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GRACE personified!

PHOTO: KAMRUL HASAN
MODEL: SAIRA AKTHER JAHAN, AYMAN ANIKA, SRABONI ROY
WARDROBE: MANSI BY MARIA MUMU
STYLING: TAHMINA SHAILY
JEWELLERY: SHOILEE BY TAHMINA SHAILY
MAKEUP: NUR AZMAIN
A SPECIAL THANKS TO BRAC'S OTITHI, MADHUPUR, TANGAIL

#FYI

Painted in Power: How Blue Eyeshadow Became a Symbol of Women's Liberation

Long before it became a trend on TikTok, blue eyeshadow was a symbol of female self-expression. It is one of the iconic fashion statements which has a rebellious history; an unforeseen symbol of women's liberation movements; a visual declaration from ancient Egypt to the twentieth-century women who refused to play by society's rigid beauty standards.

It all began in ancient Egypt, where blue played a significant role in society. For Egyptian queens like the iconic Cleopatra VII, the blue eyeshadow was not only a simple act of personal beauty statement but also a carefully studied political statement.

The pages of history remain silent on its influence in the millennia that followed, and it was not until the 1920s that the makeup trend saw a resurgence. During this time, known as the Jazz Age, society began to change rapidly, and the old Victorian ideas about "good" manners were being challenged. Women started using bold colours in their makeup that were previously tagged as "scandalous", "inappropriate" and "deeply immoral" in society.

By the 1960s, people began to question gender roles and rights and to challenge societal limitations in their lives. Women now had the right to vote, work, and make

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#PROFILE

Discover Bangladesh through the eyes of travel creator RK Sohan

In a world where content creation has taken centre stage, it is safe to say that an average viewer has scrolled through almost all genres of videos. However, there is a certain kind of content that makes you pause, not because it is loud, overly dramatic, or edited to death, but because it feels like someone actually took the trouble to see things properly. That is the feeling one gets while speaking to RK Sohan.

He is known to many as a travel content creator, but that label feels a bit too small for what he does. Making Travel content? Sure. But he also captures stories of people, food, forgotten practices, and local knowledge. Odd little customs that most of us pass by without asking a second question. The way lentils are cooked in one remote pocket of the country, or the way paddy is preserved somewhere else. A palm cake from Akhaura. Jar-fishing. Mud biscuits. Things that sound almost made up until someone goes there, sits with the people, and listens.

His journey started not from some grand influencer dream, but through fieldwork. Sohan started working for an NGO in 2021, and the job took him to remote areas where he was required to document project information and interview beneficiaries. Somewhere between the reports and the interviews and the long drives, something changed.

"I noticed many unique, unseen local customs," the traveller adds. "I started documenting and uploading these observations, and they gained a lot of interest."

That is perhaps the most honest origin story for a creator, thanks to his curiosity.

The moment when he realised this could become something bigger came during a difficult personal time.

After a breakup, he travelled to Cox's Bazar to clear his head. One of his videos unexpectedly reached 300,000 views. For someone used to a few thousand views, that was not a small jump. Then came a video on the iftar market in Old Dhaka, followed by another on his home sub-district, Saidpur. Both crossed one million views almost overnight.

"That was the moment I felt truly inspired to take this seriously," he said.

Numbers are only one part of the story. And frankly, in Bangladesh, we have seen enough viral creators to know that reach alone does not always mean depth. What makes Sohan's work interesting is the research behind it. He does not just arrive at a place, point a camera, and declare it beautiful. His team looks for what he calls "market gaps," meaning stories others have missed.

"Our research happens in three stages," he explained. "First, we use the internet to see what content already exists for an area. Second, and most importantly, I get calls from local people, fishermen, boatmen, or villagers, who share authentic information I could never find online. Third, we use AI tools to cross-check details and generate further insights."

Then he said something that explains why the videos often feel fuller than the usual "let's explore" format: "About 90 per cent of our work is actually based on this research."

That 90 per cent is the difference!

Of course, the final video does not show everything. It does not always show the failed trips, the missing supplies, the miscommunication, or the physical risk. Sohan once had to make three separate trips to the hills just to film a specific ethnic recipe. He has been stuck in a remote village for seven days during Cyclone Remal with no transport. He has dealt with fears of armed groups in the hills, bandits, and wild animals in the Sundarbans.

He, however, chooses not to make suffering the headline.

"I don't want to demotivate my audience or highlight negative aspects," he said. "While I know that negative content or scam videos often get more clicks due to human psychology, I want to focus on building a positive image of Bangladesh."

