



How modern materials are shaping the TRADITIONAL JEWELLERY SCENE

The jewellery market in Bangladesh is experiencing a remarkable transformation. Once synonymous with gold and silver, the country's fashion scene is now embracing bold innovations and diverse materials, catering to both traditional sensibilities and modern preferences. Whether it's for grand occasions or everyday wear, gold and silver are no longer the go-to options.

For generations, gold was the cornerstone of jewellery. Chains, bangles, earrings, and necklaces made of gold were not just adornments; they symbolised status, security, and a family heirloom. Silver also has its roots deeply intertwined with the daily lives of women in rural and urban communities alike. Silver anklets and nose rings carried a rustic charm, reflecting the simplicity and grace of their lives. However, just like gold, the prominence of silver jewellery began to wane with changing lifestyles.



CHANGING TIMES

Gold jewellery was historically valued as a form of financial security. For middle-class families especially, it served as a financial safety net, a quick source of cash during any emergency. Now, with gold prices soaring to unprecedented levels and imitation jewellery not having much of a resale value, this once-practical investment has become unattainable for many.

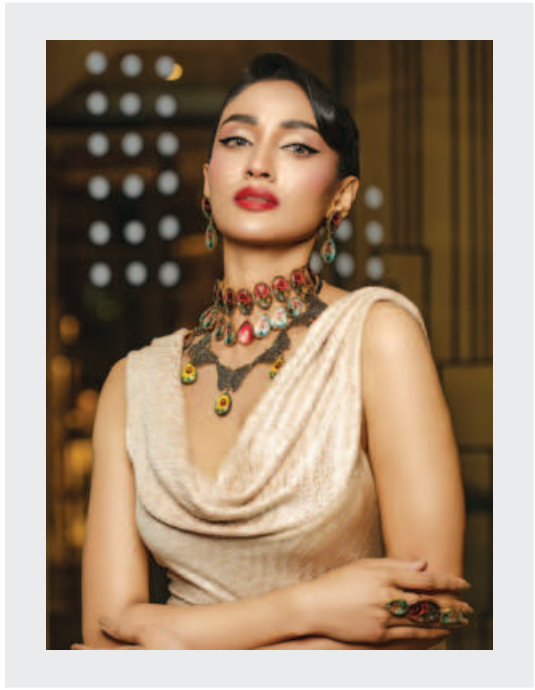
Apart from the financial aspect, changing lifestyles and evolving tastes have also played a critical role.

Designer Mehnaz Ahmed, the creative force behind the brand "Glued Together," has spent the past decade designing ornaments with a deep reverence for heritage. Drawing inspiration from the eras of her mother and grandmother, Mehnaz's latest "Noksha Collection" pays homage to the timeless elegance of vintage Bangladeshi pieces while incorporating a modern twist.

"Just like Multani of Pakistan, Rajasthani and Jaipuri jewellery of India, Bangladeshi artisans have their signature created in the intricacy of noksha designs," she explains. "This collection of Glued Together is a reflection of the beauty and craftsmanship that shaped the generations before me."

Traditional gold and silver designs, though timeless, often lack the variety that modern consumers crave.

"Perhaps the biggest difference nowadays is that women know themselves very well," stresses Tahmina Khan Shaily, the heart and creative mind behind the beautiful creations of Shoilee, a jewellery outlet. "They



know what clothes, accessories and jewellery reflect their personality and that is exactly what they want to bring forward."

Gold and silver often lose value when melted and/or remade due to having a low melting point. This factor, combined with the current price range, makes the idea of updating or remaking an old piece of jewellery sound like a bad idea. This is not a problem with imitation jewellery.

In fact, Shoilee is one of the brands that offer a unique re-plating option for customers. Shaily explains, "If you've bought a piece of silver-plated jewellery from us, after a number of uses you can bring it back to us. We will re-plate it into a gold-plated necklace."

Sk Sujana Suria, jewellery designer and owner of Baaish Boshonto, also explains how it's easier to make minor changes in imitation jewellery. "I offer customised designs as well as sizes for jewellery. Customers can choose unique patterns, colours, and materials to create personalised pieces."

Designers are now experimenting with materials like faux stones, enamel, and mixed metals, offering unique, affordable pieces that cater to a wider audience. Moreover, advancements in technology have allowed imitation jewellery to mimic the look of real stones and precious metals with astonishing accuracy.

REDEFINING LOCAL ARTISANSHIP

One of the most significant outcomes of this shift has been the resurgence of local artisanship. As consumers turn toward alternative materials, artisans have found new avenues to explore their creativity.

"Even techniques that were once exclusive to gold can now be replicated with other materials," says Mehnaz, "I've found that Minakari, one of the signature gold patterns, can be done on mixed metals, making it more affordable and accessible without compromising on beauty."

As consumers divert to buying local, they not only support homegrown talent but also ensure that their purchases reflect Bangladesh's unique cultural heritage.

Materials like brass, copper, wood, and

terracotta have proven to be versatile, lending themselves to intricate designs that rival the beauty of traditional gold and silver. The affordability of these materials also means that consumers can own a larger variety of jewellery without breaking the bank.

This shift has been especially empowering for younger buyers, who now have the freedom to experiment with their changing style without the heavy investment that gold or silver requires.

OVERCOMING THE STIGMA

There was a time when imitation jewellery was seen as inferior, associated with poor craftsmanship, and short lifespans, but that perception has changed dramatically. Advances in materials and techniques have ensured that today's imitation pieces are durable, visually stunning, and crafted with as much care as traditional jewellery.

Brides, in particular, are embracing this trend, opting for lightweight and customisable options that complement their outfits without weighing them down, literally or financially.

"The making of bridal jewellery is a journey of its own," Shaily adds with a smile. "We set up multiple consultations, sketching, undoing and redoing the elements as per the bride's vision of herself."

Mehnaz Ahmed stresses on the quality of colour coating on her pieces. When discussing the misconceptions surrounding the quality of imitation jewellery, she says, "What we knew as 'City Gold' no longer exists in our market."

The gold jewellery features a 21-karat gold plating, while the silver coating is designed to remain intact for 7 to 9 years.

It is not only the quality of making but also the usage that decides the durability of these pieces. Suria of Baaish Boshonto believes that jewellery, be it gold or imitation, should be handled with care.

"We should avoid contact with water, perfume, and chemicals, while storing it in airtight containers to prevent moisture. Cleaning should be done gently with a soft cloth and pieces should be kept separate to prevent scratches."

The changing jewellery landscape in Bangladesh reflects a broader shift in consumer preferences toward sustainability, affordability, and individuality. While gold and silver will always hold a special place in people's hearts, there is room for more diverse expressions of artistry.

This transformation not only benefits both consumers, but also artisans. Where once experienced in conventional gold and silver designs only, artisans are finding new opportunities to showcase their skills, and consumers are discovering the joy of owning jewellery that's not only beautiful, but reflects their choice perfectly.

As the industry continues to evolve, one thing is clear: jewellery is no longer confined to tradition. It's a vibrant, living art form that reflects the spirit of a nation constantly reinventing itself. From grand wedding sets to everyday statement pieces, the possibilities are now endless.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Adnan Rahman
Model: Tangia Zaman
Methila
Styling: Sonia Yeasmin
Isha
Wardrobe: Jealous
Tomato
Jewellery: Shoilee by
Tahmina Shaily
Makeup: Piash
Location: Le
Meridian
Dhaka

