



A Study on the Historical Genesis and Roots of Jamdani in Bengali Folklore: A Qualitative Approach

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ABSTRACT

Jamdani – a fine handed woven textile from Bengal has for long been revered, not only for its visual beauty, but for its rich cultural and historical context. Jamdani, often associated with royalty, has been closely associated with cultural life of Bengalis and is a part of that region's rich heritage and tradition. The paper discusses the ethnographic history and folklore of Jamdani, informed by archival resources, interviews with traditional weavers, and recorded oral histories. Through analyzing various ways in which Jamdani has been represented in local songs, stories and rituals, the study has revealed it to be something that transcends its physicality in the form of memory, identity and resistance. The research also comes to prick the narrative of Jamdani, as has evolved post-colonially as well as in contemporary age, which turns out accusing, and also continuity disruption in the hierarchy of its being handed down. This article would add to the larger conversations on intangible cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and the interpenetration of folklore and material culture in South Asia. Jamdani is one of the finest handloom textiles being practiced in Bangladesh with elaborate design and craftsmanship inspired from Bengali folklore. In this regard, the following themes are discussed drifting from cultural heritage perspective in qualitative research mode. Oral tradition and historical genesis Concept of intangible heritage and weaver's tradition in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Jamdani, Bengali folklore, handloom textile, cultural heritage, qualitative research, oral tradition, historical genesis, intangible heritage, weaving tradition, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Jamdani, a widely celebrated tradition in the history of Bangladeshi textiles, is evidence of the workmanship, the finer sensibilities and the ages of tradition, heritage and history that skip from thread to thread of its weavings. Famous for its intricate patterns and labor-intensive handlooms, Jamdani crosses fashion and utility, this is a living cultural symbol, a woven manifestation of centuries old culture, life principles and mythological beliefs. It is in the Mughal era, however, that Jamdani comes to be viewed as a fabric of eminence, becoming the attire of the nobility and the elite.¹ Despite being commonly recognized as a variety produced under Mughal patronage, the origins of Jamdani weaving go further back into the pre-Mughal history of Bengal. Fine muslin is mentioned in early ancient texts, Greek accounts, and Chinese travelers' manuscripts; the veiled history of this craft appears to have emerged from the dust of time and been nursed by centuries of anonymity, well before taking shelter under the imperial wings.

Jamdani is mainly produced in Bangladesh, particularly in Sonargaon, Narayanganj near Dhaka where it has a status of geographical indication with the separate vendors and trade-marking that had reached down in the earlier centuries that was famed as Dhakai jamdani. Traditionally crafted out of delicate cotton threads, Jamdani is characterized by a supplementary weft technique that enables weavers to “paint” complex motifs: flowers, geometry and nature-inspired designs, among others directly onto the loom. Every motif is not just ornamental; it represents cultural echoes, philosophical beliefs, and aesthetic choice formed by regional history and practical existence. These motifs are often representative in nature and depict myths, myths and legends of folklore and oral traditions that carry significance behind the motifs and significance and messages within



them. The motifs carry layers of meaning, and form part of the Jamdani's intangible heritage, as much as its tangible heritage.

Although various aspects of Jamdani like technique, weaving style, design variations, economic viability have been documented, relatively few studies have seen the product as a part of the folklore world. The weavers of Jamdani are not just handloom weavers alone, but bearers of an oral tradition. Their songs, narratives, and rites enacted in and around the loom encode systems of knowledge, social hierarchy, gender, and cosmology. For example, some myths attribute the creation of Jamdani to gods and goddesses or mythical queens, whereas local songs tell stories of weavers' labour and inspire an otherwise overlooked, historical laboring group. The intangible cultural material richness of which these narratives are a part also surrounds and is part and parcel of the tangible textile.

