

Celebrating Harvest and Heritage: How Poush Utshab Brought Rural Crafts and Traditions to Dhaka

On a winter morning in Dhaka, Gulshan Lake Park felt different. The usual city rush softened into the sound of folk songs, the rhythm of dance, the elegance of fashion shows, and the quiet conversations between artisans and visitors. On 13 December, Poush Utshab was unfolded; an event that brought together rural traditions, craft culture and childhood memories, right in the middle of the capital.

Organised by the Gulshan Society and the Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh



Poush Utshab, we wanted to recreate that festive rural environment so city people can experience it again."

The event opened with cultural performances that reflected Bangladesh's intangible heritage. Folk dance, Lalon songs, folk music, and Rabindra Sangeet followed one another. Alongside the performances was a fashion show spread across two segments, showcasing our own textile traditions. Eighteen designers presented outfits made with handloom fabrics, bringing rural weaving practices into a contemporary setting. The focus remained on material, craftsmanship and story, rather than just a show.

FDCB President and renowned designer, Maheen Khan, said the planning behind the event had been long-term. "Poush is a festive time across Bengal. In villages, there are rituals, ceremonies, and fairs during this season. We wanted the event to feel complete, which is why we combined crafts, food, fashion and cultural performances. The event stood as a celebration of life"

A cultural activist herself, Khan said the mela highlighted core designs and intangible heritage that are often ignored.

"The festival reflects the spirit of the harvest season through pitha-puli, nabanna utshab, and folk practices that are slowly fading from urban life. Bangladesh is an agro-based country, but there is a growing gap between rural life and urban living. This festival was arranged so people can share the joy of Nabanna, through food, art, music and stories," she shared.

If the performances created the mood, the artisans gave the mela its soul. Each stall told a story of skill, struggle, and survival.

Ashutosh Sutradhar, a wooden toy artisan from Sonargaon, Narayanganj, stood beside rows of brightly coloured handmade toys. "My grandfather started this work in the 1960s. At that time, 20 to 30 families were involved in this. But, now, only two families are left," he said.

Sutradhar uses koroi, gamari and burflower wood in making the toys. A recipient of eight national awards, he trained himself further in Japan and Nepal.

"Plastic toys reduced demand, but festivals like this still create huge interest," he shared.

Music and rhythm also played a central role in shaping the atmosphere of the

Poush Utshab. One of the highlights was dholcholon, a boshonto special dhol performance. The group was founded by Babu Chan, from Kamalganj, Moulvibazar.

"Today, my son and my student are performing," Babu Chan smiled. "We usually perform at religious festivals, corporate events, and seasonal celebrations. I hope this practice continues through generations."

No poush celebration is complete without pitha. The mela featured dudh chittoi, nakshi pitha and other winter delicacies, offering visitors a taste of seasonal rural life. For many, it was deeply nostalgic.

A stall visitor, Ashrafunnesa, who came from Gulshan, said the mela reminded her of childhood. "When we were young, we used to make things with clay and paper just for fun. Seeing all this after so many years feels very special," she said.

Srabanti Datta, general secretary of Gulshan Society, said this was their first attempt at organising a Poush Mela.

"We organise many events, but this one is special. We started small, but the response has been very positive. We designed the event in such a way that it feels warm and comfortable, not commercial," Datta shared.

As the evening lights reflected on the lake, the event stood as more than a festival. It became a meeting point between rural and urban Bangladesh, a reminder that beneath the city's concrete layers lies a culture, rich with craft, memory and life, still waiting to be celebrated.

By Jawwad Sami Neogi
Photo: Jawwad Sami Neogi

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