of the sari), a paar (the border), and an anchol (the loose end after the drape) — three primary elements that make it an elegant attire.

The paar binds the jomin, and sometimes the anchol, creating an oeuvre that enchants women, and draws the attention of the onlookers to the intricacy that is the design of the sari. It also serves a very practical purpose: it borders the fabric of the jomin so that the weave does not fall apart. Usually made from thicker yarn, the paar is often stiffer than the rest of the sari so that it does not fold at the edge with wear.



Noted for their floral and geometric extravagance in designs, the Jamdani upholds a richness in the wide variation of motifs that the weavers interpret in the sari. In the past, animal figures were also present in the sari's patterns, which is now all set for a revival.

The paar of this particular textile is unique in the sense that they are translucent in nature, the arrangements juxtaposed on the sheer weave, which is often in the same colour and texture as the jomin. Most often in contrasting colours, the Jamdani paar is neither broad, nor short or narrow. It is in the taant saris of Tangail, and Northern regions where the size of the paar becomes a prominent feature.



Taant saris are simplistic in nature, their attraction relying in the mastery of the weaver. And like the jomin itself, the paar is not elaborate, sometimes running like a monochrome ribbon, or just a line of zig-zag weave, or at times just straight lines.

The Mirpur Benaroshi shines in the intricacy of the paar. Often executed in strands of silver or gold, the motifs — peacock, birds, paisley — come to life through the artisan's creativity.

The colour of the paar is either in sync with the entire ensemble. Sometimes it is in stark contrast. Consider the auspicious white and red —colours of positivity. That is your Baishakh in a wild mix. The same works during the Sharodio utshab, when goddess Durga descends to her father's abode on earth.

If women find the paar fascinating, some artists think it is enchanting. Murtaja Baseer is one such artist. His leading ladies are set in two complementary settings — one deeply rooted in pastoral Bengal, and the other in the more modern context of city life.

His realism often depicts a lady donning the simplest of saris, with a paar made prominent with a single stroke of a colour— often offsetting the composition in its sheer radiance. His Avant-garde paintings set in urban settings most often portrays the sari in its simplicity. But in Baseer's signature abstract realism that breaks down the real-life image of his muse often shows a brush of colour, sometimes streaks of what is unmistakably a sari's paar.

While the sari can easily be considered a six-yard-work-of-art — a creation of weavers, and modern-day designers — the paar is nothing short of a border that frames the canvas — often extravagant, sometimes majestic in its simplicity.

In the sphere of fashion, it is one feature of grace for the sari. It is an integral part of the design of the stitchless yard, which has been the garb of choice for women of this region for the last five millennia. And its appeal, like the sari itself, is timeless.



By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Model: Surjo, Hritika,
Wardrobe: Tangail Saree Kutir
Make-up: Sumon

Sustainable Fashion Activism

To dive deeper into the subject-matter, we needed to speak to an expert who had experience in both the differing perspectives, fast fashion and slow fashion to be precise. Appointed as the Senior Product Developer at a popular U.K. brand – Next, and also the owner of a local sustainable brand AF, Afsana Ferdousi seemed to be the right person to give us plausible answers.

"I have tried to maintain sustainable fashion rules and regulations all throughout my production process," began Ferdousi. She continued to say, "A major portion of the onus lies on us; if we – as designers, cannot show the way towards sustainability, then I don't know who will! Designers introduce consumers to new trends, and motivate their buying choices. It's a huge responsibility and my brand AF works from this perspective", claimed the sustainable fashion activist.

She continued to add, "Our collections are story based, every line that we produce speaks about an important



information that will encourage us to be more responsible towards the world we live in – whether it is racism, human rights, animal rights or even being eco-friendly."

Based on our conversations, we learned that the brand AF was largely known for its association with recycling and upcycling where waste fabric and yarn from larger garments factories were sourced and re-used to make new collections. "We even use defective T-shirts from these factories, the discarded clothes and re-work on them using natural dyes like indigo and the shibori technique to make new and attractive high-couture tops," declared the designer.

"Since I have directly worked with fast fashion manufacturing units in the past, the concept of being eco-friendly became clearer. I could have imported yarn from abroad, or made brand new t-shirts from scratch, wasting thousands of litres of water, oil, energy and money to make a similar product, which wouldn't look any different or even better. At least this way, my conscience stays clear," admits Ferdousi.

To encourage clientele to get familiar with the concept of recycling, AF introduced bespoke designs with second hand fabric, where customers could bring their old clothes including saris and AF helps to transform them into contemporary styles like the jumpsuit or kaftan.

"70 percent of our clothes are made out of upcycling – using natural dyes, whilst the rest 30 percent are recycled waste from garments factories that hold certificates for ETP (Effluent Treatment Plants), and maintain GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard)," revealed Ferdousi.