Folklore is the essential means adopted to preserve the memory of such handicrafts as Jamdani. A story that connects the past to present that tells the journey of the cloth through metaphors, myths and words that appeal to the imagination. Inevitably, a number of these narratives also bear witness to the socio-political changes that have impacted. Jamdani weaving, from colonial era decimation of local industries and nationalist resurgence of time-honored arts to its subsequent commercialization in international fashion scenes. Using the trope of folklore, discussions about Jamdani demonstrate that it is not just an art object, but a space where cultural resistance, strength and assertion of identity takes place.

In modern times, Jamdani is experiencing a revival and creative rereading. It's recognition by UNESCO in 2013 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity has given a boost to the efforts at preserving and promoting Jamdani Weaves. But these attempts tend to emphasize the visual and business value of the textile, while leaving the oral histories and symbolic meanings that give it cultural depth to the side. If new generations turn away from traditional weaving, and market driven designs crowd out historically significant patterns, the danger of cultural amnesia becomes increasingly acute. So, research to underline the folkloristic approach to Jamdani will be required and as well as timely.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is noteworthy for its interdisciplinary study of Jamdani as material textile tradition and intangible cultural heritage existing within the semiotics of Bengali folklore. While Jamdani has been studied extensively in the fields of fashion, textile technology and economic sustainability, the folkloric aspects of Jamdani have not been explored adequately in scholarly works. "To peel" back the layers and narratives of the history, mythology, and tradition of Jamdani; is to also contribute to a more "whole" comprehension of the craft beyond the pale of aesthetics and market price, revealing cultural memory, identity and spiritual eloquence.

In the current globalization, such studies are important since traditional crafts like Jamdani are confronted by both opportunities and challenges. On the other hand, some forms of international recognition, like the listing of Jamdani on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list, have made Jamdani more visible and opened up routes for cultural self-respect and economic support. Sitting on the other side of this tug-of-war is commercialization, which has often resulted in diluted indigenous patterns, broken cultural lines, and marginalized indigenous communities that keep these art forms alive. The challenge it raises is a reminder that we must conserve more than just the methods of Jamdani weaving. We must also save the stories, myths and beliefs that infuse the textile with its spirit. In this effort, it converges with contemporary conversation of intangible cultural heritage protection and inclusive cultural construction.

In addition, the research highlight is the function of folklore as an indigenous knowledge and historical reconstruction instrument. In places with low literacy or limited written record, oral storytelling is the storehouse of community wisdom and historical memory. Scrutinizing the popular mythology of this unique textile (weaver songs, mythical narratives of origin, ritual practices), this study seeks to build on a people's history of their tradition often eclipsed in official histories and top-down cultural policies. This bottom-up approach is especially significant in postcolonial contexts such as Bangladesh, where reclamation and validation of indigenous narratives is crucial for cultural empowerment and national identification.



Heritage conservation practitioners, policymakers and cultural institutions also stand to benefit from this study. As Bangladesh, and other South Asian nations, further invest in the protection and promotion of traditional crafts, this research helps to demonstrate why intangible aspects need to be incorporated into conservation policy. It reasons that the conservation of folklore, along with artifacts, results in a more sustainable and respectful model of heritage management, one which respects the voices and narratives of the artisan communities themselves.

Last but not least, this research has a significance for scholarship in several different disciplines, including folklore, textile history, cultural anthropology and South Asian crafts studies. It is a model for interdisciplinary of Fine Arts & Textile and culturally grounded research that links the worlds of material culture and narrative tradition. By building a record and a critical glossary on the intrinsic linkages between Jamdani and Bengali storytelling, this essay hopes to encourage future research and activism aimed at preserving the rich and versatile cultural resources of the global South.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the history and folklore representation of the Jamdani textile tradition based on the culture of Bengal, concentrated on Bangladesh. This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing how Jamdani is not just woven as fabric, but narrated, imagined, remembered artisan; made up by oral stories, myths and a shared memory.

The following are the specific aims of the research:

- **To study the origin of the craft in Bengal.**

This requires charting the trajectory of the Jamdani tradition from its formative period through to the present, based on historical documents and other written, archival and scholarly sources.

