

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.

