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## THE TRADITIONAL EPIC ART OF BANGLADESH (INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY)

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**ABSTRACT:** *In this paper I have tried to reflect one of the special traditional cultural arts of Bangladesh which almost lost its gloom. Based on natural & eco friendly production elements Jamdani has been being made year after year .The another name of jamdani was Muslin which has taken place in history.I have presented the origin of Jamdani , its golden age & manufacturing process ; along with present limitations. Although the enormous destruction was made by East India Company, It is high time to save this extra ordinary & exponential masterpiece of work through necessary steps nationally & internationally.*

**KEYWORD:** Hand maid Fabric(Muslin), Mughals, A piece of Master art(17-18<sup>th</sup> ) century,Pit & Hand loom, Jamdani Taant Bastra Mela,Geometric design,Low cost & insufficient facility, SME,Geographical Indicative(GI),Green level & product.

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### INTRODUCTION

This 17th century story is one of the earliest known references to jamdani, a fine, hand woven figured muslin produced in Bengal. It is one of oldest most priceless handmade fabric to be of great demand across the world from Bengal to China to Turkey to Italy from thousands of years ago. But In the book Sril Silat-ut-Tawarikh, written in the 9th century, the Arab geographer Solaiman talks about the fine fabrics manufactured in the state called Rummy, or modern day Bangladesh. An interesting article in The News Today references the famous Book of Periplus of Eritrean Sea (written as a navigation and trading account of the world), noting that it documents the fine fabrics available in this area as far back as the first decade before the birth of Christ.

Thicker cotton threads are laid into the weft to produce the illusion of a suspended pattern on the surface of an almost transparent fabric. Intricate colored motifs seem to float upon the cloth. The word jamdani is thought to have derived from jaam-daar, a Persian weaving term for floral designs in cotton thread or possibly, jama, the Bengali word for dress.

There are numerous counts and recordings of such exports and transactions in historical travel and trade books dating back to 300 A.D. One such book was Kautilya's book of economics where it mentions how Jamdani was the finest weaved muslin with geometric flower designs and colorful patterns in great demand. Other such recording are found in the book of Periplus of the Eritrean Sea and other Chinese, Italian, and Arabian travelers' accounts and travel books. There are even recordings of Alexander the great musing over the geometric patterns from printed cottons.

### **Drawback**

**The Mughals** were great admirers and patrons of such elegant artistic handmade fabrics. During the Mughal Era Jamdani weaving reach its golden age as weavers were given the highest regards. Wearing Jamdani fabric was a privilege that only nobility and royalty could afford due to the lengthy and difficult weaving procedures. Jamdani woven material is some of the finest found in the world and it is also eco-friendly as it's made from hand and foot run tools.

We also know from the historical accounts and inserts from the East India Company of costly Jamdani Muslin exports to Europe and the West. Records show that in 1787, Jamdani worth 5 million Re was exported to England.



Sadly after the British occupation of Bengal there began the decline of Jamdani and other handlooms cottage industries and indigo vegetable dyes which were often used to naturally dye Jamdani patterns. Cheaper more mass produced machine textiles flooded the market and Jamdani handlooms were hindered from production to allow the machine mass produced textiles take ground.

Some designer Jamdani fabric with intricate patterns for weddings and formal wear can take as much as 9 months to create with two full time weavers. Jamdani is very versatile whereby it can be either woven with full cotton, or with a mix of cotton and silk, or with full silk, or with silk and combinations of real gold/silver/precious metal yarn. These rare pieces are truly a masterpiece of exotic breathtaking beauty. Only when you see and feel it in person will you become a true lover and believer of Jamdani miracle.