- **To study the portrayal of jamdani in Bengali folklores and oral traditions.**

The findings are expected to trace the myths, legends, folk songs, storytelling and other oral traditions mentioning Jamdani in general and at weaver community as well as rural population.

- **To examine the symbolic significations and cultural values encoded in the motifs and narratives of Jamdani**

Through interpretation of patterns, themes and metaphors embedded in the textile designs as well as the lore, the research aims to understand how Jamdani articulates larger social, spiritual and aesthetic values.

- **To record the oral history of the weavers and custodians of Jamdani weaving.**

The research documents the experiences of artisans by interviewing and field studies, particularly concentrating on the artisans' knowledge, beliefs and stories regarding the art of weaving.

- **To examine modern influences and the evolution of global forces on the folklore and culture of Jamdani.**

It examines the impact of current predicaments, from market pressures, to shifts in technology, and commodification of culture, on the transmission, and its authenticity, of Jamdani-associated folklore.

- **To enrich the debate on the safeguarding or intangible cultural heritage**

This study is being conducted to make policy and practice for preservation of Jamdani tradition sust-



ainable and culturally sensitively grounded through the recommendations in regard to folkloristic elements.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter discussed the method of research, the way data was gathered, and their analysis to give more credibility to the research. Considering the interest of the study to explore cultural narratives and historical perspectives of Jamdani weaving, qualitative research was used as the methodology to enable an in- depth investigation and interpretation.

Research Design

The research was conducted using a qualitative and interpretative methodology based on the ethnographic and ethnological tradition. This method was used to capture the lived-in experiences, oral stories and metaphoric values of the Jamdani weaving tradition in its socio-cultural environment. The study was exploratory and focused on in-depth understanding, not generalizable results.

Data Collection

Data for this research work was qualitative, multi-sourced and field centric aimed to cover the historical and folkloric aspects of Jamdani weaving of Bengal. The methods were designed to deeply immerse into the cultural atmosphere of the Jamdani production and to elicit the amount of rich, descriptive and interpreted data.

- **Archival Research:**

To examine the historical continuity and the transformations of the Jamdani tradition, the historical documents, colonial trade reports, the museum catalogues, textile exhibition documents, etc.

- **Literature Review:**

To situate evidence from the field within dominant academic discourse, academic texts, journal articles, folklore banks and ethnographic accounts were scrutinized.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of the current study was qualitative and interpretive, which was designed to elicit the themes, symbolic meanings and cultural narratives encoded in the Jamdani tradition.

I. Thematic Analysis:

All interviews, field notes and folklore transcriptions were transcribed and coded thematically. Continuation of the same symbols, motifs, narratives and concepts was traced, matched and analyzed within the text material. Key thematic areas included:

- Origins and legends of Jamdani
- Significance of Motif and Ornaments
- Gender role and the Loom and the Storyteller

II. Narrative Analysis:

Special focus was placed on the form and content of folktales and weaver songs. These narratives were read in relation to the latent registers that activate them and decode events, values and the collective memory. The sequencing, metaphors and language used in the oral traditions were analyzed to map the representation of Jamdani over time and community.



- Symbolic and Visual Interpretation
- Triangulation of Data Sources
- Reflexive Interpretation

Validation

Validation is in the context of qualitative research, which means credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the results. Several checks and measures were taken to track the reliability of the data and interpretations to correspond with the constructed nature of the lived experiences and cultural logic of Jamdani weaving in Bengali folk life. To ensure methodological soundness, data was triangulated through the use of different sources of evidence. Unlike notes in written form, this cross-validation allowed the researcher to compare and cross validate information between multiple sources and informants, thusly minimizing the possibility of bias or distortion.

