



# JAMDANI

## A GOLDEN KNOTS OF TRADITIONAL WEAVING

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### Abstract

Jamdani is a vividly patterned, sheer cotton fabric, traditionally woven on a handloom by craftspeople and apprentices around Dhaka. Jamdani textiles combine the intricacy of design with muted or vibrant colors, and the finished garments are highly breathable. Jamdani is a time-consuming and labor-intensive form of weaving because of the richness of its motifs, which are created directly on the loom using the discontinuous weft technique. Weaving is thriving today due to the fabric's popularity in making saris, the principal dress of Bengali women at home and abroad. The Jamdani Sari symbolizes identity, dignity, and self-recognition and provides wearers with a sense of cultural identity and social cohesion. The weavers develop an occupational identity and take great pride in their heritage; they enjoy social recognition and are highly respected for their skills. A few master weavers are recognized as bearers of the traditional Jamdani motifs and weaving techniques and transmit the knowledge and skills to disciples. However, Jamdani weaving is principally shared by parents to children in home workshops. Together with spinners, dyers, loom-dressers, and practitioners of a number of other supporting crafts, weavers – form a closely-knit community with a strong sense of unity, identity, and continuity. This study will try to know the history, origin, specialty, types, patterns, weaves, and making process of Jamdani. The study has also tried to find the Current Situation and Problems of Jamdani.

### Introduction

Jamdani is a unique name in the traditional weaving of Bengal. This golden glory has been cherished by the weavers of the Bengal for generations. Jamdani is a kind of ornate or patterned muslin. The traditional art of weaving Jamdani was declared a UNESCO Intangible Cultural



Heritage of Humanity in 2013. Bangladesh received geographical indication (GI) status for Jamdani Sari In 2016. It was the first GI status given to any Bangladeshi product.

The Persian word Jamdani became popular during the Mughal Era. The Persian word Jam stand for flower and Dani means a vase. It has been named after the ornamental flower vase & its patterns found in Dhakai Textile.

Jamdani was originally known as Dhakai Jamdani after the name of Dhaka. Dhaka is one of the many ancient textile weaving centers in Bengal. Due to the colonial policy, the Dhakai Jamdani and muslin industries declined rapidly. But in recent years, Bangladesh has witnessed a revival of Jamdani production, This Historic tradition still survives through their tireless work of the people of the artisans of the Jamdani village. (Jamdani Palli)

Jamdani village or Jamdani Palli built on the banks of the river Shitalaksha in the riverine Bangladesh. Historical Sonargaon, Shiddhirganj, Rupganj, Demra belong to Jamdani Palli. Overcoming innumerable limitations and adversities, this weaving practice continues to this day with the love of the weaving community.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- a. To know the history and origin of Jamdani.
- b. To find the Specialty of the Jamdani Saree
- c. To know the types and patters of Jamdani Saree.
- d. To know the weave and the making process of Jamdani.
- e. To find the Current Situation and Problems of Jamdani.

### **Origin of Jamdani**

An early reference to the Indian origins of muslin is found in the book of Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and in the accounts of Arab, Chinese, and Italian travelers and traders.

Jamdani is a handloom woven fabric made of cotton, which was historically referred to as muslin. The Jamdani weaving tradition is of Bengali origin. It is one of the most time and labor-intensive forms of handloom weaving and is considered one of the finest varieties of muslin, and the most artistic textile of Bangladeshi weavers. Traditionally woven around Dhaka and created on the loom



brocade, Jamdani is rich in motifs. In the late 19th century, T. N. Mukharji referred to this fabric as Jamdani Muslin.

### **History of Jamdani**

The use of natural fibers for textile materials began before recorded history. The oldest indication of fiber used is probably the discovery of flax and wool fabrics at excavation sites of the Swiss lake dwellers (7th and 6th centuries BCE). Several vegetable fibers were also used by prehistoric peoples. Hemp, presumably the oldest cultivated fiber plant, originated in Southeast Asia, then spread to China, where reports of cultivation date to 4500 BCE. The art of weaving and spinning linen was already well developed in Egypt by 3400 BCE, indicating that flax was cultivated sometime before that date. Reports of the spinning of cotton in India date back to 3000 BCE. The manufacture of silk and silk products originated in the highly developed Chinese culture; the invention and development of sericulture (cultivation of silkworms for raw-silk production) and of methods to spin silk date from 2640 BCE.

