

The Uses of Rajshahi Silk in Current Fashion Trend in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study is to find the uses of Rajshahi silk in current fashion trend in Bangladesh. The study also finds out the present complications of the silk industries of Bangladesh and also tried to find the ways to overcome these complications. Bangladesh has a long and glorious history in sericulture as her agro-climatic condition is very favorable for the development of this industry. 'Bengal Silk' was very prominent all over Asia. It was known as the Ganges silk in distant Italy as early as the 13th century. Bengal produced much more silk than was used locally, and it boasted a vigorous export trade of both textiles and raw silk. It was this trade which first attracted European traders to Bengal. Gradually European traders started to influence the course of this industry. Data were collected for the study through a questionnaire survey of 10 randomly sampled silk enterprises and focus group discussion. Finally we have selected 5 enterprises for final analysis. The survey was a combination of both open and close ended questions. Finally we have found some ways to re-shine the industry.

Key words: Silk, Rajshahi silk, fashion trend, Bangladesh.

1.0 Introduction:

Rajshahi silk is a famous name in the domain of clothing, especially in saris. Silk is a delicate and soft fibre produced from the cocoons of silkworms and is covered with a protein called sericin. Saris and other products made out of Rajshahi silk are coveted by users in the country and abroad. Rajshahi silk is available as fabric in colours and patterns for designers. Silk fabric is available in ranges for apparel and for other purposes. Rajshahi houses a number of silk industries, the region's sericulture accounts for almost the entire silk output of Bangladesh. But the past glory of silk is fading fast due to a lack of government support, although private sector silk industries have created many jobs in the country, including Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Naogaon and Bogra districts, in the last eight years. Like other state-run organisations of its kind, Rajshahi Silk Factory had to close its operations in 2002 for a lack supervision and proper planning. But many private silk companies, including Sopura Silk Mills Ltd, are successfully running their operations countrywide. The seven factories in BSCIC Industrial Town in Rajshahi have created 15,000 different kinds of jobs, whereas Sopura alone created 10,000 direct and indirect jobs, in several northern districts and in the capital.

2.0 Theoretical Framework:

2.1 Silk:

Silk is a very fine proteaceous filament fiber. This soft fiber is made from silk worm which scientific name *bombyx mori* lives through eating mulberry leaves. These worm makes cocoons during their

life which made with gummy substance sericin and it is a protein. Silk fiber was first found in China and afterwards it spreads worldwide, even in Bangladesh. Production process of silk fiber is known as sericulture and it is divided into two parts 'mulberry cultivation' and 'silkwarm'. In silk industry it is mentioned as two types of silk, one is mulberry type and another is non mulberry type. Non mulberry type silk is again divided into three sub categories. They are Tassar, Eri and Muga. In our country mulberry type silk is produced mostly.

2.2 Rajshahi silk

Bangladesh has a long and glorious history in sericulture as her agro-climatic condition is very favorable for the development of this industry. 'Bengal Silk' was very prominent all over Asia. It was known as the Ganges silk in distant Italy as early as the 13th century (Ahmed, 1988). Bengal produced much more silk than was used locally, and it boasted a vigorous export trade of both textiles and raw silk (Banerjee, 1990). It was this trade which first attracted European traders to Bengal (Salam, 1981; Davini, 2008, 2009). Gradually European traders started to influence the course of this industry. According to Banglapedia (National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh), by 1835, the British East India Company ran over a hundred filatures in the region and exported about 400 tons of raw silk. Later, private companies took over and the export trade boomed till the 1870s, when because of the epidemic silkworm diseases and technological stagnation Bengal lost most of its foreign markets and Japan emerged as a new major silk exporter. By the early 20th century, Bengal silk was pushed out of South Asian markets, especially by Kashmir and Mysore silk (Ahmed, 1997). By the 1930s, Chinese and Japanese silk started replacing Bengal silk even in Bengal itself. What this meant in terms of employment can be illustrated by the example of the Rajshahi district. In the 1870s, some 250,000 people derived incomes from silk production there; in 1901, the number stood at 41,000 but in 1921 it was less than 600.