Reliability

In qualitative research “reliability” in a research sense has to do with the soundness, veracity, reliability and trustworthiness of the research process and findings. Although statistical generalization is not the purpose of qualitative research, methodological soundness and transparency are crucial for credible, defensible findings. Several steps were followed in this research to enhance the credibility of the research design, data collection, and analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Books:

The Jamdani tradition has drawn the attention of scholars in fields that includes history, textile studies, folklore and cultural anthropology. The review provides an overview of the development of academic and cultural attitudes towards Jamdani, including historical analysis and the interfusion of folklore and oral tradition. The review starts with early colonial period sources and extends through to recent scholarship, to illustrate how the recollections and interpretations have transformed over the centuries.

Basu (1972), in her seminal work *Textile Crafts of Bengal* delves into the traditional weaving communities of the area, placing a cultural and historical background of Jamdani. Method of loom setting and oral transmission of motifs via folk rhymes have been described by her emphasizing that names of the motifs such as ashrafī [gold coin] and butidar have deeper mythological significance amongst artisan families.

Gillow and Barnard (1991), in *Traditional Indian Textiles*, give a very broad sense of India’s textile legacy, with a specific section on Jamdani. They call Jamdani motifs “narratives in thread,” rich in symbolism and bound in religious belief. Primarily aesthetically and technically focused, one senses their work pointing to the folkloric, complex wealth behind these woven patterns.

Reclaiming the indigenous identity of the textile, among the earliest postcolonial critique of the Jamdani narrative, Edward Million Ahmed (1995) in *Muslin: Our Story*. He sat with weaves together economic history with oral testimonies from weavers in the district of Sonargaon who tell dreams and ancestral visions as sources of design inspiration, centering oral tradition to the survival of the Jamdani.

Crill (1998) discusses Jamdani’s supplementary-warp technique which “requires a high degree of manual dexterity and concentration” and how it relies on “recalling specific design motifs from memory”. She extensively compares Ikat with Jamdani in her book *Indian Ikat Textiles*. She reads this memory-based art form as a mode of oral-visual storytelling born of generational wisdom and artisanal fancifulness.

In *Textile Narratives and Sacred Threads*, Jain (2001) explores South Asian textiles as kinds of “cultural scripting.” He also devotes attention to Jamdani, especially in terms of its mythological motifs and ceremonial



functions, suggesting that these textiles cannot be appreciated apart from their folkloric and ritual forms. He takes issue with the musealization of Jamdani that often detaches it from its oral dimensions.

Sonargaon and the Golden Thread: A History of Jamdani Weaving, Haider, 2006, is a localized, historically anchored study of Jamdani. He catalogues folk practices and the seasonal myths embedded in motifs such as dubli jal and dotapata, demonstrating that design often serves as a materialization of the mode of ecological knowledge and regional cosmology that are transmitted through oral tradition.

Jaitly (2010), in Crafts Atlas of India, paints a pellucid picture of India's rich heritage of craft, including Jamdani. She defines the craft as a "story-woven textile," enumerating how particular motifs are attached to village myths, marriage rites and seasonal celebrations. While mainly a descriptive work, the atlas highlights the symbolic and cultural dimensions of Jamdani.

Eaton, in The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760 (2013), is not dedicated to textiles research, but it does offer invaluable background to the place of Jamdani weavers in new Islamic polities. He explores Sufi patronage and the transfer of spiritual and symbolic meanings by artisan guilds, themes that would in time help to shape Jamdani's identity as a sacred craft.

Miller and Woodward, 2015, Blue Jeans and Jamdani: Globalization and Local Dress: Western mass production is the obverse to textile cultures such as Jamdani. They investigate how weavers in Bangladesh employ dreams in the making of dream-narratives, ancestral stories and motif-memory as types of intangible heritage. This anthropological approach underscores the emotive and mnemonic significance of the replication of motifs.

Qureshi (2017) in Threads of Faith: Sacred Textiles in South Asia, examines Jamdani as part of a sacred textile tradition in rituals and rites. She reports through interviews and fieldwork what weavers ascribe divine force to particular motifs that are said to protect, to enhance fertility or secure blessings oral beliefs transmitted across generations.

