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LIVING TRADITIONS

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SECTION FOUR
LIVING TRADITIONS IN WEAVING

JAMDANI

The *jamdani* is a fabric of fine cotton muslin of Bengali origin, with colored stripes and patterns. In the first half of the nineteenth century, James Taylor described the “figured” or “flowered” *jamdani*. In the late nineteenth century, T.N. Mukharji referred to this fabric as the *jamdani* muslin. Whether figured or flowered, the *jamdani* was a woven fabric in cotton, and it was undoubtedly one of the varieties of the finest muslin. It has been spoken of as the most artistic textile of the Bangladeshi weaver. Traditionally woven in and around Dhaka¹ and created on the loom in brocade, the *jamdani* is fabulously rich in motifs. As already stated in Chapter 5, the muslin is a plain cotton fabric of unbelievable delicacy and softness. We do not know exactly when it came to be adorned with floral patterns on the loom. It is, however, certain that in the Mughal period, most likely during the reign of either Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) or Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627), the figured or flowered muslin came to be known as the *jamdani*. Forbes Watson in his most valuable work titled *Textile Manufactures and Costumes of the People of India* holds that the figured muslins, because of their complicated designs, were always considered the most expensive productions of the Dhaka looms. He writes:

“Those manufactured for the Emperor Aurangzeb are stated to have cost £31 whilst some manufactured in 1776 reached the extravagant price of £56 per piece. The manufacture of the finer *jamdanis* was long retained a monopoly of the Government, the weavers, as stated by Raynal, being forbidden, under pecuniary and corporal penalties, to sell to any person a piece exceeding the value of 72 livres, or about three guineas.”²

Although the weaving of fabulous *jamdanis* declined abruptly because of the fall of the Mughal aristocracy in the nineteenth century, weavers continued to flower cotton fabrics. As a result, the weaving of *jamdanis* has not only survived to this day but has become a major industry in Bangladesh.

Origin of the Jamdani

The origin of the *jamdani* is shrouded in mystery. Megasthenes, Greek ambassador in Chandragupta Maurya’s court, speaking of the costumes of the people of India, writes: “their robes are worked in gold, and ornamented with various stones, and they wear also

flowered garments of the finest muslin.” “No conventional ornament is probably more ancient than the colored stripes and patterns we find on Indian cotton cloths,” says G. C. M. Birdwood.⁴ On the testimony of Megasthenes we may hold that the flowered garments of the finest muslin, which came to be known as the *jamdani* in the Mughal period, can be traced far back to the Maurya period (c.321-185 BCE) or even earlier.

Sources of Jamdani Fibers

Fibers are the raw materials for all fabrics. Fibers are of two kinds: natural fibers and manufactured fibers. Natural fibers come from plants, animals, and minerals. Manufactured fibers are made from wood pulp, cotton linters, or petrochemicals. The most widely used plant fiber is cotton. Silk is an important animal fiber. Rayon is one of the fourteen manufactured fibers. In olden days, cotton fibers were the raw materials for the *jamdani*. Spinners would first twist cotton fibers into yarns. Then weavers would weave the yarns into fabrics. Today manufactured fibers, especially rayon, have come into use in *jamdani* weaving.

Jamdani Weaving

Weaving is the art of making cloth, mats, baskets, hats, and other articles by crossing two sets of threads or narrow strips over and under each other. To make cloth, the weaver uses the following two sets of threads: (1) the warp and (2) the weft. The warp stretches lengthwise on a loom, and the weft is a set of crosswise threads that the weaver repeatedly draws over and under the warp. The weft is also called the woof or the filling. The *jamdani* is considered to be the most famous of the fine and lightweight patterned cloth. The pattern detailing is laborious, since *jamdani* weaving requires a delicate touch and dexterity of the highest order. In order to appraise *jamdani* weaving as a living tradition in Bangladesh, we need to look back. In *Descriptive and Historical Account of the Cotton Manufactures of Dacca* (published by John Mortimer in 1851) James Taylor gave a vivid account of *jamdani* weaving:

“In manufacturing figured (*jamdani*) fabrics, two weavers sit at the loom. They place the pattern, drawn upon paper, below the warp, and range along the track of the woof a number of cut threads equal to the flowers or parts of the design intended to be made; and then, with two small fine-pointed bamboo sticks, they draw each of these threads between as many threads of the warp as may be equal to the width of the figure which is to be formed. When all the threads have been brought between the warp they are drawn close by a stroke of the lay. The shuttle is then passed by one of the weavers through the shed, and the weft having been driven home, it is returned by the other weaver. The weavers resume their work with their pointed bamboo sticks, and repeat the operations with the lay and shuttle in the manner above described, observing each time to pass the flower threads between a greater or less number of the threads of the warp, in proportion to the size of the design to be formed.”⁵

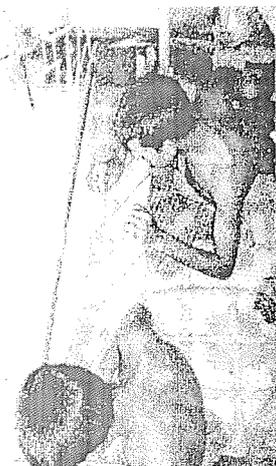
Jamdani weaving, as described by T. N. Mukharji in *Art-Manufactures of India* (specially compiled for the Glasgow International Exhibition, 1888), is as follows:

“The long warp threads being arranged, the waving is begun as in the case of a piece of ordinary cloth, and a pattern of the embroidery drawn on paper is pinned beneath. As the weaving goes on, the workman continually raises the paper pattern to ascertain if his woof has approached closely to where

Jamdani Weaving

Photo :

Md. Zahurul Islam Bhuiyan



any flower or other figure has to be embroidered, and when the exact place is reached, he takes his needle (i.e., a bamboo splinter), and as each woof thread passes through the pattern, he sews down the intersected portion of it, and so continues until it is completed. When the embroidered pattern is continuous and regular, as in the usual Sari border, the weaver, if a skilful workman, usually dispenses with the aid of a paper pattern. Two persons generally work together at a piece of a jamdani, by which a great saving of time is effected."

In *Traditional Indian Textiles* (published by Thames and Hudson in 1991) John Gillow and Nicholas Barnard gives this description of *jamdani* weaving:

"The *jamdani* technique is essentially tapestry work, the wefts forming the pattern where needed, being threaded through the wraps with a wooden needle. Such short lengths of weft threads are then extended to complete a design by being looped and tied around a warp. Each design or motif of weft-patterned work may have two or more joins, skillfully sewn and woven so as to be invisible. By using thread as fine as the compound weave, the weft patterns seem to merge and float within the cloth, rather than appear as an overlay of woven decoration."

"The *jamdani* technique is essentially tapestry work, as wefts form the pattern where needed and are threaded through the warps with a bamboo needle, rather than in a shuttle or on a bobbin," says Nicholas Barnard.⁶

Ilay Cooper and John Gillow describe *Jamdani* weaving in these words:

"Jamdani textiles are discontinuous extra-weft fabrics of gauze-like muslin in which areas of detail are created by winding thread around the warps using small bobbins or pieces of card. The supplementary wefts are not taken all the way across the fabric, from one selvedge to the other, but restricted to each distinct section of patterning."⁷

As we observed in our fieldwork, in weaving a *jamdani* two weavers sit at a bamboo loom, which is called *tant* in Bangla. It has a dugout pit below. The weavers—a *ustad* (master weaver) and a *shagred* (apprentice)—sit upright with their feet in the pit, while the loom is so installed as to rise before them. The *ustad* (from the Persian *ustad*) sits on the right, while the younger *shagred* (from the Persian *shargid*) sits on the left. The fine threads of the warp are massed so densely as to weave into it the intended design with a smooth, pointed pen. This pen is the weaver's carved wooden *kandur*. The master weaver cuts through the warp with the *kandur*, moves it below to the right and raises it above, looping a colored thread and bringing it back to the right. He repeats this process across the warp to create the weft. He loops the weft by carrying it to the left, beats it, shifts the shed and thus creates parts of each motif. As he shifts the shed each time, the other weaver returns the shuttle through the warp to the former to begin again. Two repeated operations with the new wefts, one to the right and one to the left, set the design within the web of the fabric. The whole process, though time-consuming and strenuous, is very rhythmic. The background of the fabric is usually gray, ornamented with light or brightly colored designs.

It is indeed amazing that there is no machine to set the intricate pattern. Master weavers like Showkat Ali and Enamul Haque need no drawings at hand; they can work on a pattern instantly without the aid of a sketch. We watched them at work. They sit to the right, with a helper to the left, and pierce the weft by hand and eye; running an

extra weft into the warp and then securing it with two passes of the shuttle. The designs, heavy or light, are angular and geometric.