With improved transportation and communication, highly localized skills and arts connected with textile manufacture spread to other countries and were adapted to local needs and capabilities. New fiber plants were also discovered and their use explored. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Industrial Revolution encouraged the further invention of machines for use in processing various natural fibers, resulting in a tremendous upsurge in fiber production. The introduction of regenerated cellulosic fibers (fibers formed of cellulose material that has been dissolved, purified, and extruded), such as rayon, followed by the invention of completely synthetic fibers, such as nylon, challenged the monopoly of natural fibers for textile and industrial use. A variety of synthetic fibers having specific desirable properties began to penetrate and dominate markets previously monopolized by natural fibers. Recognition of the competitive threat from synthetic fibers resulted in intensive research directed toward the breeding of new and better strains of natural-fiber sources with higher yields, improved production and processing methods, and modification of fibre yarn or fabric properties. The considerable improvements achieved have permitted increased total production, although natural fibers' actual share of the market has decreased with the influx of the cheaper, synthetic fibers requiring fewer man-hours for production.

### **The Specialty of the Jamdani Saree**

Traditionally woven saree of Bengal, the Jamdani saree is fabulously rich in motifs in geometric, figural, and floral patterns woven in a contrasting shade to the base fabric of silk or cotton. The motifs are often woven with maroon, white, green, black, silver, and golden-colored thread woven



into a gray or natural colored base fabric. It was considered at one time as one of the finest muslins in the world.

### **Classification and Properties of Jamdani**

Natural fibers can be classified according to their origin. The vegetable, or cellulose-based, the class includes such important fibers as cotton, flax, and jute. The animal, or protein-base, fibers include wool, mohair, and silk. An important fiber in the mineral class is asbestos.

The vegetable fibers can be divided into smaller groups based on their origin within the plant. Cotton, kapok, and coir are examples of fibers originating as hairs borne on the seeds or inner walls of the fruit, where each fiber consists of a single, long, narrow cell. Flax, hemp, jute, and ramie are bast fibers, occurring in the inner bast tissue of certain plant stems and made up of overlapping cells. Abaca, henequen, and sisal are fibers occurring as part of the fibrovascular system of the leaves. Chemically, all vegetable fibers consist mainly of cellulose, although they also contain varying amounts of such substances as hemicellulose, lignin, pectins, and waxes that must be removed or reduced by processing.

The animal fibers consist exclusively of proteins and, with the exception of silk, constitute the fur or hair that serves as the protective epidermal covering of animals. Silk filaments are extruded by the larvae of moths and are used to spin their cocoons.

With the exception of mineral fibers, all-natural fibers have an affinity for water in both liquid and vapor forms. This strong affinity produces swelling of the fibers connected with the uptake of water, which facilitates dyeing in watery solutions.

Unlike most synthetic fibers, all-natural fibers are non-thermoplastic; that is, they do not soften when heat is applied. At temperatures below the point at which they will decompose, they show little sensitivity to dry heat, and there is no shrinkage or high extensibility upon heating, nor do they become brittle if cooled to below freezing. Natural fibers tend to yellow upon exposure to sunlight and moisture and extended exposure results in loss of strength.

All-natural fibers are particularly susceptible to microbial decomposition, including mildew and rot. Cellulosic fibers are decomposed by aerobic bacteria (those that live only in oxygen) and fungi. Cellulose mildews and decomposes rapidly at high humidity and high temperatures, especially in the absence of light. Wool and silk are also subject to microbial decomposition by bacteria and molds. Animal fibers are also subject to damage by moths and carpet beetles. Termites and



silverfish attack cellulose fibers. Protection against both microbial damage and insect attacks can be obtained by chemical modification of the fiber substrate; modern developments allow the treatment of natural fibers to make them essentially immune to such damage.

### **Weave & patters of Jamdani work**

The mastery of muslin cloth weaving used to depend usually on the art of making yarns. The most appropriate time for making yarns was early morning as the air then carried the highest moisture. For making yarns weavers needed taku, a bamboo basket, a shell and a stone cup. They used popcorn, rice or barley for starch. Before making Jamdani designs they used to dye their yarn and starch it. For dye they used flowers and leaves of creepers. For quality Jamdani they used yarn of 200 to 250 counts. These days' weavers buy fine yarn from the market and use chemical dyes instead of herbal dyes. For making Jamdani two weavers sit side by side at a loom to work on the delicate designs. Jamdani designs are made while the fabric is still on the loom. Coarse yarns are used for designs to make the motifs rise above the fabric. Originally, the motifs used to be made on gray fabric. Later on fabrics of other colors were also used. In the 1960s, Jamdani work on red fabric became very popular. The Victoria and Albert Museum of London has a fine collection of Jamdani with work in white on white fabric.