The partition in 1947 brought about a disastrous condition in the silk industry of Bangladesh, as less than 10 percent of Bengal mulberry area was incorporated into Bangladesh, the then East Pakistan (Banglapedia). This industry was at the verge of extinction producing little more than 100 lbs in the few villages of the Rajshahi District. At that time silk enterprises were not supervised by the government and left in its entirety to local people for the production of mulberry and silk materials. After partition, although the then East Pakistan government undertook a grand sericulture development program under which 10 sericulture nurseries, one silk pilot project and one silk research and training institute at Rajshahi were established, what was lacking was a whole-hearted effort in tapping the full potentials of sericulture and providing adequate incentives to the producers to exploit them (Rahman et al., 1985). From 1947 to 1977 sericulture activities were looked after by organizations like Directorate of Industries and BSCIC (Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation). During this post-independence period the silk industry received a more focused attention in terms of capital investment, operational policy formulation, and institution building. Immediately after the independence, one of the major policy measures with respect to the silk sector of the country was imposing restrictions over the import of silk yarn and

silk fabrics thus providing the long protection of the sericulture sector. Subsequently, with a view to expand sericulture throughout the country the government of independent Bangladesh decided to create a separate organization known as BSB (Bangladesh Sericulture Board) which began functioning from February, 1978 with its headquarters at Rajshahi nicknamed the 'silk city'. Since the mid-eighties, several NGOs started to promote sericulture and silk weaving among poor rural women with financial assistance from donors and technical assistance from BSB (Huq, 1997).



Figure: 1



Figure: 2



Figure: 3



Figure: 4

Figures 1-4: Factories of Rajshahi Silk

With favorable weather and soil and with a glorious history in silk production Bangladesh should be a bright name in World sericulture industry. Yet, the reverse is true. While China and India, neighbors of Bangladesh, become the top two countries in the sericulture sector, Bangladeshi silk industry is fighting for survival (Hassan & Bakshi, 2005; Haider, 2007). Although the number of people involved in this industry is quite large (about 600,000), the running enterprises are incurring

losses of around Taka 4 to 5 thousands everyday with at least 60 factories having been shut down and many others virtually dying (Newshours BD, 2011, Roy et al. 2012).

3.0 Objectives of the study:

The main objective the study is to find the uses of Rajshahi silk in current fashion trend in Bangladesh. The study also finds out the present problems of the silk industries of Bangladesh and also tried to find the ways to overcome these problems.

4.0 Methodology:

Data were collected through a questionnaire survey of 10 randomly sampled silk enterprises and focus group discussion. Finally we have selected 5 enterprises for final analysis. The survey was a combination of both open and close ended questions. Only owners or managers of the enterprises were selected as informants.

5.0 Findings:

5.1 Fashion trends of Bangladeshi:

The 40s witnessed worldwide war, despair and asceticism. By the time the United States emerged out of depression, the rest of the world including Europe and Asia were already submerged knee-deep into terrible combat. The partition of British India in 1947 gave way to modern states of India and Pakistan – an era of turmoil whereby fashion was considered, ostentatious. Hence, slightly deterred but not detached, styling, took to its own trail. Then came 1947 and Bengal was divided into two – East Bengal (later changed to East Pakistan) and West Bengal. Even through the separation, nothing could stop ‘the craze that is fashion’, as it seeped through, into every household within the region. The 1970s saw the rise of Bangladesh, a country new in its form, but quite rich in culture and heritage; rest of the story unfolds as we continue.

5.1.2 1940s – The era of partition and poetry

In the early 40s, fashion, in the British Raj was largely motivated by the western world, finger waves and pin rolls in hairdos were quite popular. Fur was au-couture, and upscale women from Thakur baris or Nawab lineage donned the modern fusion look. Then came the fervour of liberation and nationalistic sentiments sky-rocketed; leaders like the Mahatma encouraged hand spun khadi for all its citizens to self-sustain the nation. The cotton material became ‘the trend’. Both men and women wore the khadi – making it a unique garment for the South Asian subcontinent. Textile historians depict that after the Independence from British colonialism, women were encouraged to work and the traditional Bengali style of draping the sari became cumbersome. The modern style of draping, with several pleats in the navel and the anchal on the left was considered more appropriate and elegant. Such a drastic fashion change did not happen overnight and much of it said to be influenced Gyanoda, wife of Satyendranath Tagore, and the elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore. She even opened a school in Calcutta to teach the new way (Parsi

influenced) of sari draping style to the Bengali women. Discussion on fashion will never be complete without mentioning jewellery. Bengali women and their love for gold jewelry dates back to time immemorial, early 40s were perhaps the closing moment in time for the extravagance in jewelry adornment.