This is where one has to be careful. Positive storytelling can easily become sugar-coating. From what Sohan says, his intention is not to hide danger completely.

"If a place is genuinely dangerous, I will add a warning to the video," he said. The point, for him, is not to turn Bangladesh into a tourist brochure. It is to show the parts of the country that deserve attention before they disappear into the usual noise.

His approach to brand work also says something about where he draws the line.

"For brand collaborations, I have a strict rule: I stay at the hotel or resort for a day or two first to verify their service quality," he said. "If the experience is bad, I refuse the deal and pay for my stay out of my own pocket."

That may sound simple, but in an industry where every second post can become a paid recommendation, it matters.

In the coming two years, Sohan is planning to launch an academy to create a new generation of creators who can produce quality and impactful content on Bangladesh's culture and heritage. It is an ambitious dream, sure, but not a far-fetched one. His own story has proven that content creation does not always have to start with performance. Sometimes it starts with a road, a village, a conversation and one person listening when everyone else is scrolling by.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: Courtesy


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#FASHION & BEAUTY

How young designers are RETHINKING TRADITIONAL FABRICS

In Bangladesh today, the conversation around Jamdani and Benarasi is no longer only about preservation, but about adaptation. Can these textiles survive if they remain confined to the saree? Can they enter newer silhouettes without losing their identity? And can they travel to global platforms without becoming flattened into exotic costumes?

"Today's consumers do not want to carry heritage as a burden," answers **Tanwy Kabir, founder of Canvas**. "They want to embody it effortlessly." That single observation captures the tension surrounding Jamdani and Benarasi.

In many cases, though these sarees are still treated as heritage, heirloom, and occasion wear, they are no longer discussed solely in terms of preservation.

Two textiles, two different design languages

Jamdani and Benarasi are frequently placed in the same sentence, but they function very differently.

Jamdani is built through lightness, spacing, and intricacy. Its motifs often appear to float, and the skill lies in restraint as much as in ornament. Benarasi is denser, more ceremonial, and more strongly tied to bridal wear, zari, and visual richness.

That difference matters because rethinking them requires different design strategies. Jamdani can be adapted through texture, transparency, and placement. Benarasi often requires a more careful negotiation with weight, shine, and structure.

Neither can simply be cut and repurposed thoughtlessly.

Any attempt to rethink these sarees has to begin with a more immediate problem: much of what is being sold today under these names is not what consumers think it is.

For **Munira Emdad, proprietor of Tangail Saree Kutir,** this issue is especially visible in both Jamdani and Benarasi. She points out that many Benarasi artisans have already left the profession, partly because of long-term policy failures and the gradual shift away from loom-based work.

Instead of strengthening weaving, the market made easier retail alternatives more attractive.

"That was the beginning of the decline of Benarasi weaving," she says. She argues that most of what is widely available now is synthetic or power-loom based.

In the case of Jamdani, she is equally direct. Sarees with Jamdani motifs are being produced on power looms and sold as the real thing. The difference, she explains, becomes clear on the reverse side. Authentic Jamdani shows hand-rotated thread work, while machine-made versions often reveal cut threads and mechanical finishing.

That confusion is something Tanwy Kabir, founder of Canvas, a heritage-inspired store, also sees as central.

"The biggest gap is not just a lack of awareness, it's misunderstanding at a technical level," she explains. According to her, consumers still struggle to identify whether a saree is handwoven or machine-made.

In Jamdani, thread count is one of the least understood but most important factors, because it determines the delicacy of the fabric and the complexity of the motifs.

In Benarasi, the confusion extends to zari quality and base material. "Whether it is pure silk, half silk, or polyester. These are not small differences," Kabir elaborates. "They define the entire value, longevity, and authenticity of the piece."

The result is a distorted market where handcrafted sarees are often compared with mass-produced alternatives based on visual resemblance or price alone.

Making heritage wearable, not burdensome

For many younger consumers, the challenge is not admiration but wearability. Heritage textiles are often respected, but not always integrated into everyday or even repeatable use. That is why adaptation matters.

Kabir's design response is technical as much as aesthetic. She speaks of weight distribution rather than simply reducing weight, of using finer silk counts to improve drape, and of placing zari strategically so a garment remains breathable rather than overwhelming.

She also mentions modular styling, allowing one piece to be worn in multiple ways. This is perhaps one of the clearest summaries of the current shift. The issue is no longer whether heritage has value. It is whether that value can be translated into forms that fit contemporary movement, contemporary styling, and even international platforms.

