



#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

A PLATFORM FOR ARTISANS

Tasnuva Islam's vision for ethical commerce

Since time immemorial, Bangladeshi weavers have honed their craft, producing textiles that carry the weight of history and artistry. Yet, in a rapidly industrialising world, their skills are often overlooked and their voices unheard. Tasnuva Islam, Founder and CEO of The Muslin, and Director of Sales and Marketing at Le ROYAL, Le Méridien Dhaka, saw this reality and chose to act.

Her initiative provides weavers with a rare opportunity; a rent-free platform in one of Dhaka's premier hotels, where they can display and sell their creations. This is not charity, but a well-thought-out model of ethical commerce that allows artisans to thrive without the financial constraints that so often suffocate traditional crafts.

Inspiration behind the initiative

Tasnuva Islam's inspiration for the initiative traces back to the COVID-19 era when global imports came to a halt.

"During that time, we noticed on platforms like Facebook that local products were gaining traction because there was no alternative due to the lack of imports. That made me think — why not work with weavers, entrepreneurs, and artisans who are interested in showcasing their products through our hotel, or a similar initiative?" she explains.

Her passion for arts and crafts has been a lifelong one, though her engineering background kept her from directly pursuing it.

"I have always been a great admirer of arts and crafts, and I had a knack for designing and crafting. Being an engineering student, I didn't get to do much about it. So, I founded The Muslin and wanted to do something for the weavers. You know, they don't get any platform and earn a very nominal income. I believe that this project was necessary. We don't charge any rent or have any hanger price."



A platform rooted in CSR

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to a business's commitment to contributing positively to society, and rather than being purely profit-driven, CSR initiatives integrate ethical considerations into business operations, ensuring that companies give back to the communities they engage with.

The hospitality industry rarely intersects with the traditional weaving sector, but Islam has bridged this gap with this innovative CSR project. Under this initiative, Le Méridien Dhaka has opened a dedicated space, where artisans can directly exhibit and sell their handcrafted textiles. Unlike conventional markets, these artisans are not charged any rent, ensuring that they retain the full financial benefit of their work.

To sustain the initiative without burdening the artisans, Islam has introduced a nominal VAT, which helps maintain the space and cover staff expenses. This allows the project to remain self-sufficient while keeping the focus on

the well-being of the artisans. The initiative is an exemplary model of how corporate resources can be effectively used to support cultural heritage and empower local communities.

Current situation and challenges

Despite the positive response, the initiative faces some challenges. "One challenge we face is that many people are still unaware of our location. Le Méridien, where we are based, is in a relatively quiet part of the city, so people don't always know about us. Despite that, we have seen success," says Islam.

Another issue is the misconception that the platform is a temporary pop-up event rather than a permanent boutique. To tackle this, Islam and her team are planning to launch a website soon to increase accessibility and awareness. "Since this is a CSR project, we want to make it more accessible and fairer for all. We have been experiencing a good turnover so far," she adds.

Long-term vision

Looking ahead, Islam has ambitious plans

to take Bangladeshi craftsmanship to the global stage. "Our mid-to-long-term plan is to expand to Europe and America, ensuring that Bangladeshi products, particularly those made by weavers, gain international recognition."

She envisions The Muslin as a gateway for Bangladeshi textiles to compete with Indian and Pakistani products in international markets. "We aim to create a space where Bangladeshi craftsmanship can compete with Indian and Pakistani products, reaching global markets like New York."

Ultimately, Islam hopes that by taking these strategic steps now, the seeds for long-term success will be firmly planted at the perfect time.

A model for others to follow

The success of this initiative highlights the immense potential of corporate-backed social enterprises. Tasnuva Islam's approach serves as an inspiring model for other businesses looking to integrate CSR into their operations in meaningful ways. Instead of limiting CSR to donations or short-term aid, she has created a sustainable ecosystem where artisans can thrive independently.

Other luxury hotels, corporate entities, and even government bodies can take cues from this initiative to support traditional craftspeople in their respective regions. By leveraging existing infrastructure and customer bases, such initiatives can create lasting impacts on local economies and cultural preservation efforts.

In a rapidly modernising world, preserving traditional crafts requires more than just passion — it requires strategic action, visionary leadership, and collaborative efforts. With visionaries like Tasnuva Islam at the helm, the future of Bangladeshi weaving traditions looks brighter than ever.

By Ayman Anika
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