Confusion Concerning the Jamdani

The *jamdani* is a textile that has traditionally meant a woven fabric. Its specialty lies in the fact that its stripes and patterns that form the decorative motifs are all woven along with the fabric on the loom. The decorative motifs are neither printed nor embroidered but brocaded. The muslins that were once embroidered by Muslims in Dhaka were *chikans* and *kasidas*, not *jamdanis*.

In the late nineteenth century, T. N. Mukharji, in describing *jamdani* weaving, appears to have first created the confusion when he wrote that “a pattern of the embroidery drawn on paper is pinned beneath.” In 1908, G. N. Gupta described the “figured muslins of Dacca” as “embroidery done in the process of weaving with needles of bamboo or tamarind wood.”⁸ Gupta’s statement is also misleading, for he unnecessarily uses the word “embroidery” in his description of the *jamdani*. The confusion continued as some writes, without understanding the technological aspects of embroidery and weaving, dealt the *chikan* and *kasida* embroideries of Dhaka conjointly with the *jamdanis*. George Watt, a British scholar, in an effort to remove the confusion, said:

“*Jamdanis* may be elaborately embroidered with brightly coloured floss silks. This is mostly in bad taste; it rarely follows in any way the pattern of the *jamdani* and thus appears as an after-thought.

“It may be added in conclusion that a serious mistake has arisen through writers on Indian Arts transferring the *jamdanis* from woven to embroidered fabrics, the use of the expression “loom embroideries” having been thought sufficient distinction. But a consequence of this has been the entire destruction of the study of embroidery as a separate branch of Indian Art—a result highly undesirable.”⁹

But the confusion still continues to this day. For example, AUM Fakhruddin has written: “The famous Jamdani products woven from superfine cotton or silk yarn are embroidered or inlaid on the loom with art silk, gold and silver threads.”¹⁰ Among the modern scholars, Henry Glassie is the first to notice that “the technical descriptions in the literature” are sometimes so confused as to lead people to think of decorative motifs on a *jamdani* as being embroidered rather than brocaded.¹¹

Embroidery and brocading are completely two different arts, and one must understand the fundamental difference between the two. Embroidery is the art of stitching decorations on a fabric or similar material with a needle and threads. Although it has become the convention to describe the *jamdani*’s weaving tool as a needle, *jamdani* weaving has nothing to do with embroidery, which is never done on the loom. Brocading is the weaving of designs on a fabric. Unlike the brocade, which is a cloth with designs woven into it with heavy yarns, the *jamdani* is a fabric with designs woven into it with lighter yarns. On a cloth, brocade designs are woven either by hand or by machine, and its cloth may be of cotton, linen, silk, velvet, wool, rayon, or any

other fiber. Designs on the *jamdani* are always woven by hand. Materially and technically, the *jamdani* is not the brocade; it is comparable with the brocade insofar as its method of weaving designs is concerned. The weaving instrument that the *jamdani* weaver uses looks like a smooth, pointed pen; therefore, we had better not describe it as a needle.

Jamdanis in the Early Twentieth Century

Jamdanis from Dhaka were on view at the Delhi Exhibition of 1902-1903. From the catalogue published for this exhibition, we get a fairly good picture of the *jamdanis* in the early twentieth century. The patterns seen in the *jamdanis* at that time were unquestionably Persian in origin. This proves beyond doubt that the designs introduced by the Mughals for figured muslins continued into the early twentieth century. The fabric was then usually a piece of grey cotton, ornamented with blue-black designs, occasionally with gold and silver wire. When made in the form of a sari, the end had large bold corner designs resembling the cone pattern of the Kashmiri shawl. The field of the sari had as a rule numerous small bunches or sprays of flowers, the most common being a circular design resembling the *chameli* (jasmine). On one side was the tubular flower with its spreading petals, and around and below were leaves like those of the sweet-smelling *sambak*. These and similar sprays were scattered all over the surface or grouped in diagonal lines.