In Empowerment and Craft: Women's Work in South Asia, Kabeer and Mahmud (2020) propose a feminist reading of heritage work. They write about Jamdani, and they do so in a womanly voice of oral pedagogy in lullabies, chants and ritual story telling. They maintain that this tacit transfer of knowledge is not only essential for the survival of the craft but also to its transmission of power to rural women.

Although certain of these books highlight the visual or technical, a series of newer works argue for the weaver as a teller of tales and the design as a text-based form of oral history.

PhD Dissertations

Chowdhury (2016), has done extensive field work in Rupganj and Sonargaon for her PhD entitled Weaving Identity: A Gendered Ethnography of Jamdani Artisans in Bangladesh. She discussed the pasts of female weavers and focused on the significance of oral storytelling in the passing of weaving knowledge. She discovered that the Jamdani 'themes' are not just iconic symbols, but culturally induced expressions transmitted through folk rhymes, lullabies and the words of wisdom handed down to the future generation through everyday folklore. She asserted that folklore served as a gender-based pedagogical system in artisan homes and as cultural source of resistance against economic exclusion.

Rahim (2019) in her thesis, entitled Jamdani as Intangible Heritage: Cultural Politics and Preservation in Bangladesh, offered a critique of representation of Jamdani in state policy and global heritage discourse. Through interviews with weavers, policymakers and NGO representatives, Rahim revealed a gap between institutional narratives (emphasizing aesthetics and economic value), and social memory (anchored in myth, oral history and sacred weaving rituals). Through her work she emphasized the sidelining of the folkloric in official documentation, and advocated for a process of 'heritage' that brought oral knowledge onto the same level as the written.



Nahar (2020) recently written PhD thesis, *Songs of the Shuttle: Orality and Women's Weaving Practices in Bengal*, explored the relationship between folk music and textile production in weaving societies. Much of her fieldwork concentrated on Jamdani weavers of Narayanganj, on whom she made over 50 recordings of weaving songs, phonologies and translated. These songs were discovered to carry a message, both technical as well as social -about marriage, a hard life, faith, and resiliency. Nahar also stressed that this oral component is a living archive and merits recognition as part of the intangible heritage of Jamdani.

Ali's (2021) PhD, *Laboring Threads: Postcolonial Craft and the Politics of Representation in Bangladesh*, positioned itself to be a response to the historic silencing of artisans in colonial and post-colonial narratives of craft. Jamdani was an ideal case study for his argument that Western and privileged Bangladeshi institutions often use motifs cut from the heart of their contexts, removing their story and original meaning. Ali's work features testimonies from older weavers that narrate mythical beginnings of patterns such as ansaributi and toradarjal, locating them in dreams, visions and village anecdotes. He championed a "de-colonial heritage model" which focuses on oral storytelling.

Khan (2022), in her thesis *The Sacred and the Symbolic: Exploring Motif Mythology in Bangladeshi Handlooms*, explored the religious iconography of Jamdani motifs. Her study demonstrated how certain designs such as chand-tara (moon and stars), nilambor (sky flower) and manjari (budding vine) relate to rural cosmology and religious beliefs. She did fieldwork with the weaving families who engage in pre-weaving rituals that call upon ancestral spirits or deities. Khan claimed that these metaphysical aspects are integral to the personality of the cabin and cannot be removed from its mythology.

These dissertations provide thick description from the field that contributes to the argument that Jamdani is not just a cloth, but also a vehicle for oral traditions, spiritual practices, and gendered cultural memories. By taking from oral history, song, ritual and others these scholars offer much too closer reading for how folklore is lived and shared through the act of Jamdani weaving.