Keeping artisans inside the story

None of this adaptation matters if the artisan disappears from the picture.

That is why **Maria Mumu, founder of Mansi,** focuses on direct collaboration with weavers. She says her brand operates without middlemen and aims to ensure fair wages, while also giving artisans a say in final pricing.

More importantly, she resists treating them as anonymous labour. "Tantis have very specific designs that are specific to each of them," she says. "We are making sure that they are shining in their own design."

This is a necessary reminder. Rethinking Jamdani and Benarasi for global platforms cannot mean stripping them of the people who make them. If these textiles are to move into blazers, skirts, or contemporary occasion wear, that transformation must still retain authorship, fair compensation, and technical respect.

To sum up, the future of Jamdani and Benarasi does not lie in choosing between purity and innovation. It lies in making more intelligent distinctions.

If these sarees are to remain alive, they may need to move across forms and platforms, from weddings to wardrobes, from sarees to garments, from local use to international presentation.

However, that movement must be informed, not careless.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Kamrul Hasan
Model: Saira Akther Jahan, Ayman Anika, Sraboni Roy
Wardrobe: Mansi by Maria Mumu
Styling: Tahmina Shaily
Jewellery: Shoilee by Tahmina Shaily
Makeup: Nur Azmain
A special thanks to BRAC's Otithi, Madhupur, Tangail

#TRAVEL

Beyond resorts: Experiencing Madhupur through Otithi's community tourism

By the time we reached our homestay in Madhupur, Tangail, the distance from city travel had become more than geographical.

Our lodging itself deepened that impression. Built in mud and marked by an open kitchen, it felt less like a tourist facility and more like an extension of the place. Its quiet intimacy reflected a way of life closely tied to the Mandi, also known as the Garo, community.

We were served local Mandi food, witnessed their bamboo craft and weaving firsthand, and briefly stepped into the rhythm of their everyday life. More than a place to stay, the homestay indeed captured the central promise of community tourism: that travel can move beyond accommodation into a more meaningful encounter with local culture.

What community tourism actually means

In Bangladesh, tourism is still largely imagined through the language of resorts. Community tourism proposes a different way of travelling. It is not centred on staying in a picturesque place, but on understanding the people who give that place its identity.

Nafisa Tasnim, Lead of Otithi at BRAC, explains, "When people approach Otithi, we tell them we are introducing them to the essence of a place." For her, travelling to a destination means understanding its culture, its people, its specific food, traditions, and festivals, and recognising what makes that place distinct.

That distinction matters. In community tourism, accommodation is not the main event. As Nafisa points out, "Unlike resort-based travel, accommodation is not the primary focus here; what matters most is how much the traveller interacts with the local people and culture."

She also noted that people often reduce the concept to homestays, when in reality that is only one part of a much larger model built around organised local participation, training, and direct community involvement.

Nafisa further elaborates, "For us, tourism is the art of storytelling. By hiring from within the community, we ensure that every guest experience is led by those who truly live the culture. It turns every visit into a meaningful exchange: visitors walk away with an intimate understanding of Madhupur's identity, while the local community finds a new avenue to grow their prosperity, ensuring that those traditions and stories remain vibrant and flourish for generations to come."

This matters because conventional tourism often absorbs local culture without redistributing enough dignity or income back to the people who sustain it. Community tourism, at least in its more ethical form, attempts to shift that balance.

Indeed, the time at Madhupur Homestay did not feel like it was designed merely to host outsiders for a night. It felt designed to place them, however briefly, within the rhythm of local life.

Food as hospitality, not performance

The meal, too, was part of the story.

Before it reached the table, it began in the kitchen, where the cook crouched beside a traditional clay stove, roasting a whole chicken over firewood with steady, unhurried focus. Fresh, locally sourced ingredients and time-honoured recipes like Goppa and Khari came together in simple preparations where oil was notably absent, allowing the natural flavours of the food to stand on their own.

When the food was finally laid out in earthen and metal bowls on a woven mat, it felt less like a restaurant presentation and more like an invitation into a household rhythm. There was steaming rice, mashed preparations, vegetables, fried items, and other dishes that spoke of locality and familiarity rather than display. Everything felt deliberate.

What made the meal memorable was not simply flavour, though flavour was certainly part of it. It was the fact that the food arrived with its full context intact.

That is what community tourism can do at its best. It can return context to consumption, allowing food to be experienced not as an isolated item on a plate, but as an expression of people, place, and everyday knowledge.