The saris, which were on view at the Exhibition, were of the most fashionable kinds in those days. One was a *Nilambari Jarao Shopa Terchi* with the diagonal floral pattern worked in wavy silver lines on a pure black texture. This was made by Gokal Chandra Basak of Rugganj in Dhaka district. It obtained a bronze medal and was valued at Rs.500. Another was a *Asrafi Buter Chhit Jari* made by Sasi Mohan Basak of Nawabpur, Dhaka. The third one, called *Jarao Asrafi Butter Karchopi*, also made by Sasi Mohan Basak, was much like the previous one, except that it was ornamented with flat massive gold wire heavily laid on the surface and bent backwards and forwards at the points of attachment. The central flower had a cross in gold worked over it, and the cone patterns were similarly overlaid with gold. The fourth one was a *Terch-Asrafi Miltheti*. It was made by Shaik Matabdi of Dhaka and valued at Rs.337. Its field was covered with diagonal lines of black cotton flowers, and running across these were upright bands of gold rosettes and spots woven into the fabric, not embroidered over it. The corner pieces were so large that they became huddled together and covered the end of the sari. They were boldly outlined in gold wire interwoven with the black and red cotton, the latter color being toned down by the warp of dull grey cotton. A charming piece of work, this was representative of an extensive series of highly artistic fabrics that had then given Dhaka an honorable position among the famed seats of the world's art productions. The fifth one was a grey cotton sari with the floral weft pattern in pale gold silk. In this sari the blue cotton was also sparingly used and of a much paler and more artistic shade than was usually seen. This was made by Behari Lal Basak of Dhaka. The sixth one was a white sari with the pattern in red, yellow and blue-black

cotton, worked in a large and bold wavy design across the fabric. In those days cheaper *jamdani* saris were often woven on black cotton with massive designs in green, orange, ochre, yellow and white. These *jamdanis* were popularly known as *Nilambaris*. The seventh one was a *Nilambari* sari of this kind. Its corner pieces were in the usual cone-pattern, the outlines of the flowers being in yellow and red and the background dull green in massive patches above the black texture. This was made by Sasi Mohan Basak of Dhaka and was priced at Rs.40.

As is evident from the Delhi Exhibition of 1902-1903, Dhaka was also famous for *rumals* in *jamdani*. Particular mention may be made of a *Jarao Jamdani rumal* made by Radha Ballakh Basak of Dhaka. This was woven on grey cotton with four bands of black scrolls having gold rosettes at close intervals. Another *rumal* in *jamdani*, made by Sasi Mohan Basak of Dhaka, was a square sheet. This was representative of a large series that the Exhibition displayed. These squares of flowered muslins, as they were sometimes called, were used with a charming effect as table covers placed above some brilliantly colored cloth to show up the rich design of the *jamdani*.

Although the official catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition refers to the Basaks as the makers of the exhibited *jamdanis* with the exception of the *Terch-Asrafi Miltheti*, which was made by a Muslim, I doubt very much that the Basaks were really the weavers. As the surname—Basak—indicates, they were merchants. The Basaks appear to have bought the *jamdanis* from the weavers and then sent them to the Exhibition in their names.

Jamdani Weavers

In the early nineteenth century, as James Taylor noted, Hindus wove fine plain muslins, while Muslims wove figured or flowered muslins called *jamdanis*. In Taylor's time the weaving of muslins in normal grades declined abruptly in consequence of the British colonial policy that had destroyed the hand-loomed textile industry of Bengal and compelled its people to become mere consumers of machine-made cloth from Britain, but the weaving of muslins, beyond the reach of machines in fineness, continued though on a small scale. Eventually the weaving of fabulous muslins came to a halt. But the *jamdani* survived through the weaving of cotton cloth in normal grades.

The weavers, all of them Muslims, live in the villages that run together, north of Tarabo, along the bank of the Shitalakshya River. In the past all the *jamdani* weavers were men, but now many women have risen to mastery. Firoza Begum is one of them. Girls are entering the trade in slowly increasing numbers.

Rupshi: the Heart of Jamdani Weaving

In the countryside, east of Dhaka City, across the river from Demra, bamboo sheds line the road through the village of Rupshi of Rupganj upazila, in Narayanganj district. These are weaving shops sheltering thousands of looms on which Muslim men and women weave *jamdanis* for both local and international consumption. Most of the weaving shops are located in two sections—Kazipara and Noapara—of Rupshi. Each

weaving shop is built on a raised platform of earth. Posts impaled on the perimeter carry the walls of woven bamboo and the roof of tin. Inside, pits are dug for each loom.