International Journal

In their study published in *Asian Folklore Studies*, Nawaz and Zaman (2020) performed a symbolical reading of Jamdani motifs in the light of riverine Bengali folklore. Their research located the origins of motifs like jalphul (water flower) and nakkhatrabuti (star) in popular rituals about fertility, prosperity, spiritual guardianship that revolve around river deities. They also argued that many designs of Jamdani are not arbitrary creations but taken from the metaphoric language ingrained by oral tradition, esp in the agrarian and aquatic cosmologies of the rural Bengal.

Haque (2021), a study was published in *textile: cloth and culture journal* addresses the global commodification of Jamdani in the world market. Though he recognized its commercial revival, Haque stressed the disjunction between newfangled interpretations and age-old narrations. He contended that the themes of mythology for which all societies have common symbols and rituals are being forgotten and the symbols and rituals are now referred to as "stylistic", taking them out of the context of the oral tradition of folklore. He encouraged cultural sensitivity and storytelling-driven branding that respects the history of the weavers.

In *folklore journal of the folklore society* origin narration of jamdani weaving among Muslim and Hindu artisan communities in Bangladesh, Sultana and Majid (2019) in this journal, investigated the oral traditions relating to the origin of Jamdani weaving as practiced by the Muslim and Hindu artisan communities, living in Bangladesh. In interviewing and transcribing intergenerational stories, they discovered that the two communities have overlapping myths — some people believe that Jamdani was a gift of divine inspiration in dreams, or that it emulates ancient epics and local saints. In their comparison, they emphasized folklore as at least part of a unifying rather than a dividing item in cultural memory.

Yunus (2018) in *South Asian Studies* studied how oral narratives of Jamdani weaving served as a preserve of resistance in colonial and postcolonial economic transitions. He found common patterns in artisan testimony, themes of betrayal, dispossession, and survival represented in metaphorical songs and conventionalized motifs.



Yunus suggested that Jamdani should be read as a cloth archive, containing within its designs a history of oppression and survival.

International Journal of Heritage Studies Rahman et al., (2022) in their study considered community center ICH safeguarding practices in Bangladesh with a case of study Jamdani. In their article they highlighted the importance of recording oral histories, naming practices and symbolic readings of motifs. They would recommend a composite heritage model that is composed of not only the material objects, but also the immaterial communication, songs, rites - all of which are central elements for the authenticity of the craft.

Alam and Hossain in Journal of Material Culture (2017) focused on pedagogical systems in the Jamdani weaving households. They also discovered that orally transmitted instructions parent to child, master to apprentice frequently included coded language and metaphors connected to particular designs. They showed how the skill was housed not in handwork, but a mnemonic and narrative one, since the loom is a site of labor and legend at the same time, the Jamdani loom.

In Bangladesh Journal of Folklore, Khatun (2016) provided an in-depth analysis of weaving songs sung by Jamdani weavers from a folkloristic point of view. Her study recorded 35 songs, with some treating the loom as the symbol of a spirit or a motif invested with a protective or emotional role. She claimed that they were songs of oral historiography and insisted that they should be recorded in national archives and museums, along with the textiles.

These articles from journals support my main argument that Jamdani weaving is woven into the oral traditions, symbolic meanings and folk knowledge systems of the Bengali people. Scholars from different disciplines such as folklore, textile studies, anthropology, and heritage studies have expressed the need to pay closer heed to these intangible values, particularly when confronted with urbanization and globalization.

TEDx Talks and Conferences

Ferdous (2019) in her TEDxDhaka speech ‘Woven Memory: The Folklore in Our Fabrics’ spoke beautifully of the artistic and emotional significance of the Jamdani. Relying on her personal interviews with weavers and her time spent in Sonargaon, Ferdous captured how Jamdani patterns are more than ornamental they are storied, interwoven with oral histories, folktales, and regional legends. She told how weavers explained they'd received motif designs in dreams or had connected particular patterns with love stories, seasonal festivities or divine visions. In her speech, she encouraged the audience to consider traditional textiles as “repositories of living folklore” and advocated for the introduction of oral storytelling into heritage conservation models (Ferdous, 2019).

