

#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



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

Model: Saira Akther Jahan

Wardrobe: Mansi by Maria Mumu

Styling: Tahmina Shaily

Jewellery: Shoilee by Tahmina Shaily

Makeup: Nur Azmain



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