The Loom

The loom is called *tant*. Locally produced, it speaks of the ingenuity of the weaving community. Henry Glassie has given a graphic description of the loom:

“The loom, a pit loom like those common in the Indian subcontinent, has two harnesses and a swinging beater, something like the *takahata* of Japan or the old European box loom. Four planted posts of bamboo outline the frame. The beam from which the warp is unrolled hangs from the back posts. The beam on which the cloth is rolled rides on a pair of stout posts in the front. Both beams are levered and pegged in tension. Sticks lashed as grits between the posts at the sides carry a pole that crosses above, end to end, parallel to the cloth and warp beams. From it the loom’s machinery dangles. Strings fall to hold sticks at both ends of which strings drop to suspend the heddles through each of which, in alteration, half the warp is threaded. Strings from each heddle are tied to pedals in the pit, so the shed can be shifted by tramping down on one, then the other. From the beam above, a read beater hangs.

“The one complex component in the loom, the reed, the *sana*, is made by women in the village of Chochonpara, near Demra, who splinter bamboo into silvers, shave them smooth, then bind them with cotton thread into a tight series. The *sana* usually consists of fourteen hundred or eighteen hundred slices of bamboo, though reeds with counts above two thousand are known. Beside each slick silver of bamboo runs one thread in the fine warp.”¹²

Showkat Ali

Showkat Ali has been weaving *jamdanis* since boyhood and has become a great master. He has risen through the trade. Because of his mastery and fame he receives special commissions. He once spent four months weaving a very expensive *jamdani sari* for a wealthy lady, who paid him forty thousand taka. This *sari* was brocaded in gold. Showkat Ali participated in many textile exhibitions and fairs sponsored by different organizations in Bangladesh and received many awards for his excellent craftsmanship. In 1993, the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, a national organization promoting arts and crafts, selected him to go to India for one month to demonstrate the weaving of *jamdani saris* in New Delhi, Calcutta and Kerala. In 2000, he was commissioned by the Bangladesh National Museum to weave a number of *jamdani saris* for preservation in the Museum’s permanent collection. Thus he is one of the leading artists whose works have been saved for posterity as documented examples of traditional art. In 2002, he participated as a *jamdani* weaver from Bangladesh in the 36th annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall, Washington, D. C., in the United States. One million visitors attended this festival, which was organized on a specific theme—The Silk Road Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust. Showkat Ali demonstrated his superb skill by weaving a *jamdani sari* on a loom (taken from his own shop in Bangladesh). He amazed thousands of viewers for two weeks.

Enamul Haque

Enamul Haque learned weaving at the age of twelve from Noor Husain, a friend of his father. Initially he was in Ghulam Maula’s employment. He established his own workshop with two looms in 1995. Now he has five looms. He employs three weavers

including his younger brother. Though much younger than Showkat, Enamul is also a master weaver and has participated in many textile exhibitions and fairs sponsored by different organizations in Bangladesh. Commissioned by the Bangladesh National Museum in 2000, he spent six months weaving a superb *jamdani sari* and received thirty-five thousand taka. This is one of the finest *jamdanis* produced in modern Bangladesh. Thus he is also one of the leading artists whose work has been saved for posterity as a documented example of traditional art. He was also invited to participate as a *jamdani* weaver from Bangladesh in the 36th annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall, Washington, D. C., in the United States, but due to the circumstances beyond his control he was unable to attend it. However, he was recognized in the catalogue published by the Smithsonian Institution for this festival.

The Jamdani as a Sari

The most fascinating *jamdani* is the one made in the form of a sari.¹³ Its quality and cost depend on the fineness of the warp, the count of threads that pass through the *sana*, and the weight of the design. Once the *jamdani* sari was woven in Dhaka in counts up to 200s. Today it is woven in 80s-120s counts. According to Rta Kapur Chishti, the finest of the *jamdanis* "had a high reed and pick count in the white or natural cotton ground with a slightly lower count yarn or a piled yarn for extra-weft, creating a shadow effect on the gossamer ground."¹⁴ Showkat Ali called the *jamdani* sari a luxury item.

Usually two weavers work two weeks to make a *jamdani* sari that brings two thousand taka at market. Cheaper *jamdani* saris can be made by two weavers in two to three days. The time-span is wide for expensive *jamdani* saris, ranging from four weeks to six months.