5.1.2 1950s – Uprisings, inherited memories and liberation stories

The 1950s was an era that saw many external conflicts. Bangladesh was still apart of East Pakistan, but brimming with its unique culture, fashion sense and heritage. The ladies from this region followed the styles of prominent actresses from Bollywood like Nargis, with her high-necked silk blouse and pure chiffon saris. This actress won many accolades for her role in ‘Mother India’, breaking box office records massively in the recently sovereign countries. Even though Nargis was an Indian actress, her works and styling was quite popular in both East and West Pakistan. Besides the actresses particular style, that was trending, the upper crust of society were also inclined towards donning a combination of Victorian and Mughal styling like lehengas, embroidered gowns, long frilled skirts, etc. – a common scene at many elite gatherings.

5.1.3 1960s – Fresh looks, the rise of cinema and tight skirts

This particular era can be most remembered because of the difference in the hairstyles. The simple curls and waves were replaced with the bouffant look and long braids. Ladies used to tease their hair with fine toothed combs to create mountains of knots, later brushed, to give away a beehive effect. While the western world was sporting miniskirts for the first time, the Bengalis were donning sleeveless blouses with chiffon saris and body hugging shalwar-kurtis. The sari draping style was also changing from the traditional right to left anchal to the swirling Bollywood style copied from actress Mumtaz. Large accessories were replaced by thin belted wrist watches, tiny ear studs and necklaces with locketts.

5.1.4 1970s - Independence and bell-bottoms

Despite the war of Independence and creation of a sovereign state- Bangladesh, 70s was the most colourful decade for fashion in the freshly liberated country. Singers and actresses like Runa Laila and Bobita were major fashion icons for the society. Runa Laila - gifted with the voice of an angel was a treasure for Bangladesh. Young ladies from the entire South Asian zone were mesmerised by her talents and her styling sense, diligently following her looks, as a major fashion icon. Bobita on the other hand was a national heroine, even favored by people living in the furthest peripheries of the nation. Runa Laila’s thin eyebrows and Bobita’s up-do have become cult fashion, ever since. Global fashion inclination, in the 70s was towards psychedelic prints, vibrant colors, nets, shiny materials with bold designs and Bangladesh was not left uninfluenced. Long unkempt hair, thin eye-brows, bell-bottom pants, loop earrings were fad and the Bangladeshi ladies were donning the trending style.

5.1.5 1980s – Liberty, experiments and fashion

Embracing the new found liberty in its truest sense Bangladeshi women began to experiment with their looks during this era. While Hollywood and Bollywood, both were there, prominently, to tell

people what to wear, ladies did some research of their own. Inclination towards polka dots in different colors, sizes and shapes reigned supreme. Halter necked blouse became popular and puffed-up wavy hair with frontal bangs became a ‘new thing’ in hairstyling. Few women even wore kameez with velvet jackets and loose shalwars – more like the, then popular Hindi Cinema heroines. Big loop earrings were still in, only this time they were donned in more vibrant colors, rather than the traditional silver and gold. The 80s is probably the decade best attributed to the rise of fashion in the country, which until then, had more serious issues to address.

5.1.6 1990s – Mughal influence and boutique shops

Not much happened in the fashion scenery during this era. The ladies leaped backed to the Mughal era and Anarkalis and really long kameez became rampant on the streets. Bengali ladies began tying their hair in a tight-up-do, and dressed it up further with extensions. This era saw the rise of boutique shops, making their way into the local markets, one after the other.