"Based on my experience, I have learnt that the fast fashion industry is not completely reckless as before because there are various measures in places and global standards set in motion, to make them as eco-friendly as it is possible for the moment. The work is continuous, giving us hope to a promising future," the designer informed.

From Ferdousi we also learnt that ETP helps in cleaning the chemical laden waste water of factories by making it reusable for other uses like agriculture. And GOTS, is a certification given to factories that work with BCI (Better Cotton Initiative) cotton and organic cotton. Where, Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is a global not-for-profit organisation that partners with millions of cotton farmers across the globe, providing training on sustainable farming practices.



Eco-friendly, sustainable and slow fashion: A new mantra for the local fashion industry

Another Pahela Baishakh during lockdown reminds us the need for a complete change of outlook on our concept of fashion, livelihood of the artisans, and caring for nature. The pandemic has reminded us once again that our concerns are no longer theoretical, that the world has already begun to show signs of collapse. The only thing that stops us from complete degeneration is time and our current dedication (however minimal it may be) towards a cleaner and better world.

Sustainability of the fashion industry is a major concern worldwide. The much spoken about concern is being tackled sensitively across the globe, where every country is in favour of fashion's durability and sustenance. Now getting back to our home-grown fashion industry, the couture wear and the handloom industry which is almost on the verge of dying, we investigate what holds them back.

To better understand the current context of the Bangladeshi fashion industry, we decided to speak to an expert. The rendezvous with Emdad Hoque, Vice President, FDCB (Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh) was very enlightening, as he elaborated on significant issues that could make a huge difference, if adopted appropriately.

"When we began FDCB, seven years ago in 2014, our main idea was to work towards a better world, a cleaner world, via a more sustainable fashion industry. With this notion in mind, we worked with heritage fabrics like *khadi*, Rajshahi silk, Tangail *taant*, all local handloom items, to help popularise our lost craftsmanship and heritage

fabrics and finally this year, in collaboration with a multinational brand, we did a sustainable fashion exhibition, highlighting designers and designs who support a similar perspective," said Hoque.

He also mentioned that Bangladesh was majorly a handloom-based nation, where our natural crafts from the ancient times demanded that we work with our fingers — so handloom had always been an intrinsic part of our culture and traditions.

Through this conversation, he reminded us that the seasons of Bangladesh were dominated by the monsoon, demanding that we wear season-appropriate comfortable fabrics, like *khadi* and organic cotton material instead of synthetic items like nylon or polyester, almost all-throughout the year.

He also stressed about the tradition of recycling, to being a part of an old-age tradition, "We all use the '*kantha*,' a soft and light embroidered quilt in Bangladesh, every family has more than one in their collection; these *kanthas* are made out of old saris of our mothers and grandmothers — which they did not throw away, but rather, re-used to make something again." Hence, the culture of wastage or throwing

away something when not in favour is not inherited — our customs are clear on that.

"Traditionally, we always made use of older fabric, mended something that was torn and wore it again and then if it was beyond repair, we would try to find alternate ways to use it, maybe use it as patchwork for a new dress, or as cushion covers or even a collage for a bedspread. This very concept has encouraged me to start my own brand — EMDAD," revealed Hoque.



Rather than using brand new fabric, Hoque collects discarded garments from a second-hand market in the city and aesthetically places them into brand new, sustainable, hand-woven, designer pieces.

Deeper into the conversation, Hoque revealed his concern about the current pandemic situation, saying that if the rate of pollution was not reduced in time, it would soon be too late and we may never be able return back to the good old days of a clean, carefree world.

"Nature has its own way to retaliate, if we don't clean up our act soon, and continue polluting the environment at the current rate, then another disaster is just lurking around the corner," concluded the expert designer.

When we speak of sustainable fashion, we cannot exclude accessories like jewellery, bags and shoes. Designer Hosna Emdad, of Kristung jewellery, makes sure there's no gap in our understanding. "Fashion is incomplete without jewellery

Deeper into the conversation, Hoque revealed his concern about the current pandemic situation, saying that if the rate of pollution was not reduced in time, it would soon be too late and we may never be able return back to the good old days of a clean, carefree world.

and to advocate sustainable fashion would only mean endorsing sustainable jewellery as well, and that's where Kristung comes to materialise," said Hosna Emdad.

"Kristung is also the name of a stunning mountain in Bandarban, where 'Kris' means tiny birds and 'Tung' means mountains in the local dialect. I fell in love with the name right when I heard it, immediately naming my brand after the majestic mountain."