The community behind the landscape

To speak of Madhupur only through its forests or muddy roads would be to leave the place half-told. The region is also deeply shaped by the Mandi community, also widely referred to as the Garo community, whose presence gives Madhupur much of its cultural texture and continuity.

The Mandi community has a longstanding relationship with bamboo and weaving. Bamboo has long been used to make baskets, fishing traps, storage items, tools, and household objects, not only because it was available, but because it became part of an entire way of living with the land.

In much the same way, weaving has long carried both practical and cultural meaning. Garo women have traditionally worn garments such as the Dakmanda, a handwoven cloth marked by geometric motifs and a strong sense of identity, while weaving itself has historically been passed down within households, often from mothers to daughters.

Seen from that perspective, a visit to Otithi's Madhupur Homestay is to encounter this heritage and a vibrant web of knowledge and labour that sustains the land and people, reflecting a living culture passed from generation to generation.

That is what gives the experience its depth. The visitor is not just looking at a place, but briefly encountering the lives and practices that continue to hold it together.

More than a place to stay

What stayed with us after leaving Madhupur was not just the landscape, but the feeling of having witnessed a place from closer than usual.

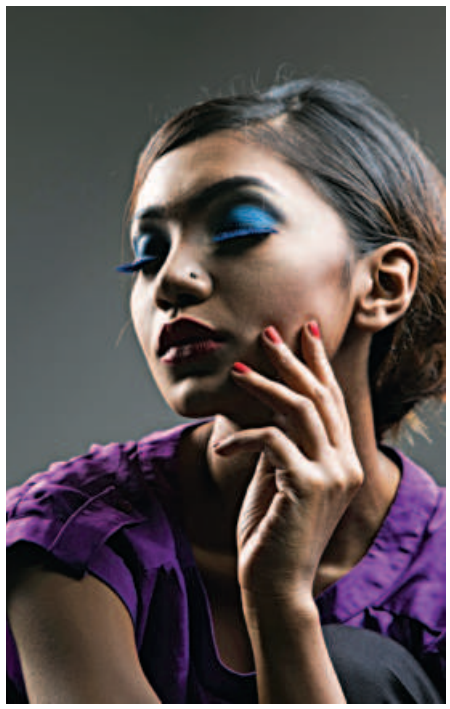
So often, travel allows only a surface impression. However, this place felt different, shaped by a living cultural world seen in Mandi food like Goppa and Khari, bamboo weaving, Dakmanda textiles, and community-rooted hospitality.

That, perhaps, is what made the stay memorable.

It was not polished in the way conventional tourism often is, but it felt sincere. And sometimes sincerity leaves a deeper mark than comfort, and this perhaps is the true beauty of community tourism, something we experienced here through BRAC's Otithi, when, of course, approached with care and thoughtfulness.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Kamrul Hasan; Silvia Mahjabin

Painted in Power: How Blue Eyeshadow Became a Symbol of Women's Liberation



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their own choices that they never could before, and by their makeup, they were reflecting this new sense of freedom and independence.

Blue eyeshadow became a powerful way of showing confidence and rejecting the traditional notion of "acceptable" beauty standards in society that a woman should always look soft, pale and invisible.

This sense of self-expression carried on into the 1970s and 1980s, when being an individual became more important for women than before. During this time, blue eyeshadow got a new layer of meaning. Women's presence was in music, film and corporate jobs, and they chose to embrace bold makeup to break free from conformity.

The brighter and bolder the colours, the stronger the message it presented that "I decide who I am, what I want and how I present myself."

Blue eyeshadow became associated with working-class women and subcultures, which symbolised freedom and personal choice. It erased the lines between "high fashion" and "everyday rebellion", making it accessible to anyone who wants to wear it.

Fast forward to the 2020s, and social media has played a major role in the return of blue eyeshadow's popularity. Different platforms are filled with creators who are experimenting with vibrant eye looks, and blue is the main character of it. They are unapologetically sending the clear message that beauty has no rules, and self-expression should not be limited or set by men and their preferences.

So, next time if you see someone wearing a swipe of vibrant blue across the eyelids, just remember that it is not just makeup. It is a legacy of individuality, refusing to be invisible. It is about making bold choices, and about a long journey of self-expression and liberation.

By Faria Nowshin Tazin
Photo: LS Archive/ Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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#PERSPECTIVE

The hands behind Bangladeshi handcrafted jewellery

Her story offers an important entry point into the world of Bangladeshi handcrafted jewellery. It's with artisans like Salma, that this story really begins.