During the Textile India Summit in Ahmedabad (2021), a panel discussion titled “Orality in Design: Motifs from Memory” saw Bangladeshi designer and researcher, Sadaf Zaman, speaking on the role of artisans as collaborative protectors of cultural heritage. Zaman shared case studies from her own work with Jamdani weavers in Rupganj, showing how many of the motifs in her collections were co-created in oral history sessions and memory-mapping exercises with senior artisans. The motifs in jamdani have stories embedded in them, and these stories are fast vanishing with the disappearing traditional knowledge holder. Her lecture treated folklore not as an addendum but as crucial to survival of craft traditions (Zaman, 2021).

Another pertinent session of the UNESCO South Asia Craft and Culture Forum (2022) centered on “Narrative-Based Craft Documentation. Academics and Practitioners from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka deliberated various models of the inclusion of oral history and folklore in digital record and museum display. Jamdani was introduced as an exemplary textile, in the characters of its being a motor and form of production developed from unwritten tradition. It was suggested that pre-weaving rituals, weaver songs and origin legends should be recorded in local languages as part of the conservation process (UNESCO, 2022).

These conference and talk-based contributions point to a rising awareness of the importance felt among practitioners, designers and cultural institutions of the need to document and sustaining the oral folkloric tradition of the Jamdani. Such platforms provide surprising new, frequently non-academic - at least at first



glance - perspectives on how storytelling, motif memory, and artisan voice are being exhibited or transfigured in current heritage practices.

Television Documentaries

The Ekattor TV documentary “Jamdani: Story in Every Strand” (2018) offers a close-up of the weaving communities in Sonargaon, emphasizing not only the technical excellence of Jamdani weavers but also the colorful stories that are entwined in their art. The documentary includes extensive interviews with veteran weavers, who frequently recount the inception of certain motifs as having been handed down during dreams, ancestral stories or village legends. Many artisans said their elders had taught them the meanings behind each, like kalka (paisley) to represent fertility or toradarjal (the net of thunder), related to seasonal myths. It also filmed pre-weaving rituals highlighting the fact that Jamdani is rooted in a sacred oral tradition not merely a material craft (Ekattor TV 2018).

“Vanishing Cultures: The Last Weavers of the East” (2020), a feature by the BBC World, investigated endangered craft traditions throughout Asia, with a segment on Jamdani weaving in Bangladesh. In this episode, we dwelt in the symbolic realm of Jamdani motifs and the oral stories that string along. Older artisans consulted for the feature referred to some patterns as protective amulets or depictions of heavenly bodies, citing generational legends and religious imagery. The documentary stressed that these patterns are not just aesthetic, but “visual proverbs” interconnected with local cosmologies, seasonal cycles and ritual life. It also highlighted the risks of the move to mechanized or fashion-led production on the future survival of these oral traditions (BBC World, 2020).

Another significant work, “Threads of Identity,” broadcast on BanglaVision (2021), offered a community-based narrative on Jamdani weavers in Narayanganj. This project illuminated the importance of storytelling in women’s lives in artisan homes. Grandmothers, daughters, mothers passed on designs in stories at the loom during dressing or at the evening gathering. One story traced the motif of the ansaributi to a local tale about a royal weaver and a spirit guide. The film ended by promoting oral tradition to be documented in audio-visual form for preservation of heritage (Bangla Vision, 2021).

These TV documentaries provide vivid visual ethnographies of Jamdani weaving as a cultural practice based on myth, memory and oral knowledge. They show how the artisans aren't just manual workers, but keepers of an intangible heritage, and that storytelling, through both word and design, are as alive as the personality of the craft.