Motifs in Jamdani Weaving

In its prime, the *jamdani* of Bangladesh was arguably the most spectacular cloth in the Indian subcontinent. Since its emergence it has given us a fascinating array of motifs, most of which are rooted in the land and nature.

In the Mughal period, the motifs were unquestionably Persian in origin. While the original motifs have survived, many new ones have emerged in accord with local flowers and plants or symbols of indigenous origins. Some of the Persian motifs are *golab buti* or rose flowered, *chameli buti* or jasmine flowered, *gul daudi buti* or chrysanthemum flowered, *buti jhardar*, *toradar*, *butidar*, *tercha*, *jalar*, *phuldar*, *turanj*, *jamewar-buti*, and *panna hazara*.

According to Showkat Ali, there are one hundred and sixty motifs. Of the many terms used nowadays to denote floral and other motifs in *jamdani* saris, some are still Persian names. The field of a *jamdani* sari often has numerous bunches or sprays of sweet-smelling or charming flowers. *Buti* is a single flower not connected by a *jali* or trellis. On one side of a *jamdani* sari are the flowers (roses, jasmynes or chrysanthemums) with their spreading petals, and around and below are leaves. *Buti jhardar* denotes sprays of flowers. When the flowers are large and life-like, the motif is called *toradar*. When small flowers or sprigs are scattered all over the surface, it is called *butidar*. When sprays of flowers are grouped in diagonal lines, the motif is known as *tercha*. When the floral ornamentation spreads like a network over the fabric, it is called *jalar*. The expression *phuldar* is used when a running

floral pattern covers the entire field. *Turanj* is the name for the cone-pattern. The local name for *turanj* is *kalka*. *Jamewar-buti* generally denotes flowers of a large size arranged in rows. A very elaborate and costly design is *panna hazara* or a thousand emeralds. This designation is given when the sprays of flowers are connected together like the settings of a jewel. Of the indigenous floral and other motifs, some of the more popular ones are *genda-buti*, *fardi-buti*, *pan-buti*, *tara-buti*, *duria*, *shaburga*, and *karalla*. *Genda-buti* is the flowering of marigold. *Fardi-buti* denotes minute spots or dots. The *pan-buti* design is heart-shaped like the betel leaf. *Tara-buti* is a star-shaped speck. *Duria* is a striped pattern, and *shaburga* is a spotted design. The *karalla* pattern, named after a vegetable, is of an egg-shape, somewhat tapering to a point at each end.

“Light or heavy, sprinkled or continuous, simple or complex, the designs are angular, repetitive, and geometric. They are named for things out of the world to which the geometric forms bear, often fanciful, resemblance. The usual objects of reference are alive with brightness, rich with color, and graceful in shape: jewels and stars or birds and flowers, the peacock and swan, the lotus or lily. Names are chosen to evoke natural beauty, which is identified with brilliance, color, and grace, and these qualities intensify in motifs titled in combination, such as the star-flower or the swan-flower.”¹⁵

Dhakai Jamdani or Dhakai Sari

Beyond Bangladesh the *jamdani* sari is popularly known as the *Dhakai jamdani*, the *Dhakai jamdani* sari, or simply the Dhakai sari. Rabindranath Thakur, the great poet of Bengal, refers to a *jamdani* sari as “Dhakai sari” in a poem:

The room she did not enter
Though in and out of my mind she goes all the while
Wearing her Dhakai sari with a touch of vermilion on her forehead.

The *Dhakai jamdani* is basically the most charming extra-weft patterned *sari*. According to Rta Kapur Chishti, “the *Dhakai jamdani* is the first serious and significant extra-weft patterned sari, which cannot be compared with any other at least in the cotton range” if we evaluate it in the context of the saris seen until now from the common heritage of Bengal.¹⁶ “The pick by pick building up of its extra-weft patterning with plied yarn provides a solid, smooth edge to the patterned elements against a translucent ground fabric.”¹⁷ The solid outline and refinement of the patterned elements are the distinguishing features of the *Dhakai jamdani* sari in pure cotton. A cursory look at the traditional *Dhakai jamdani* range will give us an idea of the richness of this extra-weft patterned sari. Here are some examples:

