

# **The Past and Present Situation of the Traditional Shakha Art (Making) Industry**

**Rehana Sultana**

Assistant Professor, Department of Fashion Design and Technology,  
Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology, Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Md. Mizanur Rahman**

Assistant Professor, Department of Fashion Design and Technology,  
Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology, Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Dheeman Kumar Biswas**

Assistant Professor, Department of Fashion Design and Technology,  
Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Email of the corresponding Author: [mizanedubd@gmail.com](mailto:mizanedubd@gmail.com)

## **Preface**

The research is aimed at gaining a better understanding of the past and present of the Shakha industry, which is well known as a traditional and creative industry in Bangladesh, as well as gathering accurate logical information about the existing problems in the industry and presenting appropriate recommendations for its solution.

## **Introduction**

Shakhaes are very valuable ornaments for the followers of traditional religions. Without Shakhaes, traditional religious girls cannot sit on the pedestal of marriage. Preparations started before the wedding, just as the father provided a pair of Shakhaes, so the bridegroom and the conch came to get married with vermilion.

Shakha is a white bangle made from conch or a special type of sea snail which is recognized as a symbol of chastity of married Hindu women. The main materials of this industry are collected from the sea. This conch is commonly found in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and Titpur, India. From a conch shell of proof size, four Shakhaes of thick type and 10 Shakhaes of start type are found.

In short, Bangladesh is the main location of this industry in old Dhaka. It is located on the banks of the river Buriganga at the junction of Islampur Road and Nawabpur Road. Shankharibazar is named after the Shakha artists living in the area. To the locals it is known as Shankhari Patti.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- a) Gather accurate information about the history of the Shakha industry.
- b) Collect information about the source of raw materials used in this industry.
- c) Consistent collection of information about the overall design strategy of the Shakha industry.
- d) Research on modernization of machinery used in this industry.
- e) Learn about the lives of the artists involved in this art.
- f) Knowing about the by-products of Shakha industry and other products.
- g) Know about the environmental and health risks of this industry.
- h) To present the real picture or real picture of the interest or reluctance of the next generation towards this art.

### **History of Shakha Industry in Bangladesh**

Shankharibazar Shakha of old Dhaka is one of the centers of industry. Dhaka has gained world fame for this industry. Shivchar is a successful trader in this Shankharibazar. According to his information, in 1660 AD, the Hindu community started its Shakha in Shankharibazar with its Shakha industries.

According to historians, the conch industry developed in the early stages of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Bellary, Anantapur, Titvali, etc. in South India. After the destruction of the Hindu kingdom in the state by Malik Kafur in the 14th century, the artists of the Shakha migrated to Dhaka to meet the existential crisis and to earn a living.

Many experts think that the history of Shakha industry in Bangladesh is not so new. In reality, it may seem new, but it is not. Bengali women have been using hand Shakhates and snail ornaments for a long time. The long tradition is not just that the exterior was created by Indian artists. The Shakha is considered very sacred, especially by Hindus and Buddhists.

From the description of the Portuguese writer Garcia da Ota and Vernier, the concept of conch art in Bengal is similar. Note that these two Europeans came to

Dhaka for business and travel. Tavernier's account It is known that the conch industry developed in Dhaka and other areas outside Dhaka, including Sylhet and Pabna, around the 17th century. According to James, the Shankharis came to East Bengal from South India around 1860 during the reign of King Ballal Sen. Shankharibazar of Bikrampur bears that memory. After the Mughals came to Dhaka in the 17th century, Lakheraj brought the Shankharis to Dhaka, a new city, by showing them the lure of land. Conch industry researchers have all identified Dhaka as the main center of this industry. Shankharibazar is mentioned in the writings of Mirza Nathan, the general of the seventeenth century Mughal subedar Islam Kha. Moreover, according to Dinesh Chandra Sen, the conch industry developed independently in Dhaka and he made such remarks in view of the association of Bengali women in ancient Bengali literature.

Thomas Williams, a traveler visiting Dhaka in 1810, was very appreciative of the conch ornaments made in Dhaka. According to James Wise, there were 835 Shankharis living in Dhaka around 1883. According to the writings of Kedarnath Majumdar, about 100 houses of Shankhari lived in Shankhari Bazar around 1883. An alley about 350 yards long is the heart of Dhaka. The lakhs of land given to the Shankharis was very small in size. For which the buildings at that time were 200 yards. Where the main gate, equivalent to a house, would be six feet long and the corridor would be as long as 2030 feet. Most of the houses have four floors and the buildings are much cluttered and without windows.

One of the most successful conch selling centers in Shankharibazar is Maa Mansa Conch Industry. They have their own Shakha making factory and the main Shakha designer in that factory is Ajit Sur. The information given by him gives some details of the Mughal period. During the reign of Nawab Nazim-ud-Daulah with his ancestors, the ancestors of Ajit Sur NakShakhar used to bring their ornaments from Sindh by boat to the banks of the river Buriganga for sale. At that time the Nawab noticed a lot and so the Nawab instructed them to settle in the stable. They then settled there and started their business. Their next generation now survives in the shankhari market.