Kristung jewellery deals with eco-friendly items like bamboo, jute and even locally sourced yarn to make artistic ornaments. "To make it more sustainable, I have engaged previously unemployed women to empower them and make them contribute to the country's economy whilst flexing their creativity," Hosna reflected.

Designer Tasfia Ahmed runs her namesake brand as a sustainable



initiative, and works to promote the local fabric industry, and the uniqueness of our craftsmanship associating it with modern and contemporary designs, which are more relatable to the young buyers of today.

"Sustainable fashion is not only about how we source the fabric or the yarn, it is a much bigger issue. It includes everything from fair trade to economic welfare of the artisans. How we are able to raise their standard of living by giving them work and fair wages in return of their good work. It even includes the aspect of child labour, something so heinous, yet

occurring rampantly within our country," Tasfia said.

Inquired what prevented us as buyers from making sustainable purchases; Tasfia emphasises two major points — being culturally inappropriate and unschooled about our heritage stories.

"We must know how much harm we are doing to the world with our erratic purchases. Plus, we must educate ourselves about our culture and traditions, so that we can bring back our passion towards local clothing, designs and styles, which are unique rather than mindlessly follow what the global media

bombards us with," she explained.

Fashion was never a linear concept, where we like something, wear something and dispose of it as soon as we bought it. If we do not consciously stop filling our wardrobes with sustainable clothing, if we do not question our designers, labels and brands about the clothes that we wear, how they were made and who made them, then there will never be a fruitful ending.

This is probably where the designers need to be more innovative and use the age-old handloom in newer ways and incorporate it into modern, contemporary designs to make it more attractive to the younger buyers of today. Every design needs to tell a story, about the background of the textile or maybe even the livelihood of the artisans. This will help educate the buyers and help them make a connection with sustainable products.

Finally, we must always remember

A bird's eye view into slow fashion

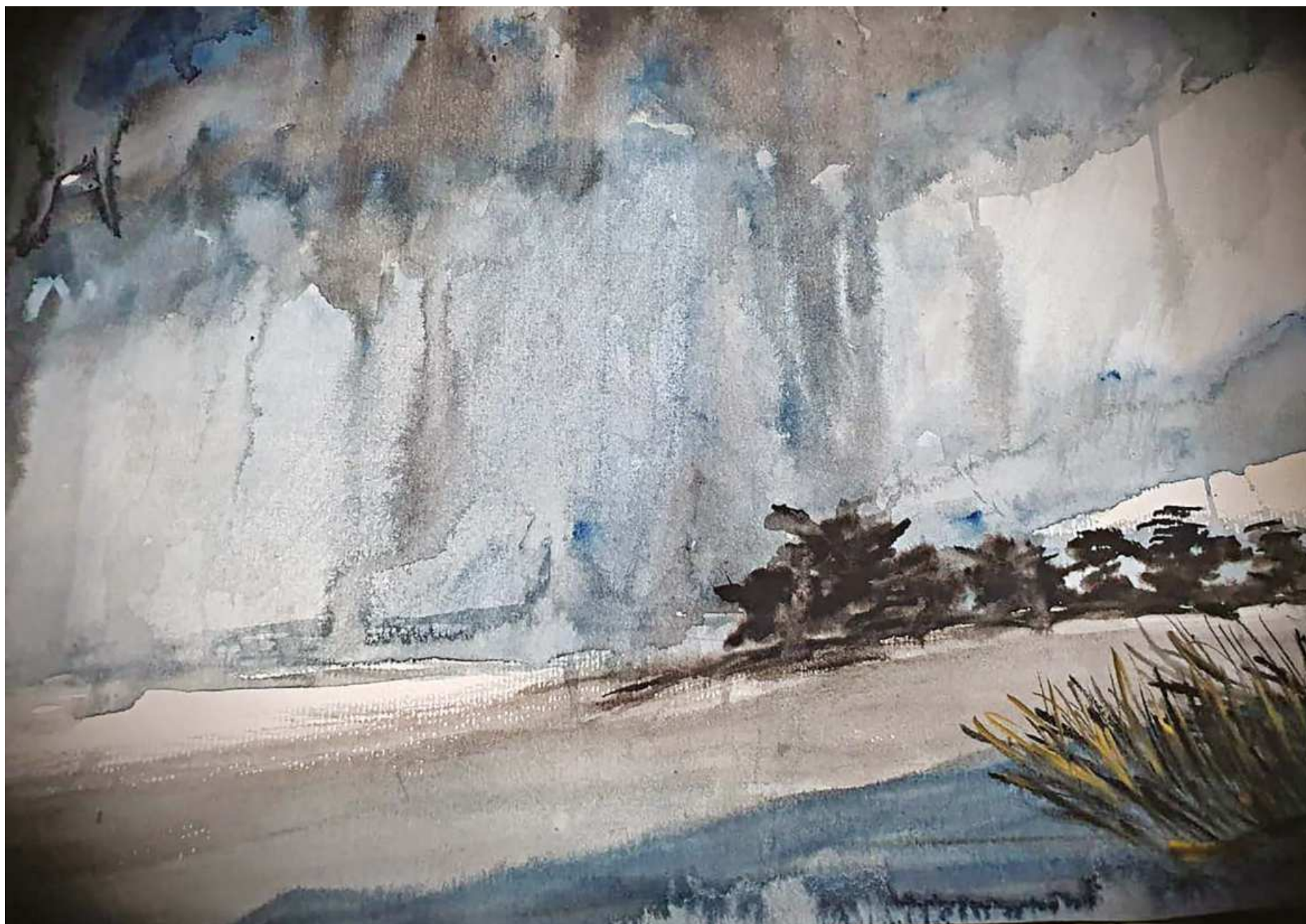
Slow Fashion advocates a more sustainable and conscious approach to fashion; clothes are made out of environmentally friendly materials, including recycled items. This business model emphasises on promoting local skills, craftsmanship and reduced consumption rate. The end products, often comparatively higher in price, have an extended longevity — meaning it is valued more and does not fall out of 'trends' as quickly as fast fashion. Production process of slow fashion demands improved salaries.



