

From Faridpur to Dhaka: Bamboo artisans holding on to heritage

When Sunita Rani Biswas arrived in Dhaka from Boalmari, Faridpur, she was not carrying luxury goods or designer fabrics. She carried something simpler: mats and bamboo baskets. For her, bamboo weaving is more than a skill; it's an inheritance. Her introduction to this craft did not come through formal training or curated workshops.

She shared, "My mother used to do this work. I would sit beside her and watch her hands move. That's how I learned."

Years later, that childhood fascination turned into a lifelong pursuit.

"After getting married, I took the initiative to do the work myself. Now, I cut, weave, and shape everything on my own," she added.

Biswas specialises in handwoven bamboo items, utility-based and decorative, each crafted with patience and care. However, like many artisans, her work is seasonal.



Faridpur artisans Asim Biswas and Sunita Rani teaching bamboo weaving



Malobika Dipanwita Roy Founder and CEO of Gunoboti

Sunita Biswas was one of the featured artisans at Celebrating Bangladeshiness, a three-day event organised by Gunoboti, a creative platform working with traditional artisan communities, craft enthusiast individuals, and trained designers. Held at the Alliance Française de Dhaka, the exhibition brought rural artisans face-to-face with urban audiences through

workshops, panel discussions, and open markets.

Malobika Dipanwita Roy, Community Architect and Founder of Gunoboti, shared that Celebrating Bangladeshiness stemmed from both personal memory and a broader urgency.

"This knowledge is fading," she warned. "If we don't act now, we risk losing entire systems of traditional wisdom.

"Gunoboti is not about freezing traditions in time but creating spaces where they can evolve. Preservation cannot mean rigidity. Crafts must be allowed to grow with the times."

The story of Celebrating Bangladeshiness was not told in speeches or shared on social media posts. It was narrated with the sound of a blade slicing bamboo. In the way artisans carried their tools like they carried their names — worn, but never broken. It was told by people like Asim Biswas, also

from Boalmari, who has spent decades bending bamboo into shape and survival.

"I was eight when I started. We didn't have much, but we had bamboo. So, we made things — fans, stools, baskets. And we kept making them."

Like many artisans, Asim Biswas doesn't see himself as an artist. He sees himself as a provider, a keeper of a fading practice. "There's always bamboo near our home. But the market? That comes and goes. People buy during festivals, and then forget us the rest of the year."

At the heart of the event was a panel discussion titled "Handicraft Industry Product Diversification," where urban professionals, educators, and sustainability advocates tried to articulate what Sunita and Asim already knew: that the distance between the village and the capital is not just measured in kilometres. It's measured in visibility.

The panel's experts spoke with urgency about reviving Bangladesh's fading craft heritage. Bishwajit Goswami stressed the loss of artistic identity to mass production, while Emerald Upoma highlighted bamboo as a sustainable alternative to plastic in children's toys. M A Maruf emphasised promoting artisans over products, and Syed Muntasir Ridwan called for integrating handcrafted traditions into a future-facing, sustainable Bangladesh.

Sanlap Biswas, volunteer and lead investigator of the research, explained, "We didn't organise this just to showcase crafts. We wanted to build a shared space where artisans and urban learners could connect, where traditional knowledge meets contemporary relevance."

Despite their skill and dedication, artisans like Sunita and Asim face an uphill battle. Many rely on occasional events or seasonal fairs for income. Others are considering abandoning the trade altogether due to a lack of consistent buyers.

"This industry is disappearing, but I believe it can survive if we all work together," Sunita Biswas said, adding, "It feels good to be in Dhaka. Here, people saw our work and asked us questions. That rarely happens where we're from."

For Asim Biswas, the experience was just as affirming. "To be part of something central like this — where the city sees and values our craft — gives me hope. I want this to happen more often, in more places."

While the event offered a rare moment of recognition for artisans like Sunita and Asim, one exhibition alone is not enough. For traditional crafts to survive, more regular and inclusive platforms are essential. Initiatives like this must be scaled up to provide visibility, market access, and design innovation. If supported consistently, these crafts can not only endure but thrive.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy



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