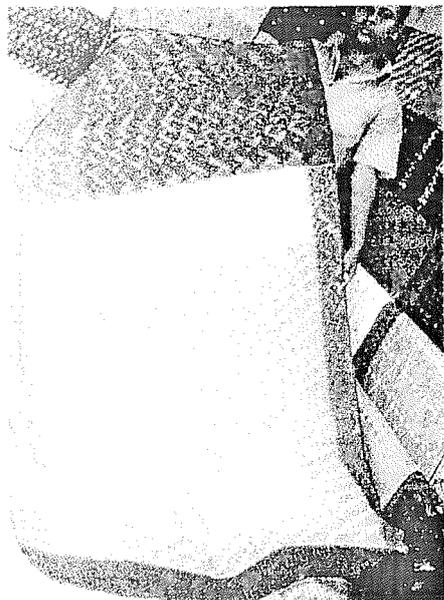
Phool paar (floral border sari) represents black for the extra-weft patterning in the borders and endpiece.

Paakhi phool kor (bird’s wing patterned sari) is an example of the fine black and white *jamdani sari*.

Phool bel kalka konia (floral patterned and paisley cornered endpiece sari) moves a step ahead by using an all-over body pattern in white on white with black and white in the border and two corner motifs making up the endpiece. The intricacy of the weave and the sheer weight of the extra-weft patterning are the unique features of this sari.

Phool bel (floral patterned sari) represents indigo blue in the patterned elements of this sari.

Dhan chhori (sheaf of rice patterned sari) combines red with *zari* gold in the extra-weft elements highlighting and uplifting the colored patterning.



Jamdani Marketing

Photo :

M. Zahurul Islam Bhuiyan

Marketing

Some weavers fill orders from firms in Bangladesh and India. Special commissions are rare. Most *jamdanis* go to the market town of Demra, which marks the eastern edge of Dhaka district. On Fridays at dawn, weavers flock in Demra, holding neatly folded *jamdanis* above their shoulders. They circulate continually around the buyers. When a seller is stopped by a buyer, haggling begins over the price of the *jamdani* that buyer has liked after opening its fold. The moment the price is negotiated, the buyer drops it into his pile and the seller gets the money. As many as seven hundred jamdani saris come to market, and most are sold by nine in the morning. With new money in hand, the weavers pause for tea in the nearby stalls and discuss the day's prices. They shop for their needs—parts for looms are sold around the edges of the mercantile turmoil—and then head for home. The buyers take their bundles to the retailers in Dhaka City, especially to the stores at New Market, where the *jamdanis* will be sold for about double the price the weaver received.

To this day, the *jamdani* weaver is deemed the finest weaver in South Asia. The best *jamdani*, like the best *murti*, is “the yield of concentration, the moment in which planning melts into performance, and attention focuses precisely upon the little act in which the past and future merge.”¹⁸

End Notes:

1. By Dhaka is meant the original Dhaka district, which now consists of four districts. The region that has been renowned for *jamdani* weaving is now located in Narayanganj district.
2. Quoted in Sir George Watt, *Indian Art at Delhi, 1903* (Calcutta 1903), 283.
3. G. C. M. Birdwood, *The Arts of India*, (Calcutta 1988), 235.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Quoted in Sir George Watt, *Indian Art at Delhi, 1903* (Calcutta 1903), 284.
6. Nicholas Barnard, *Arts and Crafts of India*, (London 1993), 138.
7. Ilay Cooper and John Gillow, *Arts and Crafts of India*, (London 1996), 95.
8. G. N. Gupta, *A Survey of the Industries and Resources of Eastern Bengal and Assam for 1907-1908*, (Shillong 1908).
9. Sir George Watt, *Indian Art at Delhi, 1903*, Being the Official Catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition, 1902-03, (Calcutta 1903), 286-287.
10. AUM Fakhruddin, 'Jamdani: The Exquisite Fabric of Bangladesh,' in Shamsuzzaman Khan (ed.), *Folklore of Bangladesh*, Volume Two, (Dhaka 1992), 25.
11. Henry Glassie, *Art and Life in Bangladesh*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis 1997), 479.
12. Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, 409.
13. A sari is a long flowing piece of cloth, usually six yards in length and forty inches in width. It makes an artistic female costume. Half of it is wrapped around the waist as an improvised skirt, and the remaining half climbs over the bust. Numerous are the motifs woven into *jamdani saris*.
14. Rta Kapur Chishti, *Saris of India*, (New Delhi 1995), 184.
15. Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, 415-416.
16. Rta Kapur Chishti, *op. cit.*, 204.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Henry Glassie, *op. cit.*, 415.