5.1.7 2000s – Millennials and chemical experiments

This was the beginning of a new millennium and the world was converging to become one global unit thanks to the Internet and the rise of social media. The 2000s saw a major rise into consumerism and the Bangladeshis were adopting more of a western look. Jeans, slacks, tops, shirts were the major fashion items for the everyday woman, while saris became celebratory attires. Hairstyling became free-flowing taking no definitive form. However, hair colorings, permanent straightening, or curling, and highlights became rampant.

5.1.8 2010 onwards – Back to the basics and fusion wear

Pure westernization had lost most of its charm and Bangladeshis became more interested into fusion, a perfect blend of both East and the West. Casual kurtis, pants, dhotis, etc. were basic dress up materials. Saris were trending back again, only this time the blouses were altered in various ways to give a ravishing fusion look. Jacket blouses, net blouses, halter necks and many other designs became the highlight of a sari. No major changes came in the hairstyles department but highlights became more environmentally friendly, while hair straightening-curling procedures became temporary and wellness oriented. Regarding accessories and jewelry, big dial wrist-watches, diamonds and small purses started trending.

Almost 70 years ago, the subcontinent was liberated from colonist regime. It resurrected, only to find itself broken into many pieces and ultimately Bangladesh was born in 1971. Many styles have come and gone within this period but one thing has definitely remained constant throughout it all was the obsession of the people of Bengal, to look their best through thick and thin.

5.2 Uses of Rajshahi silk in Bangladeshi fashion:

Renowned showrooms for silk product in Bangladesh are:

1. Sopura silk

2. Doyel silk
3. Zarif fashion & craft
4. Usha silk
5. Sharee shop Rajshahi silk

5.2.1 Sopura Silk

Sopura Silk plays a vital role in silk sector of Bangladesh. Normally north Bengal is famous for silk products and in that sector Sopura Silk is one of the famous silk production company.



Figure-5: Sopura Silk Mills Ltd.

5.2.1.1 Type of Silk:

1. Sopura Silk produces soft silk, andi silk, dhupian silk, muslin, balaka silk etc.
2. In past, balaka silk of this company was very popular but now the days people are very keen to buy muslin silk.

5.2.1.2 Products:

1. For men-they make shirt, panjabi, fatua and pajama etc.
2. For women-there are different types of shares home decoration cloth procts etc. Most of the customers here are the women but it has a popularity for men's as well.



Figure-6: Current fashion trend of Sopura Silk

5.2.1.3 Type of Silk:

1. They do two different types of color for sharees are such like this_ acid dyes and reactive dyes.
2. Apart from this screen print, block prntnt, batick, stitch are applied here to enrich the beautification of silk.

5.2.1.4 Media and advertisement:

Previously Sopura Silk used to give advertisement in popular dailies and weeklies as well but now a days they believe that they are well known and they dont need any kind of advertisement anymore. So they are making their own business with confidence and spreading the business as well. Sopura Silk is spreading their business in different international sectors. Now a days they import raw silk from China and send their products in different countries. Sopura Silk is spreading their business in different international sectors. Now a days they import raw silk from China and send their products in different countries.

5.2.2 Doyel Silk

Doyel Silk was established in 1967 at Rajshahi, Bangladesh to make the Silk popular to people. They normally produce all kind of silk such as- Motka, Balaka, Muslin, Soft Silk etc. Most importantly, Doyel Silk produce the silk with their own mechanism and instrument. They have got 72 worker with 22 Power loom. They are working hard to make this whole project happen but in some cases they use 35 hand loom to produce dhupiyam, andi silk (these 35 hand loom known as tant are situated in Harinagar).

5.2.2.1 Production and Customer Reviews

1. They produce Pnjabi, Sherwani, scarfs (produced from Motka, Dhupiyam and andi Silk), Sharees. Among these products Scarfs and Sharees are very popular.
2. They get all kind of customers start from young age to old and people. Most people prefer silk dresses for special occasion and for normal uses as well. Bolaka and Soft Silks are most popular to people.



