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WEEKEND READ

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PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

FROM WHOLESALE WONDERS TO POP-UP SHOPS

The thriving world of BANGLADESHI CERAMICS

“You get six full plates in beautiful designs for just Tk 900 or a little more, I mean these are best for gifts and everyday use. I am here to buy 300 pieces of gift items as a party favour, I am arranging for friends,” says Bilquis Hossain, a customer.

RAFEAT BINTE RASHID

Bangladesh's booming ceramic industry is as thriving as our readymade garment (RMG) sector, which I say from my many shopping exploits. I have gathered a vast knowledge about what kind of ceramics wares are found in vans or pop-up shops and wholesale markets like Cheragali Ceramics Market at the turn of Tongi towards Uttara.

According to the website of Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), the ceramic industry is expanding and progressing towards being the third largest export sector of Bangladesh. This manufacturing sector caters to 85 percent of the local demand, which includes traditional ceramics such as tableware, tiles, sanitaryware, insulators, heavy clay, etc. The good news is that Bangladeshi ceramics products are exported to over 50 countries.

“As an export-oriented industry, we always focus on and maintain quality parameters at the international standard level. During export order productions, we plan to produce around five percent more than the order quantity to secure on-time delivery. All the products you

with maybe a slight tilt or colour mismatch or some subtle issue, that only an inspector can see, are found in local shopping places. But trust me when I say this, the products are truly mind-blowing.

I got some Versailles-inspired tea party crockery; the opulence of French decor and ornate pattern in cream white with gilt and beautiful hand-painted flowers or whimsical fairy tale drawing has set my mind



and Upohar, situated at the end of the narrow aisle. They are busy with customers who seek exclusive stoneware, chinaware, porcelain, and ceramic objects of export quality.

“What you find here comes directly from the factory, all intact, we do not sell rejected products, we are actually wholesalers and also do some retail sales because of demand. The distribution officers from reputed factories come to dealers like us and



our monthly expense and profit are sorted. The business is good, our product range is diversified and many of our clients come for export items,” says the grouchy salesman of Uphor, who has a no haggling honour, even if you insist on not paying that meagre Tk 20 change, he will not take it lightly.

“Fortunately, in porcelain tableware – all the products you find in van or thrift marketplaces are



find in vans and flying retailers are not rejected. Functional rejection in tableware is almost zero. However, there is always a chance of rejection in design due to high-temperature firing. And yes, these products are within an affordable price range,” explains Mohammad Khorshed Alam, chief operating officer of Building Materials, Akij Bashir Group.

It is this extra production of export orders that we find in local pop-up carts. Somehow, the rejected items

into holding a Versailles tea party as soon as our depressive contour lifts. The tiny cake platters are just for Tk 60, and serving dishes with the Hamsa Hand, a universal sign of protection, power, and strength are found for just Tk 150 a piece.

Dainty tea cups and saucers in pink and gold, mugs, plates, and serving platters with joyful faces of fictional characters like Medusa or Salvador Dali, inspired surreal imagery with leaves, worms and flowers for as low as Tk 200, leave you with a yearning to throw, maybe a Neo-psychedelia themed party; just to add the sixties tempo to our sad days.

Rich glazed plates in indigo hue or salmon pink shades with golden border for Tk 1,400 for half a dozen, delicate pastry plates with expressional motifs bring nothing less than joy and it is nothing less than a wonder to find such a diverse and precious collection of ceramic crockery in the dinghy rundown Cheragali Ceramics Market, vans parked in residential area, footpaths of adjoining areas in New Market and Gulshan DCC market.

Though prices vary according to locales, the lowest price is certainly in Cheragali. You enter through gate number five and you stumble upon two huge shops Sumaiya Collection

sell in lots. Each lot approximately has 30,000 products. When the working relation between marketing officers and a few favoured dealers like us is amiable, they offer to sell the extra export production,” Md Tafsir Ahmed, proprietor of Sumaiya Collection.

He adds that the products we find in vans are their yearly wastage lot, which they sell to small-time dealers of the vans and footpaths. This wastage load has breakage and misprints or mismatched objects. However, there are times when I am curious to find excellent quality ceramics being sold in vans, while the majority of the factory load is sold to big shops in Gulshan, New Market, and other ceramic shops.

“You get six full plates in beautiful designs for just Tk 900 or a little more, I mean these are best for gifts and everyday use. I am here to buy 300 pieces of gift items as a party favour, I am arranging for friends,” says Bilquis Hossain, a customer.

“With Tk 80,000 as shop rent, salaries for staff, and other miscellaneous expenditure, if we can sell Tk 2-3 lakhs worth of goods,

‘Made in Bangladesh’. Sometimes you get to see a different brand name under the product, this is because we produce for different brands worldwide. High quality and on-time delivery is a major standout point for our reputation in the international market. On top of that, we have expert and experienced manpower, especially for design application, which gives our product the ultra-edge and extra appeal,” says Khorshed Alam.

“The obstacle of this flourishing industry is the uninterrupted gas supply; it is one of the most important factors to consider for tableware production. Also, the tableware industry needs to be supported with a friendly duty structure for imported raw materials. It is another issue that needs to be addressed if we are to compete in this industry in the world market.

“The overall economy of the country is maintaining an uptrend, with the per capita income rising. These help to turn porcelain tableware into everyday goods rather than a luxury item. International brands have confidence in our tableware

my favourite part of hosting. Whether you're hosting a formal dinner party or enjoying a cosy family meal, a well-designed tablescape or table setting can transform a simple gathering into an event to remember. The arrangement of items on a table with matching or even carefully curated mismatched ceramic crockery elevates the dining experience with their refined aesthetic.

So, I always look out for unique, quirky, elegant, dainty tableware to take my game to the next level with a touch of sophistication and style. Heirloom pieces are of course most cherished but if you don't have one passed down, there is nothing to feel sorry about. There is plenty of fine china found in the vans of Dhaka that adds a touch of sophistication and nostalgia to your table.

The ceramic ware collection should be a pleasure and a joy for the connoisseur, and since porcelain wares have a long lifespan, they can outlive and can be passed down generations if stored safely. Whether you're upgrading your dinnerware collection or searching for the perfect gift for a special occasion, the ceramics market and stores in Dhaka promise to unleash your creative mind as far as dining experiences count.

