

Jamdani: Brand Ambassador of Bangladesh

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If anybody asks me what's my favorite Bengali attire, my answer would be Saree. Cause saree is everywhere in Bengali culture, it doesn't matter either it's a family occasion like a wedding ceremony or a big national celebration like Bengali New Year or Durga Puja. But like most of the Bengali ladies, if that saree is Jamdani, only then it represents the true heritage of Bangladesh for me.

According to some historians, the lifespan of Jamdani started from Mughal Empire in the fifteenth century when the official language of Bangla (current day Bangladesh, Kolkata of India) was only Farsi & the word Jamdani itself also a Persian word. But some historians argue with this opinion & according to their opinion, before Mughal, the people of Jahangirnagar (Currently Dhaka, Narayanganj & nearby areas) started making Jamdani as a product for Jomidar (Bengali elite class) & souvenir especially in Konnadan (a Bengali synonym of marriage) ceremony.

The regular length of a Jamdani Saree is 12 to 13th feet & width 3 to 3 & half feet like any other saree. But the true difference between a Jamdani & a regular saree relies on the selection of cotton, looms, production time & method, production instruments & also the great skill of master weavers.

The whole making process of Jamdani is so much pristine & time-consuming that sometimes a Jamdani saree takes 3 to 6 months to produce & the master weavers of Jamdani count it as a piece of poetry. In the process of making Jamdani, master weavers took inspiration from nature, formation of stars in night sky or their daily life occasions that the design of Jamdani under one singular name brand itself branched to some subcategory such as Bhanga Khoi (broken comb), Chinir Bason Bhanga (broken sugar bowl), Ek Aunguilla (one finger), Kauer Thang (crows feet) etc.

In the process of making Jamdani, master weavers collect muslin (special cotton produced by silkworm) through sericulture & rearranged all muslin in a rectangle shape loom (locally made only for Jamdani) & the rearranging process of muslins takes a minimum couple of days. Then muslins are colored & dried in open air

& this drying process take a couple of days. After this drying process, again this muslin needs to submerge in the doom of rice gruel & one more week of drying. Then the muslin is ready to weave & only then master weavers sit to make the jamdani through the next process of making is more rigorous. On the other hand, a regular saree making process is much more simple & easy that after the British industrial revolution to now these days, it takes only a couple of hours to make a regular saree from cotton to display in a merchandise store.

To get a personal experience with Jamdani I tried to get the opinion of my grandmother. According to her opinion, there are various types of saree like cotton, slick, linen they used to wear, but the most traditional on is Dhakai Jamdani saree. Especially Dhakai jamdani back to the 20th century was famously considered a true cultural icon. Back to her time, whomever they like most gave jamdani as a souvenir & that's how she owned a jamdani from her mother in law Which made her feel culturally more proud and valuable in the family. At one point in our conversation, She added that in their time of early 50s Bengali culture, Every rich & elite class family must have a couple of jamdani saree as a symbol of high class & eliteness. To keep the jamdani pristine, they used to put some locally made hybrid carbon paper & naphthalin. Also once a year they put the saree outside the warm weather to remove the moisture & dust.

I would like to share my personal experience, when I came to the United States I bring this Jamdani saree with me. I wear this saree very often such as Bengali New Year or any other Bengali occasion. I got so many good compliments for this traditional dress. When I wear this saree I feel so emotional, because it represented my culture, my tradition. I feel like I represent my country through this saree. Most of the women like to wear the same kind of jamdani saree to keep our tradition alive. In Bangladesh everywhere, we wear this type of saree but in the United States we wear only a certain time. I think over here western dress more convenient to wear compare to my traditional clothes. Even though I like my cultural dress still I don't wear much, because with this clothes I can't go for work is not comfortable. I most of the time wear western clothes because this country's culture is different than mine.

In the process of making jamdani, the master weaver hired some seasonal

worker who are locally called sagreed (intern weaver) & shared his daily life experience & inspiration (from nature or stars) among them & through this way, as team work, they select a design for jamdani. This process of selecting a design is so much random that nor master, not sagreed write down the actual process of making jamdani. As all Sagreeds work all through the process of making jamdani with master weaver that slowly they could remember the whole process of making jamdani & this process of remembering was going on from the Mughal empire to last twenty century, from one generation to other. This remembering technique of making jamdani is locally called 'Buli' language.

Back to the seventeenth century, the worth of one lakh (1200) taka jamdani was exported to Delhi from Bengal every month. It's a mere example of how much Mughal patronized jamdani. As the process is so much time consuming around 4 to 6 month, master weavers were paid highly by Mughal & then also british. But after British industrial revolution, the patronizing of jamdani was getting less important & rather than patronizing, British East India Company started to manipulate the jamdani market through encouraging more industrial ready-made merchandise. Also in 17th& 18th-century jamdani, weavers used to use 200 to 300 count yarns per loom & early 20th& today's extinction age, it's maximum 60 to 70 count yarns per loom which clears the quality of jamdani is failing day by day to it's old high standard & quality.

To create a Dhakai Jamdani design, there is no short cut. It needs one's devotion, sincerity & commitment. It is not a mere profession; Rather it can be called a passion, Maleka Khan, Former President, Bangladesh handicrafts Manufacturers & exporters association recalls with pride. Also, the whole jamdani industry was once running through skilled master weavers & their remembering process to sagreed . Also, only people of dhaka, narayangonj & nearby were patronized to this industry for some unknown reason & it didn't diversify to other parts of Bangla. Though some master weavers are still alive to make real jamdani, there's a clear lack of patronization from government level & also from the private sector.

Jamdani is our heritage, our tradition & tradition survive through nursing from generation to generation. In order to save jamdani tradition, Bangladesh government should take some necessary step like patronizing the rest master weavers through

paying good monetary incentive & spreading the news through electronic & paper media about the importance of jamdani tradition for our Bengali culture & value, & also encouraging the master weaver to share their weaving experience to young generation so that the technique of making jamdani can pass to next generation. Also, the government should take necessary initiatives to write down & save the whole system of making jamdani so that young enthusiasts can at least familiar themselves through reading about jamdani. Also, print & electronic media through their feature writing & documentary onto Jamdani can spread the news of the almost extinction of jamdani & the awareness to identify the difference between a Fake & real jamdani. Then I believe, slowly with those proper steps & awareness, the heritage of jamdani would be a revival to our Bengali society like the 17th-century Mughal empire.

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