

## Jamdani

*Rich history*  
The word Jamdani is of Persian origin, from 'Jam' meaning flower and 'Dani' meaning a site or a container. The earliest mention of Jamdani and its development as an industry is found in Kautilya's (about 3rd century BC), where it is stated that this fine cloth was used in Bengal and Punjab.

The cotton saris of Andhra Pradesh are a good example. The best known are the Godavari, Wanaparthy, Nander, Venkatesgiri, Uppada and Mangalagiri. Godavari and Wanaparthy are known for their check body and silk border and pollu carrying the motifs in gold. Sometimes wedding saris and some very special saris carried a Pithavari pallu, richly worked in gold.

Uppada and Venkatesgiri specialized in weaving fine pure cotton saris enriched with gold thread motifs woven in the Jamdani technique. The motifs woven in Venkatesgiri are stylized parrots, elephants, gold coins, and stylized leaf-forms, woven half in gold and half in cotton thread. Uppada's masters weave fine Jamdani patterns all over. They were known right through the independence moment as a place from where very fine khadi saris, woven on handlooms with handspun cotton were supplied.

Tamil Nadu developed cotton saris, which followed the pattern of silk saris very closely. Jamdani is a fabric of fine cotton muslin of Bengali origin, with colored stripes and patterns in the first half of the nineteenth century. Jenies Taylor described the figured or flowered Jamdani in the late nineteenth century. T. N. Mukherji referred to this fabric as Jamdani muslin. Whether figured or flowered, Jamdani is a woven fabric in cotton, and it is undoubtedly one of the varieties of the finest muslin. It has been spoken of as the most artistic textile of the Bangladeshis weaver. Traditionally woven around Dhaka and created on the loom beside Jamdani is fabulously rich in motifs.

## Varieties of Jamdani Work

Though mostly used for girls, Jamdani is also used for scarves and handkerchiefs. Jamdani is believed to be a fusion of the ancient cloth-making techniques of Uttaral (perhaps 2,000 years old) with the weaving 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 mostly of geometric, plant, and floral designs and are said to originate in Persian and Mughal fashions thousands of years ago. Due to the exquisite path-staking methodology required, only artisans and royal families were able to afford such luxuries.

The main peculiarity of Jamdani work is the geometric designs. The expert weavers do not need to draw the design on paper, but instead work from memory. Jamdani have different names according to their design (for instance, pena, hajar, dubb, lak, bandar, berak, jabar, shark, charbona & many others). Present-day Jamdani saris have on their ground designs of rose, jasmine, lotus, branches of bananas, branches of ginger and sage. A Jamdani with small flowers dispersed on the fabric is known as Budidar. If these flowers are arranged in repeated position it is

called tersu jandani. It is not necessary that these designs are made of flowers only. There can be designs with peacocks and leaves of creepers. If such designs cover the entire field of the sari it is called jalar naksha. If the field is covered with rows of flowers it is known as fulwar jandani. Duria Jandani has designs of spots all over. Belward jandani with colorful golden borders used to be made during the Mughal period, especially for the women of the inner court.

## The early History

The earliest mention of the origin of Jandani and its development as an industry is found in Kautilya's book of economics (about 300 AD) where it is stated that this fine cloth used to be made in Bengal and Pundra. Its mention is also found in the book of Periplus of the Eritrean Sea and in the accounts of Arab, Chinese and Italian travelers and traders. Four kinds of fine cloth used to be made in Bengal and Pundra in those days, viz khouna, dukul, pattorna and karpasi. From various historical accounts, folklore and stoks, it may be assumed that very fine fabrics were available in Bengal as far back as the first decade before Christ. Cotton fabrics like dukul and muslin did not develop in a day. Dukul textile appears to have evolved into muslin. Jandani designs and muslin developed simultaneously. The fine fabric that used to be made at Mousul in Iraq was called mosuli or hosulin. In his 9th century book *Sifat-al-Jawahir* the Arab geographer Solaiman mentions the fine fabric produced in a state called Rumay, which according to him, is the old name of the territory now known as Bangladesh. In the 14th century, Ibn Batuta profusely praised the quality of cotton textiles of Sonargaon. Towards the end of the 16th century the English traveler Ralph Fitch and historian Abul Fazl also praised the muslin made at Sonargaon.

## The Mughal Era

Without any shadow of doubt, it can be said that the jandani industry of East Bengal reached its zenith during the Moghul era. The art of making jandani designs on fine fabric reached its zenith during Mughal rule. There were handlooms in almost all villages of the Dhaka district. Dhaka, Sonargaon, Dharmraj, Titabari, Jangalbari and Bajipur were famous for making superior quality jandani and muslin. Traders from Europe, Iran, Armenia, as well as Mughal-Pathan traders used to deal in these fabrics. The Mughal Emperor, the Nawab of Dargal and other aristocrats used to engage agents at Dhaka to buy high quality muslin and Jandani for their masters' use. The golden age of Dhaka muslin began with Mughal rule. Since then the demand for jandani and muslin fabrics at home and abroad grew and this prompted further improvement in their manufacture. According to 18th century documents of the East India Company, a high official of the company was posted at Dhaka to buy mulmul khas and sarkar-i-ali. He had the designation of Daroga-i-mulmul. Every weaving factory had an office, which maintained records of the best weavers and other exports. Weavers had no fixed salary. They used to be paid the market value of the jandani or muslin they produced. It was the duty of the Daroga to keep a sharp eye at every stage of production. Mulmul khas worth about Re. 100,000 collected from Dhaka, Sonargaon and Jangalbari used to be sent to the Mughal court every year. According to a 1747 account of muslin export, fabrics worth Re 550,000 were bought for the Emperor of Delhi, the

## The current problems

At present, a major problem of the industry is that the weavers do not get adequate wages for their labour. According to a national daily, a senior taantli 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 to this profession. For many, the garments industry offers a lucrative alternative. A good piece of Jamdani sari needs the labour of one to two months, and the wage paid to the weavers does not compensate for their labour. The producers often do not have direct access to sari markets and because of their dependence on the middlemen, who often form informal cartels; they are deprived of their share of profit. Sometimes, the producers fail to recover the costs.

Thankfully, the government and other organizations are trying to revive the old glory of Dhakai Jamdani. In a bid to avoid the middleman they are trying to establish direct contact with the weavers. A Jamdnai Palli has been established near Dhaka. Jamdani, one of the oldest forms of cottage industry in Bangladesh, was once was a dying trade. It was successfully revived due to the pioneering work of entrepreneurs such as Monira Emdad. Tangail Sarce Kurir along with other sari stores on Baily Road, strive to support the thousands of weavers of Bangladesh who have struggled to keep this age old tradition and fashion alive. Organizations like Rajshahi Institute of Design, Shanto Mariam University of creative technolgy, etc. are helping designers create new Jamdani designs.

create new designs

The current problems

At present, a major problem of the industry is that the weavers do not get adequate wages for their labour.