Jamdani Production reached a pinnacle during the latter period of the Mughal empire. The ultimate test of its fineness was to pass a sari width through a small golden ring. Centuries before the arrival of the Mughals, the Bengali textile industry had exported fine cotton muslins to both Roman and Chinese empires. The Greek geographer Megasthenes described Bengali muslins in the 4th Century BC. The Romans were so inspired by the fabric's diaphanous quality they called it "woven air". In the 17th and 18th centuries, the fabric became a much desired and expensive trade good exported west to Kabul, Baluchistan, Persia, Arabia and Greece. Jamdani continued to be produced and exported during the days of the British Raj, but the British supported their own agriculture and textile industries at India's expense, and the quality of Bengali jamdani

declined. Recently, quality has returned with revived interest in traditional Bangali textiles. Today, jamdani is produced more or less as it has been for centuries.

### **Construction**

Making jamdani is very labor intensive requiring specialization that is divided amongst workers by religion, village and, especially, gender. The work generally involves a community of artisans, often a family of weavers or dyers cooperating in accordance with years of tradition like a carefully calibrated clock. Work is scheduled according to the season of the year and the time of the day, choosing the most appropriate moments for the practice of various tasks. Most of the weavers are Muslims who believe figurative representations in art are a direct challenge to the omnipotence of God. For this reason, artisans create motifs drawn from nature or abstract designs with a geometric sensibility.

**Pit looms** are still used, however, the original throw shuttle has been replaced by the fly shuttle, a faster and more efficient method of production that still depends upon the hand for guidance. Traditionally, the plain weave background was white, off-white or grey; today background colors are chosen from a vibrant array. The best quality jamdani is produced with locally grown, fine cotton. It is always woven during the monsoon season from June to October when the air is humid and moisture prevents the fine threads from becoming brittle and breaking. Bundles of thread are dyed in a variety of colors. The dyed thread is strengthened and softened by soaking overnight in a solution of rice water starch, allowing the women to wind it more easily onto bobbins. It is tedious work done early in the morning, usually between 4 and 9, before the increasing heat dries the thread, making it more difficult to handle. The wound bobbins are sent to another worker who prepares the warp on a beam. Afterwards, the warp is sent to the weaver's house where it is set up on a loom. Drawings are placed under the warp as a guide. The weaver, almost always a man, may or may not follow the drawing, often preferring to work from intuition alone. Colored thread is carefully inserted and hand tied into the fine weft to create patterns on the plain weave.

The entire system of production, from dyeing the thread to setting up the loom, is determined by the length of jamdani's most marketable end product, the sari. For this reason, it is nearly impossible to convince weavers to produce different lengths of running yardage. Looms are set up with 11 meter warps, each warp yielding two saris, 5.5 meters in length. The patterns woven into these two saris will not be repeated by the weaver again. various Notations, symbols, patterns and various stages that needs to complete to weaving a Jamdani. From the very beginning to the end there is several procedures and in this infographics we will try to cover it with few simple but must have to follow steps.

Here are the most common and often used notations that used on Jamdani saree are as bellow-  
1. Eksa Signifies the primal symbol "X". It represents cross roads and the unity of opposites, and in some cultures the butterfly and the soul's journey home.



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3. Shunya means Zero, and therefore also origins. In asian subcontinent spiritual tradition it is the beginning that encompasses the end. Jamdani Saree step by step production given -

Yarn Spinning: 2 weeks (14 Days)

Yarn Dyeing: 4 weeks (28 Days)

Loom Setting: 1 week (7 Days)

Weaving: 3 to 7 days

Washing: 3 days

Finishing: 3 days



Jamdani Production Process



### **Economical Growth of jamdani**

Compared to 1,600 Jamdani weavers in 2000, the number in 2015 was around 15,000 from 3,000 families. According to Bangladesh Handloom Board, the total number of Jamdani weaving units is 12,383. Now total Number of 888115 weavers, dyers, hand spinners & allied artisans have been using their creative skills into more than 0.30 million active looms to produce around 620 million meters of fabrics annually. Total number of male weavers 472367 & Total number of female weavers 415748.

