

MANJULIKA CHAKMA - 2003



Proprietor of Bain Textiles

In the 1960s, when people in the hill tracts could not imagine starting a business – and, especially for a woman, it was absolutely unthinkable – an indigenous woman came forward to show how peoples' lives can be improved through business. Her name is Manjulika Chakma – the first tribal woman entrepreneur in the country. Born in 1943 in Rangamati, Manjulika took bold initiatives to develop traditional looms in her area and establish the first business concern of tribal handloom products.

Traditionally, agriculture had been the main occupation in the hill tracts region dominated by tribal people. The art of weaving was taught to women as part of regular household chores. In her childhood, Manjulika learnt weaving from her mother Panchalata Khisha. They had looms in their family, locally called "komortant." They used to produce traditional loom products in the 1950s.

Manjulika says during the 1950s and early 60s, many indigenous women in hill districts used to produce clothes for their own uses only. They never thought about starting any commercial venture. So, it was a real challenge for her to take such an initiative.

Manjulika joined Shah Boys High School as a teacher in 1961. Around that time, she thought of doing something for her fellow weavers. She purchased two traditional looms in 1965 and started applying new weaving techniques while

continuing her teaching profession. Thus, her journey as an entrepreneur began with a capital of only Tk 500. It was a very difficult task, but she overcame all hurdles through sheer hard work and dedication.

Sometimes she had to stop production because of inadequate capital and raw materials. Marketing was another problem she faced at the initial stages as there were very few buyers in Rangamati at that time. People outside the hill tracts hardly knew about the products. But she didn't lose heart. Opening a very small showroom at her residence in 1965, she started selling her products.

Over time, she succeeded in attracting buyers and received huge appreciation while handloom products became a profitable business. This encouraged her to concentrate on her business full time. Eventually, Manjulika's Bain Textile became a popular name in handloom. Presently, Bain Textile has three showrooms in Rangamati and one in Cox's Bazaar. Besides, her products including various clothing and household items are sold in selected outlets in Dhaka such as Aarong, Prabartana, Karika, Aranya, and Kumudini.

Products have been developed and diversified at Bain Textile considering the tastes and demands of buyers at home and abroad. The company has a long range of products such as tribal dress (pinon, khadi), shawls, bed covers, shalwar kameezes, shirts, panjabis, T-shirts, frocks, sleeping gowns, skirt-tops, side bags, purses, sofa covers, napkins, and towels.

Bain Textile earned Tk 4 lakh in 2000 and Tk 6 lakh in 2001 from exports. Around 80 weavers, experts, and helpers are engaged in her handloom business, apart from the more than 100 tribal women in four villages who produce handloom products for sale.

With separate weaving, dyeing, design and tailoring units, and exclusive

showrooms, Bain Textile emerged as a complete business house. Manjulika still plays a key role in supervising the whole production process right from procuring raw materials like yarn and chemicals for dyeing, preparing them for use, and controlling the quality. She is a master in preparing vegetable dyes. It's a secret of her success in making her products popular.

In the early days of her business, Manjulika had fund constraints but banks could not do much for her as it was very difficult for them to provide loan to a person without collateral. Manjulika did not have any assets to keep as mortgage against bank loans. Two local banks came up with proposals to give her loans but she could not make a deal with them.

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Manjulika says a lot of changes have taken place in the techniques of producing handloom products but they have not lost their basic characteristics. Traditional tribal looms have been transformed into modern ones but the products are still attractive because of their unique colour and designs that demonstrate the rich heritage of tribal community.

At a time when local and global markets are flooded with fabrics manufactured in modern and high-tech

plants, tribal handloom with ethnic designs is still popular with a different taste and appeal. Manjulika played a leading role in popularising these indigenous designs amongst both local and foreign buyers.

Manjulika's bold initiative created new entrepreneurs also. Her tireless efforts encouraged others to start business of handloom products in the hill districts. Over the years, about 20 to 25 such handloom enterprises have been set up and showrooms opened where several thousand indigenous women are working.

Thus, she has contributed towards employment generation for women in the previously almost unknown field of tribal traditional looms. Bain Textile helped the indigenous people take part in economic activities and improve their lives. Manjulika's work has also created a market for ethnic handloom products and brought them into the world of fashion. Her future plans include establishment of another unit equipped with power looms to increase production volume.

Manjulika's struggles did not come to an end although she is now a successful woman entrepreneur. She has been able to turn her very small initiative into a reputed business concern. But she could not yet open an outlet of her own in Dhaka due to lack of capital.

Manjulika won Shilu Abed Award in 2001 and Best Successful Woman Entrepreneur Award in 2002 in recognition of her outstanding contribution in the field of business and craftsmanship.

She participated in the International Industrial Fair in Kolkata in 2003 and 2004 and Chiang Mai Trade Fair in Thailand. By taking part in these shows, Manjulika wants to popularise Bain Textile products abroad and increase export earnings. She always feels that participating in a fair abroad is a good way of learning and also improving the quality of products.

এ চালান

সরকারি বিভিন্ন ফি
এক্সিম ব্যাংকে
জমা দিল নিশ্চিত, নিরাপদে

এক্সপোর্ট ইমপোর্ট ব্যাংক অব বাংলাদেশ লিমিটেড এর সকল শাখা ও উপশাখায় এখন থেকে অটোমেটেড চালান সিস্টেম এর মাধ্যমে ইনকাম ট্যাক্স, ভ্যাট, পাসপোর্ট ফিসহ সরকারি বিভিন্ন রাজস্ব ফি জমা প্রদান করা যায়।

আপনার নিকটস্থ এক্সিম ব্যাংকের শাখা বা উপশাখায় এসে সহজেই দ্রুত ও নিরাপদে সরকারি ফি জমা দিন।

