



How upcycling is transforming our fashion industry

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me years ago, but the edges started fraying," says Anika, an undergraduate student. "Instead of throwing it away, I turned it into a set of cushion covers and a table runner. Now, every time I look at them, it reminds me of her."

Kameezes and dresses, too, offer opportunities for re-styling. A heavily embroidered kameez that feels outdated can be deconstructed to create chic tops or even trendy fusion shirts.

"I once took an old kameez and had my tailor turn the neckline embroidery into a statement collar for my new top," shares Fahmida, a teacher. Dresses with flared bottoms or A-line cuts can be shortened to create playful and stylish tailored into smart co-ords. Every leftover fabric, every extra piece — all those broad panel designs that come and go with the trend — can be used creatively.

Shaing Shaing U Nini, Faculty and Coordinator at Bandarban University, is one of the creative minds behind the much-talked banana plant fibre, and an advocate for eco-conscious living. The pilot project, however, took a backseat despite its popularity because of lack of funding, promotion, as well as a potential market.

Based on her experience, Nini stresses, "Sustainable fashion is new. It needs to be promoted through governing bodies, as well as diversified product launches, if we want a positive outcome from it."



Her words emphasise the need for systemic change, combining individual efforts with institutional support to make sustainability mainstream.

"Sustainable fashion needs some level of machinery, even if it's handmade," she further adds. Nini explains that while traditional craftsmanship remains the backbone of upcycling in Bangladesh, the integration of technology can help scale these efforts and make them more accessible.

Workshops, exhibitions, and fashion shows can further promote the concept of sustainable fashion. Imagine a runway featuring garments made entirely from recycled fabrics or accessories crafted from discarded materials. Such events not only inspire consumers, but also send a powerful message about the potential of upcycling.

For designers like Chondona Dewan, sustainability is also about preserving heritage.

"There is so much scope for experimenting with upcycling," she says. "We can pull from the past and bring them forward." Her patchwork creations are evidence of this philosophy, blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary aesthetics.

The future of fashion lies in such stories of creativity and care. As consumers and designers alike embrace upcycling and recycling, they are not only reducing waste but also redefining what it means to be fashionable. "We need this sustainable fashion to be stable," says Chondona Dewan. "And this should be carried forward to the next generation."

What we must understand is that sustainable fashion is more than a trend; it is a movement that challenges us to think differently about what we wear and how we live. By turning waste into wonder, upcycling and recycling offer a pathway to a greener, more thoughtful future. As we rethink the role of fashion in our lives, one thing is clear — the most stylish thing we can wear is our commitment to sustainability.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Model: Mashiat
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin Isha
Wardrobe: Chondona Dewan
Jewellery: Shoilee by Tahmina Shaily
Makeup: Piaash
Location: Ashraf Kaiser Residence (Arunapalli)