that fashion has always been a circular concept, where everyone in the process is connected to one another. If we as buyers do not value our heritage, our crafts, or our environment, then there will never grow an industry that supports a cleaner, better world. Because after all, what is demanded is supplied.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury
Photos by Emdad Hoque, Afsana Ferdousi, Hosna Emdad, Tasfia Ahmed

Special thanks to FDCB, Maheen Khan and Shaibal Saha for helping in the development of the story



The tempestuous nor' wester

Jhor elo, elo jhor
Aam por aam por,
Khacha aam, dasha aam,
Tok, tok, mishty...
Ei jah!
Elo bujhi brishti.

Lines like these bring up a surge of memories; immediately transporting me back to the yesteryears when ma used to put us to sleep with stories from Thakurmar Jhuli and beguiling rhymes. Nowadays, whenever there's a Kalbaishakhi Jhor in sight, I quietly hum identical tunes, making sure my sons are close enough to listen.

As I try to pour out my thoughts on a piece of paper, to fairly explain my feelings about seasonal storms, the outside darkens miraculously. Clouds begin to take shape; one mighty puff joins another, as if to show a parade of gallantry. As the sky darkens, the clouds rumble and when

the entire city is tiptoeing to take shelter, I stand next to the veranda on my tenth-floor apartment, marveling at the majestic beauty of the Kalbaishakhi.

While it may be true, that the thunderstorm will uproot few trees, while breaking down some into awkward pieces, the Kalbaishakhi will also bring with it an array goodness, washing away all the sickness and dirt off the country,

The Kalbaishakhi provides a fresh angle to Bangladeshi artists, because the entire gram Bangla, the scenic green villages, depict a stunning scenario that is unique and cannot be found anywhere else.

encouraging the nation to start afresh with renewed faith.

If we look at the Kalbaishakhi from an artist's point of view, nothing can be more surreal. Every capture, be it a painting or a picture taken by a camera, the results are fascinating and the subject majestic.

Goutam Chakraborty, a renowned artist of the city, also the Director at Galleri Kaya, agrees with us on this note. "The Kalbaishakhi Jhor is a terrific scene to capture, through all mediums of art, from oils to pastels to watercolours and even acrylics. But the quickest capture can be made through watercolours and maybe that's why many artists prefer this medium, to paint the best possible storm scenario, not just in Bangladesh but all over the world," said Chakraborty.

There's another perspective to look at when discussing the Kalbaishakhi, while storms maybe a typical setting for artists from all over the world. The Kalbaishakhi provides a fresh angle to Bangladeshi artists, because the entire gram Bangla, the scenic green villages, depict a stunning

scenario that is unique and cannot be found anywhere else. The thunderstorm in an open field, maybe a mustard field can be captured with a mix and match of beautiful colours like the yellow ochre, Prussian blue and olive green.

Then there's the picturesque scenario where the rain pours over the tin-sheds, the thatched roofs and mud houses, the coconut trees swaying with the wind and little children running about, collecting fallen mangoes from trees, are instances that surpass all descriptions of beauty.

From an artist's point of view, all seasons may have their unique charm, for instance, spring, with heaps of flowers in bloom, or summer with its scorching heat making the sunflower fields glisten like fields of gold. It may just be the king of them all, not because it dominates our seasons, but because of the unique beauty that is associated with the season – the majestic Kalbaishakhi.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury
Art by Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury