



Pre-loved clothing

Where every stitch carries a memory

Dhaka is a city of memory and nostalgia, especially in winter, when familiar visions from the past surface. Across its roads, lanes, and markets, the city quietly rewrites the biography of pre-loved clothing. A quiet intimacy is woven into these garments. A zipper remembers a winter in Beijing or Tokyo. A denim jacket holds the slope of another's shoulder. A sweater carries a lingering warmth. In the city today, these intimacies form a strange, beautiful commons of taste, necessity, and reinvention. What began as informal trade for survival has rapidly become a conscious fashion subculture and a living online economy — a language for rethinking waste, style, and value.

Today, pre-loved fashion stands at an urgent intersection of history and environmental consciousness, aligning with the slow fashion movement against capitalist fast fashion. It now carries multiple meanings stitched together: memory, resistance, sustainability, and sharpened style.

In Dhaka, you are immersed in a vast sea of pre-loved clothing.

Well-known locations include the New Market area — Gawsia Market, Nurjahan Market, Globe Market — and the pavements in front of Dhaka College. It appears in Laxmibazar, from Kobi Nazrul College to Suhrawardy College, in Karwan Bazar's Kapor Potti, and throughout Elephant Road.

In Uttara, it surfaces around Rajlakkhi Complex, in front of H M Plaza, and along Rabindra Sarani.

In Mirpur, it runs through Hope Market in Mirpur 10 and along Mirpur Mazar Road. It is found in Bongobazar, Baitul Mokarram Market, Farm View Super Market in

Farmgate, and along the road from Ananda Cinema Hall to the Farmgate overbridge.

The largest centre lies in front of Sadarghat, stretching from Waiz Ghat to Laal Kuthi. Begun Bazar in Old Dhaka is also historically renowned. Beyond these, pre-loved clothing is scattered across Banani, Gulshan, Badda, Malibagh, Moghbazar, and Rampura. Additionally, it is available only on Tuesdays at the open space in front of Priangan Market on Elephant Road and at Mongolia Bazaar in Hazaribagh's Section Dhal, like a temporary weekly market.

Pre-loved clothes are available not only in markets, footpaths, and vans but also in online shops on Facebook and Instagram, where each piece is dramatically photographed, precisely styled, and narratively described as an object of desire.

A faded coat becomes spiritual minimalism; a fraying shirt, poetic decay. Both worlds

share the same ecosystem: one speaks the tactile language of instinct, the other the measured language of curation.

This clothing often makes a transnational journey. Garments from China, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan arrive at Chittagong Port, are sorted in Dhaka, and carry hidden geographies in their seams. Alongside these, a significant portion of stock consists of brand-new clothes, often surplus from local garment factories or unsold stock from high-end stores, creating an ironic loop where Bangladesh, a major producer, distributes its own near-new excess.

Pre-loved clothing is not merely sold but reimagined. In tailoring workshops in areas like Nurjahan Market, Globe Market, Bongobazar, Begun Bazar, Mohammadpur Bus Terminal, and Town Hall Market,

garments are deconstructed and reshaped: jackets are tailored sharply, denim is reworked, shirts become kurtis. Alteration is a creative dialogue between fabric and body, creating something personal from foreign cuts.

Dhaka stands at a crossroads, producing millions of new garments while absorbing the world's pre-loved clothes. This contradiction reveals the fashion industry's



excess and inequality, and the brilliance of repair.

The ancient Bengali tradition of reusing fabric has formalised into a growing industry, accelerated by young entrepreneurs and COVID-19. Pre-loved clothing here serves three roles: survival, aesthetic exploration, and environmental instinct. It offers economic opportunity and sustainability, though rising prices

risk accessibility. Its future depends on infrastructure investment and a conscious ethic that sees garments having a life before and after their owners. In Dhaka, clothing doesn't just end; it finds new life, teaching a city how to begin again.

By Adipta Hasin Rahman

Photo: Adipta Hasin Rahman, Collected