It shares 63% of the total fabric production in the country designed for home consumption, meeting 40% of the local demand for fabrics. Besides, it provides employment opportunities to a million rural people, 50% of which are female. Another half a million people are indirectly engaged in the industry. Jamdani will contribute more than \$10 billion taka annually to the national exchequer as value addition. It is estimated that about 2,000 pieces of Jamdani saris are being produced per week in the region. The price of saris ranges between Tk. 5,000 and Tk. 40,000. Specially made saris can cost as much as Tk.150,000.

In addition to meeting domestic demand, the Jamdani industry is supplying saris to South Asia, Europe, Middle East and North America. The increasing demand for Jamdani from Dhaka is corroborated by the report that, in the International **Jamdani Taant Bastra Mela** (Handloom Textile Fair) organised in 2015 by Bangladesh Weavers Product and Manufacturing Business Association (BWPMBA), only spot order was worth Tk. 3.12 billion.

It needs to be particularly noted here that it is India which has been the leading importer of Jamadani from Bangladesh. In the fiscal year 2015-16, Bangladesh's export of Jamdani to India was worth \$9.12 million as against \$5.49 million in the fiscal year 2014-15. It is believed that there is export of Jamdani to India for which there is no official data. The total export of Jamdani saris, including to India, jumped from \$11.84 million in 2014-15 to \$15.41 million in 2015-16.

### **Varieties of jamdani work**

The main peculiarity of jamdani work is the **geometric design**. The expert weavers do not need to draw the design on paper. They do it from their memory. Jamdanis have different names according to their design. For instance, panna hajar, dubli jal, butidar, tersa, jalar, duria, charkona, mayur pyanch, kalmilata, puilata, kachupata, katihar, kalka pad, angurlata, sandesh pad, prajapati pad, durba pad shaplaful, baghnali, juibuti, shal pad, chandra pad, chandrahar, hansa, jhumka, kauar thyanga pad chalta pad, inchi pad, bilai adakul naksha, kachupata pad, badghat pad, karlapad, gila pad, kalasful, murali jal, kachi pad, mihin pad, kankra pad, shamukbuti, prajapati buti, belpata pad, jabaful and badur pakhi pad. Present day jamdani saris have on their ground designs of rose, jasmine, lotus, bunch of bananas, bunch of ginger and sago. Efforts are underway to revive traditional jamdani designs. A jamdani with small flowers diapered on the fabric is known as butidar. If these flowers are arranged in reclined position it is called tersa jamdani. It is not necessary that these designs are made of flowers only. There can be designs with peacocks and leaves of creepers. If such designs cover the entire field of the sari it is called jalar naksha. If the field is covered with rows of flowers it is known as fulwar jamdani. Duria jamdani has designs of spots all over. Belwari jamdani with colourful golden borders used to be made during the Mughal period, especially for the women of the inner court.



### **Current Condition**

This remarkable piece of ancient knowledge and expertise was almost lost completely. Today Jamdani fabric is mostly worn as a saree for formal/special occasions. Only Bangladeshi weavers have managed to retain this ancient Jamdani weaving knowledge which was passed down from weaver to weaver only. With the decline of the Mughal empire in the Indian sub-continent, Jamdani kaarigars or weavers lost their most influential patrons. This is considered to be the primary reason for the decline of this exquisite art form. The decline was accentuated with the subsequent import of lower quality and cheaper yarn from Europe. These issues have had repercussions in contemporary times as well.

With the oldest generations of artisans unable to sustain their craft production, the younger generations did not have any training to fall back on. Also, the main Jamdani-making belt in Bangladesh, on the banks of the river Shitalakhya, is under severe threat with waste from factories, mills, and settlements. At present, a major problem of the industry is that the weavers do not get adequate wages for their labour. A good piece of jamdani sari needs the labour of one to two months and the wage paid to the weavers does not compensate for their labour. The producers often do not have direct access to sari markets and because of their dependence on the middlemen, who often form informal cartels; they are deprived of their share of profit. Sometimes, the producers fail to recover the costs.

