

As society becomes increasingly materialistic, most of us, in our attempt to grab the latest styles off the rack, forget to evaluate the costs associated with it both to our lives and the environment around us. As trends change sporadically, people's voracious demands grow to keep up with the season's aesthetics. Considering that buying quality clothing can get expensive, the general fashion enthusiast typically leans towards cheaper alternatives.

SUSTAINABLE FASHION TRENDING *once again*

Fast fashion, however, has a dark side, especially for Mother Earth. Seasoned shoppers will tell you that it is not actually as cheap as it is touted to be. As prices of individual items are low, and there is a lot of variety to choose from, purchasing can become addictive.

Sustainable fashion is the efforts within the fashion industry to reduce its environmental impacts, protect workers producing garments, and uphold animal welfare. Slow fashion, by definition, is a different approach, in which designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers are more aware of the impacts of products on workers, communities, and ecosystems.

Bangladesh boasts several responsible fashion initiatives such as Broque, Living Blue, Friendship Colours of the Chars, Jatra, Aranya, and many more revered names.

A proud member of the World Fair-Trade Organisation, Aranya believes in creating opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers and offering them fair wages for their work. Employing more than 400 rural homemakers for its Nakshi Kantha projects, Aranya allows them to work

from the comfort of their homes and ensures a source of income for them.

Momotaj, an artisan, working for a sustainable fashion brand, mentioned, "We have never seen such flourishing demand for our hard work before. There are hundreds of us who work here and all of us are thankful for this extra source of income."

Regular orders and demand for the hallmark stitch also guarantee that the art form is passed down to future generations as a gift, not a burden.

"I learned it from my grandmother and mother. I am teaching it to my daughter and daughter-in-law," shares Muneera, another member of the craftsperson community. "We feel immensely proud, especially when we see the fruits of our labour draped around a popular celebrity. We love styling them!"

In 2019, the National Crafts Council and Bengal Foundation organised a Jamdani Festival, in order to restore its position of pride. Few sustainable and like-minded organisations took part in the event where artisans were supplied with the finest quality of khadi yarn from

India and charged with the mammoth task of replicating patterns dating back centuries, from museum archives and private collections within the country and abroad.

The Jamdani weaving process took place in Sonargaon, an ecologically and geographically viable location that had historically sustained Jamdani communities. The initiative earned the title of "World Crafts City" for Sonargaon by the World Crafts Council at the Jamdani Festival.

"In the '80s, the founder of Aranya, Ruby Ghuznavi, was funded by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) to research the future of naturally produced dyes. Decades later, I continue her legacy, researching and adding darker and brighter hues to Ruby's natural

colour palette," muses Nawshin Khair, Creative and Managing Director at Aranya Crafts.

Most sustainable clothing brands boast of using natural dyes that are biodegradable, non-toxic, and non-allergenic. Unfortunately, the popularity of locally produced, retail pieces is slow to catch on. They come expensive, because of the research, development, and production process, the costly procurement of their raw materials, and the fair wages that they must pay to local artisanal communities. They also take more time to produce than machine-made clothing, which means that only limited quantities of items can be made.

A renowned singer and media personality, and repeat customer of a famed sustainable clothing brand, Nobonita Chowdhury, expresses, "I have saris from Aranya that are more than 20 years old. Each time I drape them, I feel the love and the efforts of the artisans who painstakingly made this sari for me. I feel honoured to stand by our local craft community. It is indeed, what any responsible customer should do."

According to Nawshin Khair, the steering wheel of a major sustainable fashion brand like Aranya, the younger



generation nowadays increasingly looks for conscious designs, which are ethical, sustainable designs that can be anything from organic and animal-friendly, to vegan.

"It is a new niche for us, especially as the idea goes so well with the ethos of Aranya," said Khair.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed
Model: Jolly, Mariyam
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Makeup: Piash
Wardrobe: Friendship Colours of the Chars
Location: Bulbul Lalitakala Academy, Wais Ghat