For 11 years, Salma has been making jewellery by hand in Jhenaidah. She did not enter the craft through inheritance or a family workshop. She learned it step by step, first in someone else's factory, making "small earrings and decorative work," then through practice, and later through formal training.

"After receiving training from Shishu Niloy Foundation (SNF), I started making these large earrings, necklaces, and chokers," she shares.

What is striking about her story is not only that she learned the craft, but what she built from it. Today, she runs her own workshop. "I have arranged employment for 10 to 12 people in my workshop," she says.

WHAT MAKES IT HANDCRAFTED

One of the biggest problems in Bangladesh's jewellery market is that handcrafted work is often judged beside machine-made products without any real understanding of the differences between the two. To the average buyer, a polished finish can look "better," a lighter piece can seem more convenient, and a lower price can appear more reasonable.

However, handcrafted jewellery is built through a completely different logic.

Tahmina Shaily of Shoilee explains this with clarity.

"Handmade jewellery," she says, "Will never have a 100 per cent perfect finish; it will have a rough texture."

She compares it to handloom saris, where small fibres remain visible, or to any handmade object that resists industrial smoothness. In her workshop, she says, they often tell artisans that a piece should not have a "China finish," by which she means an overly polished, factory-like surface.

Weight is another clue. Handcrafted jewellery often requires a certain minimum metal thickness because if the sheet is too thin, it may break during carving or shaping. Machines can make items extremely light and uniform. The hand cannot always work that way. When a brand manages intricate carving on very light sheets, Shaily notes, that becomes a true technical strength, not an easy achievement.

Lora Khan of 6 Yards Story offers another practical distinction. "Machine-made jewellery," she explains, "Is often like a 'die-cut' object, stamped into a solid form." Handcrafted jewellery, by contrast, reveals construction. One can often tell that many parts were joined together to form the finished piece.

This is why handcrafted jewellery should not be evaluated only by the standards of symmetry, polish, and price set by industrial manufacturing. The handmade object carries a different kind of value.

JEWELLERY AS A CHAIN OF LABOUR

If handmade jewellery costs more, it is because it asks more of human beings.

"The most important element in handcrafted jewellery is the human connection," says Shaily. She points out that while a machine may stop for technical reasons, a human has physical and mental difficulties. For her, that vulnerability is not a weakness in the process but part of what gives handmade work its value.

She explains that a handcrafted piece carries multiple journeys at once. "When we design, the designer's journey is included. When it's being made, the artisan's journey is added. When we get the product, another process starts to make it market-ready — photography, checking if the look is right, and trial periods to see if it's too heavy or if the colour lasts," Shaily explains.

What reaches the customer, then, is not simply an accessory but the result of many layers of labour, testing, and emotional investment.

According to Shaily, handcrafted production creates employment in ways machines often do not. One piece may involve many people: one person making petals for an earring, another polishing them, another assembling them, another colouring them. A jewellery line is not the product of one hand but of many coordinated ones.

Salma's story makes this visible from the ground up. She began by doing small tasks in another factory, learned through repetition, and then moved into more complex jewellery-making through training. Now she runs her own workshop.

Her journey shows that handcrafted jewellery is not only about preserving aesthetics. It can also create local work, especially outside Dhaka.

FROM ORDER-BASED WORK TO DESIGN THINKING

This movement from execution to design is one of the most important changes taking place in the handmade jewellery sector.

Tanwy Kabir of Canvas speaks to this relationship between handwork and design. "Traditional Bangladeshi jewellery is not simply a matter of repeating old forms. It is about identity," she says.

She mentions forms like hashuli, baju, or kharu, but emphasises that her work does not merely copy them. Instead, it translates their essence into contemporary form. Tradition, in her view, is something living — something that can evolve without losing its roots.

And that evolution depends on artisans.

And if handcrafted jewellery in Bangladesh has a strong visual identity, it is because so many designers keep returning to local memory.

Khan describes, "Regional motifs, she says, are our roots. A Jamdani motif does not need explanation. People see it and relate to it immediately. That shared recognition is one reason such motifs remain so powerful in jewellery."

This is where Bangladeshi handcrafted jewellery differs from generic fashion accessories. It can carry a local visual vocabulary that people recognise without instruction.

In the end, Bangladeshi handcrafted jewellery is not only about adornment. It is about touch, training, memory, and the many hands that shape a piece before it reaches the wearer. From artisans like Salma building local livelihoods to designers reworking familiar motifs into contemporary forms, this sector carries both cultural and economic significance.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Kamrul Hasan
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