### **Policy making to save jamdani**

1. The Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) has set up a Jamdani Industrial City and a research centre at Noapara in Narayanganj district at a cost of Tk 5.86 crore for the further development of the Jamdani shree. There are 409 plots in the Jamdani Industrial City, 399 industrial plots have already been distributed among entrepreneurs for setting up their industries.” With a view to enhance the traditional Jamdani industries, the government has set up Jamdani industrial city and research centre on 20 acres of land at Noapara of Tarabo union under Narayanganj.

2.The GI is a name or sign used on certain products to certify that they possess certain qualities and are made according to traditional methods, or enjoy a certain reputation, due to its geographical origin. The government should finalize the geographical indication (GI) law without further delay to safeguard the patent rights of the country's centuries-old Jamdani saris. The government to form small committees to lobby with the government to protect Jamdani's patent. **Geographical Indicative** Products (Registration and Protection) Act 2013 (GI) was passed in the National Parliament in November 2013. Until the passing of this Act, Bangladeshi products were vulnerable to abuse by other parties. The Act will now enable the registration process of Bangladeshi products under the national and global GI regime, provided that rules are framed as soon as possible.

### **Why GI Implement for Jamdani in BD**

First, greater Dhaka region was the earliest and sole site of Jamdani production, so Jamdani is automatically entitled to GI tag of Dhaka and doesn't need an additional geographic locator.

Secondly, the term Dhakai Jamdani can encourage other countries/places to call Jamdani prefixed by other place names, causing confusing geographical indication.

Thirdly, Dhaka had many physical reincarnations in different historical periods and we are not sure if Jamdani existed at a time when this region was yet to be named Dhaka. Foremost of all, Jamdani is not a generic name, it's a brand that combines both fabric and designs.

Finally Jamdani has to be a unique name, whose geographical location indicator must be Dhaka. In other words, Dhaka and Jamdani are synonymous. So, India's registration of Jamdani under its GI law is illegal and a violation of existing TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) regulation.

### **The specialization of jamdani**

- 1.Uniqueness – intricate designs
- 2.Flexibility of production in small batches
- 3.Constant scope for innovation
- 4.Adaptability
- 5.Rich comfort factor
- 6.Eco-friendliness
- 7.Niche products can't be made on Power loom
- 8.Small volumes of Niche products possible only on Handlooms
- 9.Consumer perception –Uniqueness in clothing and pride of being different than others
- 10.Multiple Handloom products with fusion of traditional and trendy designs are possible.
- 11.Growing concern on Social responsibility, Ethical sourcing, Sweat- Shop conditions and pro-poor approach among international buyers.

### **Challenges and way outs for future marketing policy**

As Handloom industry is the biggest handicraft industry in our country, it is the second largest source of rural employment after agriculture. The declining productivity of handloom industry is caused by simultaneous activation of internal and external factors

1. Although skills of our workers are up to the expectation level, they are lagging behind in capturing the modern technology due to lack of infrastructural support from the government. Immediately need to introduce modern technology with weavers.
2. Set up Jamdani industrial park/ handicraft village/clusters of producers linked with lead exporters to ensure sustainability. Government already took steps but as early as possible should complete the set up of Jamdani industry.
3. Generally due to conventional process it takes much time to make the goods. Due to low production, workers have low income. So, many of them are eyeing on other professional fields. In many clusters, only old age people do the Handloom weaving, young people are not taking weaving craft as their profession. Most of the weavers left their inherited profession as it became tough for them to earn a living. Declare some compensation from government to ensure weavers wages.
4. Training and skill development of the young and introducing them with modern designs can encourage joining the sector. Scattered traditional artisans are out of modern fashion and designs while still they are innovating at their best. Setting up of design development centre is urgently needed for producing new product and product diversification. Weavers need to be trained for better performance, innovation and technology to be provided for overall development of the sector in a design development institute.
5. Need to Integral effort to link the handlooms and its supply chain.
6. Public or private authorities should come forward to make **“Green Products”** to claim special value addition and incentives for the products. Efforts are underway through close collaboration of public and private sectors toward product promotion, diversification and export marketing
7. Integral effective research and development system is must for creating new international brands or reaching the existing local Jamdani to the international area. Existing products are now being to India to some extent. Export to other markets should get preferences.
8. Weavers, mainly the marginal ones, were counting immense losses, as yarn prices were unstable in the last few years. Yarn price should fix from government.
9. Generally a large financial support with highly qualified engineers and extremely business experienced persons are required to run an industry which are absent in handloom industry.