Whether figured or flowered, Jamdani is a woven fabric in cotton. This is a supplementary weft technique of weaving, where the artistic motifs are produced by a non-structural weft, in addition to the standard weft that holds the warp threads together. The standard weft creates a fine, sheer fabric while the supplementary weft with thicker threads adds intricate patterns to it. Each supplementary weft motif is added separately by hand by interlacing the weft threads into the warp with fine bamboo sticks using individual spools of thread. The result is a complex mix of different patterns that appear to float on a shimmering surface. The pattern is not sketched or outlined on the fabric but is drawn on graph paper and placed underneath the warp. Jamdani is a fine muslin cloth on which decorative motifs are woven on the loom, typically in grey and white. Often a mixture of cotton and gold thread was used.

Though mostly used for saris, Jamdani is also used for scarves and handkerchiefs. Jamdani is believed to be a fusion of the ancient cloth-making techniques of Bengal (possibly 2,000 years old) with the muslins produced by Bengali Muslims since the 14th century. Jamdani is the most expensive product of Dhaka looms since it requires the most lengthy and dedicated work.



Jamdani patterns are a mostly geometric, plant, and floral designs and are said to have originated thousands of years ago. Due to the exquisite painstaking methodology required, only aristocrats and royal families were able to afford such luxuries.

### **The Making Process of Jamdani**

The work of various chapters of Jamdani is going on day and night in almost every house of Jamdani villages. Some make yarn or collect yarn, some dye yarn, then roll over the yarn in a cylinder (Natai) with starch and let it dry. After drying, the yarn is spun into cocoons. There are different types of cocoons, like small, medium and large cocoons as per their need and uses. Then, with skillful hands, two people walk in parallel and pull the yarn on the pair of poles, this is the work of walking with the yarn (Tana-Hata). The women of the Jamdani villages use their fine hands to tie the yarn to the needle, the bamboo comb resembling a notch is called shana. Then the den (Norod) is prepared and with it the work of filling and pulling the bow is done. All this is a preparatory part of Jamdani weaving. Hauzainna (pre-weaver) plays a key role in performing all pre-knitting activities.

At the end of pre-knitting the main knitting work begins. In the weaving of Jamdani, ordinary bamboo and wooden pit-loom are used. Usually the master artisan sits on the right side of the loom and Junior artisan (Sagred) on the left side. These two artisans perform knitting in their matching. This is like a family story. Everything seems to be tied together in a strange magical form.

Jamdani is a fine muslin cloth on which decorative motifs are woven on the loom, typically in grey and white. Often a mixture of cotton and golden thread was used. The variety of designs captures itself in an impeccable weaving style. The Magical weaving continues to pull the thread by harmony & rhythm. Sometimes it takes weeks, sometimes months, even months after months or more. Motif is added separately by hand by interlacing the weft threads into the warp with fine bamboo sticks using individual spools of thread. The result is a complex mix of different patterns that appear to float on a shimmering surface. The pattern is not sketched or outlined on the fabric. Weavers work on motifs and designs from their memories and reveal their creative talents.

The industry has been passed down from one generation to the next. In this way a Jamdani tells the story of her tradition with absolute affection to each and every one of them.

A gathering of weavers, wholesalers and moneylenders is held at the Jamdani market in the first light of day from Friday morning night on the banks of Shitalaksha. From weavers to



moneylenders, from wholesalers to shopkeepers, online or offline, the story of a family tradition is fulfilled in the embrace of the love of Bengali Lalna. The weaving story of this strange Maya mantra, which is centuries old, is still going on.

### **Variety of Jamdani Work**

The most peculiar characteristic of Jamdani work is its geometric design. The expert weavers do not need to draw the design on paper. They do it from their instinct. Jamdanis have different names according to their design. Some names of jamdani are: 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, chandrarhar, 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 background designs of rose, jasmine, lotus, a bunch of bananas, a 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 bidar. If these flowers are arranged in a reclined position it is called tersa jamdani. It is not necessary that these designs ought to be 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 herem, the inner court.

