



The Daily Star
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FEAR OR FAVOUR

LIFESTYLE DIARIES

Trends that transcend the test of time



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"The beauty of local fabrics like khadi, for instance, is in its hand-woven and hand-spun element of it. It is alarming and almost disheartening to see the drastic decline in the number of weavers in our country," expressed designer Maheen Khan.

Nini stresses that where once there used to be close to twenty thousand looms, the number has now fallen to less than a mere hundred due to a lack of skilled weavers.

Shedding some light on the practical aspect of it, Nini explains that with the cost of living on the rise, it is not fair of us to ask artisans to carry the burden of this legacy unless we can assure that the price they receive is equally rewarding.

"Because handloom weaving pays less than other popular occupations, the younger generation in particular is becoming less and less interested in pursuing it as a career. And they are not to blame. We are living in expensive times. Putting myself in their shoes, I also would not like to hold on to a tradition if it holds me back financially," she stated.

Tenzing Chakma, whose designs have added a new contemporary dimension to the traditional ethnic wear of Bangladesh, said, "Handmade products, be it dresses, shoes, scarves or accessories, are meant to be expensive."

"We are not only paying for the work we see, but also the effort and time spent behind bringing each piece together. While it is not uncommon or alarming for mass-produced outfits to be a part of our regular wear, we should not allow the

authenticity of Bangladeshi natural textiles to be compromised in the process."

Chakma further explained how lack of guidance has made artisans very hesitant towards trying new designs and techniques, something that he had to overcome with his team over the years.

Faiza Ahmed added, "The challenge does not end with the declining number of weavers. It's also in the maintenance and quality assurance, which is especially tricky when it comes to several small-scale producers."

TIME FOR REVIVAL

Today, there is a worldwide surge to go back to the roots; a call to go green, urging us all to embrace sustainability in all spheres of life, including fashion. And there is no better time to bring back the magic of hand-woven textiles than now.

Our local weaves come with a low carbon footprint; something that makes them extremely attractive in the global market. Not only are they as authentic and unique as can be, these natural weaves give us outfits that are more than mere clothes; they are a lifestyle choice.

Moreover, designers and industry experts unanimously agree that Bangladesh's textile heritage has significant potential in the global market.

Tenzing Chakma provided a simple example, stating, "One of my clients wanted a veil for her wedding. I had suggested Rajshahi Organza for it. It was smooth and flowy with the right texture to make it into a perfect veil. She was brave enough to take my suggestion and go outside the norms of chiffon or lace. And the results were stunning."

The unique textures, intricate designs, and rich cultural history of traditional fabrics like jamdani and muslin make them highly sought-after commodities among discerning fashion enthusiasts worldwide.

"Jamdani does not necessarily

need to be a sari," explained Faiza Ahmed, adding, "In fact, if we can present it as a yard cloth, even with a price for its exclusivity, it will attract a huge crowd from all over the world."

By leveraging this cultural capital and embracing innovation, Bangladesh can position itself in the global market for sustainable and ethical fashion.

THE WAY FORWARD

While individual designers can train their teams or encourage a handful of people, they cannot initiate a bigger change unless guidance and support come from policymakers and government authorities.

Investing in training programmes for artisans is crucial to revitalising Bangladesh's textile heritage. By providing opportunities for skill development and entrepreneurship, artisans can expand their market reach and enhance the value of their craft.

Collaborations between government agencies, and non-profit organisations, as well as designers, can facilitate access to resources, markets, and technology, speeding up the process of retaining our cultural heritage.

Policies that prioritise the preservation and promotion of traditional crafts, along with initiatives to provide financial assistance and training to artisans, are essential to safeguarding Bangladesh's cultural legacy.

The way forward is anything but easy. However, it is not impossible. With traditional weaves and modern innovation, we are only a few steps away from making sustainable fashion that will create its own identity around the globe.

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