Hence naturally it is very unlikely to be able to arrange the financial support or manage the upper limit of loan for them. But some banks (such as Grameen Bank, Proshika etc.) offer small amount of loan for the changing of social view and developing micro finance industries. By taking loan from these NGOs can help them to change their view of life and the national prospect. Everybody knows that cost of fund is much higher for such micro-credits which is affecting the life of such artisans as well.



An integral effort for creating 'Green' label for handloom products can give better access to the industrial loans that can be distributed or the benefit of that can reach to the artisans that can change their life. Moreover Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) in European and American markets for Bangladeshi handicrafts is an impetus for our exporters and it is making their products competitive. Although implementation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements will gradually phase out such preferential treatment, Bangladesh as a least developing country (LDC) will continue to enjoy the benefits to tariff preference of sometime in future.

10. Creating Overseas Market for jamdani export from Bangladesh can find bigger opening in a number of product areas and at the same time consolidate existing export base in some of the traditional product range. Traditional Bangladeshi product like jamdani which have made some dent in the export market have the potential for increasing their market share significantly. Arrangement of International Handicraft Fair to attract more buyers and thus reducing difficulties in entering to overseas market for our Traditional and Non-Traditional Handmade goods.

11. To create demand and usage of jamdani products in fashion industry.

12. E-commerce and Internet are emerged as promissory distribution channels to market and sell jamdani.

13. Enhance capacity of the exporters for getting market information.

14. Develop fund for identifying new markets and new products.

15. Focus will be on capacity building of the SME's to support all companies to comply with the international product oriented code of conduct.

16. Integrating and redefining of Jamdani industry is possible by separating Handicrafts from the "Textile Sector". It will help to create a new branch of national trade as a unique business beside textile business, that's why at first EPB need to take steps by separating the handicraft exports from textile exports.

17. Continued and focused attention has to be given to handicrafts for up-gradation of skill, creation of better work environment and development of cluster for specific crafts with common service and improvement of infrastructures and market development.

18. Quality of raw materials to be ensured for product diversification.

19. Branding Bangladesh is very essential at this moment because some of the buyers sell our quality products in their brand which is preventing our market growth.

20. Facilitate exporter participation in trade fairs, designing catalogues and preparing for exhibition

21. However, there is still the need for intensification of efforts at the levels of production and marketing as well as design innovation and adaptation. Our exporters of handicrafts should bear in mind that while creation of export market is a challenging task, maintenance of the market is a more challenging one dependent on regular supplies, quality assurance, and last but not the least fulfillment's of the consumer test and preferences.

## CONCLUSION

The long-winded nature of the Jamdani weaving process demands a price that limits its consumer base. A craft process at risk of extinction, it must be recognized that the Jamdani industry can only survive if the market is expanded. Now the government and other organizations are trying to revive the old glory of Dhakai Jamdani. In a bid to avoid the middlemen, they are trying to establish direct contact with the weavers. A Jamdani Palli has been established near Dhaka. Jamdani, one of the oldest forms of cottage industry in Bangladesh, was once a dying trade. Organizations like Radiant Institute of Design, Shanto Mariam University of creative technology, National Institute of Design (NID) and others are helping designers create new Jamdani designs.

Jamdani has never gone out of style. Even today, Jamdani is equally valued. It has and it always will symbolize aristocracy. The demand for quality Jamdani Sarees have increased exponentially over the years. We invite you to see and feel these spectacular pieces of fabric containing a wealth of history from eons ago. Owning Jamdani allows you to own a true masterpiece of time from a past long forgotten.

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