The production cost of jamdani in Mughal time was very high and its quality control deserves a mention here. The Daroga-i-mulmul posted in the headquarters of Mulmul Khas office in Dhaka used to engage expert artisans for jamdani weaving paying them money in advance. Only the members of the royal family could afford these as the cost of such jamdani products was beyond the reach of ordinary people. The exclusive fabrics for them were made in some designated top-class weaving factories under the close supervision of the daroga (inspector). The emerging top businessmen also used to set up jamdani weaving factories like the royal families to get required Jamdani fabrics for their own use. They also used to engage jamdani artisans for this purpose. The demand of such precious jamdani products was very high in the international market. Royal families from Europe and Asia used to procure those costly clothes by placing orders in advance to the trading agencies in Dhaka. But the jamdani industry started declining in the early 19th century with the emergence of the mechanized textile industry and its cheaper products. The textile eventually mills captured the world cloth market.





The jamdani of Dhaka still survives with its new characteristics. It needs one to two months to make a standard jamdani sari. Although jamdani was made in different parts of Bangladesh in the past, the core villages to weave it were the villages that still survive with their past glories. The weavers of these villages are the main descendants of traditional jamdani weavers. The sites are Noapara, Dakkhin Ruposhi, Ruposhi Kajipara, Gandabpur, Shiddhirgonj, Mugrakul, Khidirpur, Imkoli, Tarabo, Khalpara, Dighborar, Khadun, Pabankul and Sultanbagh, Moreover, jamdani is also made by the artisan of nearby villages of Gonganagar, Kahina, Meergodai, Mahimpur, Harina Nodir Par and Meerkutircheo, and some areas of Sonargaon upazila. At present, Jamdani has also produced in Boalmari upazila of Faridpur district.

### **Current Situation and Problems**

From the middle of the 19th century, there was a gradual decline in the jamdani industry. A number of factors contributed to this decline. The subsequent import of lower quality, but cheaper yarn from Europe, started the decline. Most importantly, the decline of Mughal power in India deprived the producers of jamdani of their most influential patrons. Villages like Madhurapur and Jangalbari, (both in the Kishoreganj district), once famous for the jamdani industry went into gradual oblivion.

According to a national daily, a senior taanti or "ostad" earns about Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 per month. Junior weavers get much less, around Tk 1,600. As a result, many weavers do not want their children to come into the profession, preferring the more lucrative garments industry.

This challenge has two key parts. First, the socio-economic task is to make handloom a sustainable grassroots activity which can offer weavers and other ancillary trades a viable livelihood as opposed to a low paying and intermittent sector.

The second one relates to inducting creative, aesthetic ideas and vision into the minds of weaving community to make Indian handloom relevant to the lifestyle and choices made by modern Indians—the young, well-travelled global trendsetting fashion consumers and ambassadors for their nation and its unique textile heritage.

The biggest test the sector faces is to develop continuous, constant skilling of weavers at the village level by master weavers and supervisors. As part of the social contribution, we have introduced a lot of programs to upgrade the skills of weavers, enrich their looms, and help them adapt to newer





design approaches and bring about artisanal diversity, resulting in work for the weavers throughout the year.

Going forward, we believe that if the next generation isn't enthused by handloom business prospects and the capabilities of Indian Jamdani weaving, we will be left with a handful of weavers. Fortunately, the fact is that there is a change, and there is a new sense of revival as a new generation of weavers carry forward the art within the weaver family.

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 a 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, and others are helping designers create new Jamdani designs.

Jamdani is a symbol of aristocracy. The demand for quality Jamdani Sarees has increased greatly over the years.

## Conclusion

The government of Bangladesh undertook several measures to develop jamdani industry, which include establishment of a Jamdani Industrial Estate and Research Centre. Its objective is to enhance production quality and marketing facility, provide infrastructural facilities to the jamdani artisans, rehabilitate the jamdani entrepreneur and weavers, promote the socio-economic status of the skilled and experienced jamdani craftsmen, supply designs and samples of jamdani having high demand in markets to the artisans, conduct research of improving the qualitative standard and excellence of jamdani product. BSCIC started the construction work of the Jamdani Industrial Estate and Research Centre in Noapara village under Tarabo union of Rupgonj upazila in Narayanganj district in July 1993 and completed the work in 1999 at a cost of Tk 58.563 million across a land of 20 acres. At present, there are 412 industrial plots (each of 1200-2000 square feet) over 14.39 acres of land. So far 399 plots have already been allotted to the entrepreneurs.

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