According to experts, the industry developed 2,000 years ago in the hands of the powerful nation of South India. From the Great Banga Granth, it is known that in the Tamil capital, Dhaka, one to one Shakha artifacts were found, which may have spread to Jethi Bengal. When it comes to Shakha industry, just as Shankharibazar cannot be left out, so the story of the misery of the Shankhari people in 1971 cannot

be ignored. On the night of March 25, 1971, the Pakistanis demolished Shankharibazar. After independence, the Shankharis again came to live in their old place in groups and concentrated on the old work. But it was not possible to bring back that previous feeling. Its Shakha industry once contributed a lot to make Dhaka city famous.

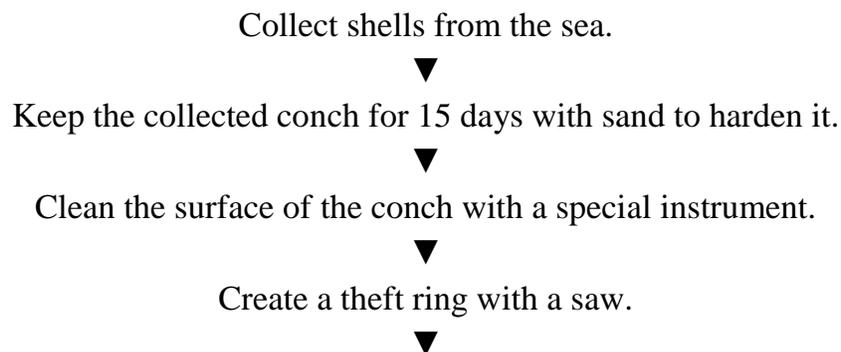
### **Raw Material for Making Shakhaes**

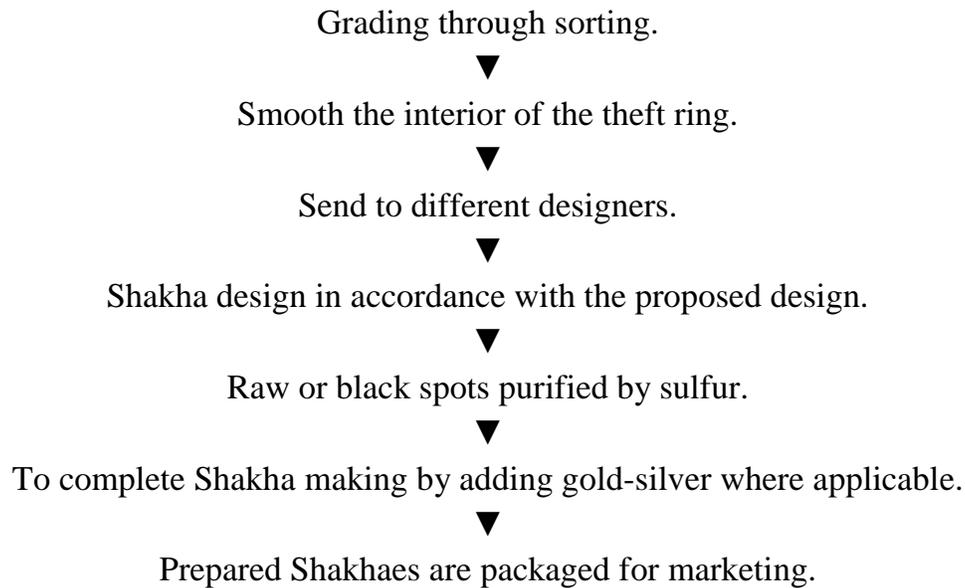
The Shakha-forming material is a special kind of conch, which is found only in the Indian Ocean. Imported from Chennai and Sri Lanka in India. The species of conch used for making ornaments of this conch are Titputti, Rameshwari, Doaniyat, Motisalmot, Patigarbashi, Kachambar, Dholajadki, Kelakor, Jamaipati, Aloakarpati, Nayakhad, Khaga, Shurkichona, Titkori, Jahazi, Gordbaki, Shuroti, Dukhanpati and Alabila.

Of these, Alabila is the lowest of the best. Its current market price is 150 to 50 to 60 thousand rupees. In 1970, the price was 40 to 50 rupees. At present, due to lack of adequate supply, sometimes traders are not able to import high quality even with orders.

Saw was used in ancient times to remove the ring of theft from the conch shells. Later the use of an electric circular saw began. In addition, the equipment used is called mandabari, a type of grinding machine used by artisans to smooth the rough inside of a cut. In addition hand tools like sand, tripod tool, drill for drilling, hammer, nail etc. are used.