Figure-7: Current fashion trend of Doyel Silk

5.2.2.2 International and National Business

1. Some of the famous fashion houses in Bangladesh such as 'shada kalo' , 'annya mela' get their products from doyel silk'.
2. Doyel silk provided a huge amount of sharees for the air hostesses of ' united airlines' for 1 year.
3. They provided 3500 pieces of silk sharees for 'south asian games'
4. Bangladesh foreign ministry sent lots of scarfs to different countries from doyel silk.
5. Some foreign embassy use some silk products to enlighten their decoration

5.2.3 Current fashion trend of Zarif fashion & craft, Usha silk and Sharee shop Rajshahi silk:



Figure-8: Current fashion trend of Zarif fashion & craft



Figure-9: Current fashion trend of Usha Silk



Figure-10: Current fashion trend of Sharee shop Rajshahi silk

6.0 Constraints to the development of the silk industry

Insufficient government patronization was cited by owners or managers of the silk enterprises as one of the major constraints to the development of the Bangladeshi silk industry. In actual fact these silk enterprises are not coordinated by the government; they are left to run individually, so that they are competing with each other while also having to compete with China and India. In this respect BSB has proven ineffective in managing the whole silk industry. In BSB, the directors are government administrators who were frequently transferred before they could settle long enough to understand the problem of the silk industry.

Financial problem is another major hindrance. Due to lack of publicity and lack of government assurance, industrialists are reluctant to invest money in this sector. Only very few firms - two or three are dominating this whole silk sector, while the majority of the enterprises are small in size and production scale. One factor that contributed to the high production cost had to rely on imported raw materials such as mulberry. Mulberry production was not encouraged in Bangladesh. Although mulberry production is very profitable, most of the farmers are unaware of this due to lack of information and extension services. Many enterprises could hardly afford the cost and felt discouraged to increase production. Lack of skilled labor, modern technology, and uninterrupted electricity supply were also cited as constraints to the development of this industry.

7.0 Recommendations from the enterprise owners of the silk industry

Many of the silk industrialists opine that if government assists directly the silk industry will develop rapidly. According to them more investment is necessary for this sector as are increasing skilled labor and popularizing silk items throughout the country. They offer the following recommendations:

- a. Giving credit with simple conditions Giving credit with simple conditions is very much needed at this time as investment in this sector is decreasing year by year. If government banks take this step then more people would be interested to invest in the silk industry and this will definitely help this sector to flourish.
- b. Widespread use of modern technology Most of the silk enterprises have obsolete machineries for production. BSB should help those enterprises which lack financial capacity to own modern technology. The BSB could buy and lease those machineries to those enterprises while earning some income for itself.
- c. Disseminate information Advertisement, publicity and promotion of products are keys to the development of the silk industry. BSB should play a vital role in spreading information locally and internationally.
- d. Reduce tax and give out subsidy Production cost is significantly dependent on the price of imported silk thread. The price of locally produced silk yarn was Taka 1300 per kg while the China-yarn was Taka 2500 during the eighties; now the current prices have risen to between Taka 5600 to Taka 6000 (Newshours BD). Owners of the silk enterprises urge the government to alleviate tax imposed on thread and give them import subsidy.
- e. Training entrepreneurs and workers BSB and BSRTI should organize training programs, workshops and seminars more frequently. All the new entrepreneurs and workers should have access to introductory training on sericulture provided by BSB or BSRTI.
- f. Increasing mulberry cultivation To reduce the import of raw materials (silk thread), Bangladesh must start mulberry production in the opinion of the industry owners. If the raw materials are provided locally the production costs would be considerably reduced and thus Bangladesh can be competitive in the international market. The industry owners perceive that BSB and BSRTI should actively motivate farmers to cultivate mulberry by means of subsidies in the production of mulberry.

8.0 Conclusion

There is not many differences in sector of design of Silk sarees. In most cases the producers of these sarees do not invest any resources on design, style and motifs to be used. One of the main problem in the silk supply is that- if a color of silk is finished from the stock, it is rarely reproduced. Because of the fact that the yarn is dyed manually so that makes it very hard to reproduce the same shade of color twice. There is not so much differences in style of sarees in demand of young generation and old generation. Still Rajshahi silk is showing her impact on current fashion.

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