



Heritage Textiles

# TRENDS *that* transcend THE TEST OF TIME

Going through our grandmother's closets, you will find at least one age-old silk or taant sari that still sits with elegance. Sure, clothing preferences and fashion have changed with time as they should, but have they changed so much that we are losing out on the textile treasure that sits in the country?

The tapestry of Bangladesh's textile legacy is woven with generational artistry and cultural significance. As we weave together tradition and innovation, the nation stands poised to write a narrative of sustainable fashion that resonates across the world.

A closer look would shed some light.

#### PRICELESS TREASURES

Maheen Khan, a pioneer designer in the fashion industry of Bangladesh and Founder President of the Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh (FDCB), is someone whose work has always featured local artistry, adding her creativity to make outfits that speak tradition and exude elegance.

In conversation with us, she expressed, "We have so much to offer in terms of local textiles. Take cotton, khadi, or jamdani for instance. Each of these has earned its name from subtle differences in its making and the texture of the thread used. Does this not itself speak volumes of the intricacy of each fibre used?"

Faiza Ahmed, a designer and fashion activist, who started her work with local fabric agrees wholeheartedly.

"I realised that I cannot proudly claim 'Made in Bangladesh' by tracing designs on a piece of fabric that's not ours," she explained, adding, "When I decided to work with local textiles, my research revealed we, as a locality, are the epitome of sustainable fashion and creativity. And I wanted to be someone to showcase this."

One of the more recent additions to this rich legacy is the Kolaboti sari made out of banana plant fibre.

Shaing Shaing U Nini, Faculty and Coordinator of the School of

Business Administration, Bandarban University, is one of the creative minds behind this entirely new fabric that holds the potential to add new dimension to Bangladesh's local textile.

"The initial plan was to make files or folders. However, as we began putting all elements together, it seemed to become a less feasible option. Be it the finances needed or the time, the returns from making folders out of banana fibre were not looking to be as rewarding. Then the idea struck to make this into the national outfit of Bangladesh, a sari," remarked Nini.

Bringing in the skills of artisan Radhavati Devi and support from the Bandarban District Commissioner, Nini and her team took on the challenge of making the first ever Kolaboti sari that took 15 days to weave.

This diverse fibre, the first in Bangladesh and all its neighbouring countries, is eventually to be used for making bags, mats, purses or even shoes.

Talking of drawbacks and challenges, Nini stressed, "Extracting the yarn of banana fibre is rather difficult and costly. Then comes the time needed to weave a sari. If the returns do not match the time and efforts invested, it is highly discouraging."

The low returns are not isolated to Kolaboti saris only. As much as we would like to take pride in our natural fibres and artistry, the picture is no longer what it used to be.

#### THE CRITICAL DECLINE

Despite the rich legacy, the weavers' community is facing a decline. A shocking revelation by industry experts says that Benaroshi Polli, the biggest Benaroshi hub of Bangladesh, is currently struggling to keep up with incoming orders due to a lack of weavers.

Artisans have abandoned their art in large numbers because of economic difficulties they have faced over the years and the allure of more lucrative careers.

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