### **Periodic Flow Diagram of Shakha Formation**





### **Shakha Marketing System**

In Shankharibazar, these two types of Shakhaes are sold wholesale and retail. Wholesale sales are from factories. In this case, Shakhaes of different shapes, sizes and designs made earlier, at least 30 to 40 pairs are sold to retailers together. The price of these Shakhaes varies from Rs. 20 to Rs. 400 per pair.

The retailer sells Shakhaes to general buyers in its own store. In this case the price of the Shakha can be from Rs. 200 to Rs. 7/8 thousand per pair. In addition, in some cases, the Shakhaes are made according to the design and the order of gold-silver addition. The price depends on the type of design, the quantity and quality of gold or silver.

### **Types of Shakha Designs**

The use of motifs like flowers, leaves, vines, rice husks, fish, birds etc. is usually noticed in the design of Shakhaes. Over time, Shakha designs with different names have become available. The notable designs in the medieval Shakha designs were pachdana, tindana, bachchadana, sadabala, aulakeshi etc. The designs used in the present era include Tally, Chittaranjan, Satilakshi, Jalphas, Haysadar, Danadar Shakha, Englishpatch, Bengalibala, Necklacebala, Latabala, Dhanchhari, Hasimukh, Tarpach, Joy Shankh, Patharghata, Motalta, Muridagala, .

### **Other Uses of Conch**

Although Shakhaes are mainly made from conch shells, they have some more uses. These include conch shell earrings, skull cuts, hair clips, necklaces, watch chains, bracelets and more. Several types of conch are used for playing. A kind of special cutting is made suitable for playing. Such conch shells are played in various festivals and Manglik events. There are also water conch shells, which are used to hold the Ganges water in worship.

### **By-products of Shakha Formation**

When making a Shakha from a conch, the powder that is produced by rubbing the conch cannot be thrown away. Conch powder is widely used in cosmetics industry. As it is in great demand as a cosmetic material, the powder of this conch is processed and sold.

### **The Situation of Shakha Market**

The present picture of the busiest Shankharibazar of antiquity is quite different. Where hundreds of artisans used to work day and night to create new designs and inlaid Shakhaes, now there are only 10 to 12 artisans. It is said that Shakha artists are almost extinct in Shankharibazar. In the past, Shankharibazar meant the flourishing business of Shakhaes and conch. There was no shortage of buyers. Indigenous artisans used to design one Shakha after another with a lot of time. But today they are not found. Searching for them at the field level, it is learned that at present 90% of the crafted Shakhaes are made in India. Whose design is machine-made. Nowadays there is no work in the hands of local artisans. Shakhaes imported from India are so popular that ordinary buyers do not want to buy expensive handicrafts made by local artisans.

### **Some of the Notable Causes of the Current Plight of the Shankha Makers**

More imports of Indian products: At present buyers of the country generally give more importance to foreign products so sellers import Shakhaes from India at lower prices in the hope of making extra profit.

**Lack of adequate machines:** The Shakhhaes made in India are fully machine engraved. This makes the Shakhha finish brighter and saves time than the handmade design. The skilled craftsmen of Shankharibazar are lagging behind in this regard.

**Influence of Indian media:** At present, the Indian media is increasingly promoting various programs and dramas on the television screens. These are not usually made in Bangladesh.

**Lack of proper capital:** To make a perfect design, one needs automatic equipment, which requires a large sum of money to buy, which is not possible for an ordinary craftsman.

Another major problem among the problems is the maximum wage of Rs. That again becomes less of a craftsman. As a result, they are struggling to survive with their families. According to the artisans, they could not leave the profession even today, remembering the passions and teachings of their ancestors. Talking to them further, it is learned that they will not allow their children to enter this profession in future. Because, they think there is no respect in this profession. At present they are trying to educate their future generations in higher education, to employ them in other professions like all other people.

### **Ways to Recover the Shakhha Industry of Bangladesh**

At present it is imperative to rescue the Shakhha industry from tragic consequences. Because the talent of talented artists is revealed through this art. The following steps can be taken to revive the industry.

- a) Stop import of over-manufactured goods from India.
- b) Reduction of tariff rate on import of raw materials.
- c) Arrange for low interest loans to artisans.
- d) Provide necessary equipment.
- e) Provide adequate training.
- f) Increase the wages of artisans.
- g) Increasing its use as an accessory to fashion accessories outside of religious products.

## Conclusion

Shakha art is an ancient and traditional art of handicrafts in Bangladesh. Today, this industry has become an endangered industry due to the change of social conditions in the course of time and the flight of the winds of the age. Although the art is not completely lost in the face of religious demands, the basic beauty will be transformed into artificiality. So we have to sustain this small craft through concerted efforts.

## End Notes & References:

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2. Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, p. 1062, right column.
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