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

In The Daily Star offered a special feature, “The Living Language of Jamdani” (2021), which presented how the Jamdani motifs constituted a symbolic lexicon, formed over centuries through oral tradition. Reporters spoke with master weavers in Rupganj who told them that names like asharfi (gold coin), dubli jal (floating net) and nawab kalka (royal paisley) are more than design allusions, they come with references to local myths, seasonal rites and spiritual practices. The paper highlighted that this non-written language is in imminent danger of disappearing, unless it is actively recorded and passed on (The Daily Star, 2021).

Prothom Alo (2022) published a culturally orientated piece entitled “Why Our Crafts Must Tell Stories”, that argued in favor of content-based recognition of intangibles such as storytelling, symbolic meaning, and weaver songs, which they stated were integral to the core identity of Jamdani, in an editorial. It took issue with the implicit government and corporate approach, using only product aesthetics without consideration of the woven in stories that give the cloth its richness. The article demanded the inclusion of folk art and storytelling traditions around crafts such as Jamdani in the national curriculum (Prothom Alo, 2022).

An account by the Dhaka Tribune (2024), “Motif & Memory: A textile exhibition brings back the oral history of weavers” covered an innovative exhibition showcasing Jamdani which was in combination with audio recordings of artisan narratives and songs of weaving. Organized in a joint effort by local NGOs and cultural foundations, the exhibit used motifs as portals into regional mythology. Weavers elaborated the metaphorical



underpinnings of patterns such as chand tara (moon and the stars), megh buti (cloud motif) and manik (gem), often associating them with tales of love, loss, or divinity (Dhaka Tribune, 2024).

The Business Standard (2023) describes the obstacles faced by Jamdani weavers in an article, headlined “UNESCO Tag, But Forgotten Traditions.” The piece reported that after the Jamdani tradition was recognized by the world at a Unesco Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013, and with the economic impetus and design innovation this status has generated, many in the trade feel that the stories and the ritual of the artisans have been left out in the cold of policy focus. The report referred to one of the artisan demands: greater respect for their role as “narrators of tradition,” not mere fabric producers (The Business Standard, 2023).

In a long-form interview titled “The Storytellers of the Loom” (2022) with younger generation weavers, featured in ICE Today, a lifestyle and culture magazine in Bangladesh, efforts to save traditional folk stories associated with Jamdani designs were also discussed. One weaver relayed his grandfather’s stories of a pannahazaar motif (a thousand emeralds) based on dreams of a river goddess. The feature highlighted the importance of storytelling for skill development and cultural pride (ICE Today, 2022).

These journalistic and administrative sources confirm that oral storytelling, the naming of symbolic motifs, and community memory are crucial aspects of the Jamdani tradition. Most significantly, they indicate that outside academia and the institution, the demand for the preservation of such folklore by Jamdani weavers is being increasingly felt in the public domain.

FINDINGS

Drawing on field interviews, oral narratives, motif analysis, archival accounts and discussions with some of the weavers in traditional Jamdani weaving villages, especially in Sonargaon, Rupganj and Narayanganj, this chapter outlines the major findings. The results are organized thematically to illustrate how oral tradition, spiritual symbolism, cultural memory and socio-economic change intertwine in the Jamdani tradition.

- **Oral Traditions and Cultural Memory:**

One of the significant affirmations relate the oral story that also is at the very core of how weaving know-how is shared in regard to Jamdani are passed over generation. Weavers described learning motifs not from books or written texts, but from songs, bedtime tales, proverbs, or dreams — often shared, she said, by mothers or grandmothers. Motif names like pannahazaar (a thousand emeralds), dubli jal (floating net) and chandtara (moon and stars) were part of oral tradition, each associated with a tale or lesson. These stories enlighten as they instruct, and emphasize such values as patience, faith, and respect for the natural world.

- **Motifs as Visual Folklore:**

Those motifs of Jamdani fabrics are not merely decorative elements that have been picked up arbitrarily; rather, they are visual metaphors that are rooted deep in myth and belief. For instance, butidar motifs were frequently thought by craftspeople to represent the divine blessings, while ashharfi patterns were believed to be the emblem of luck and money, according to local mythologies. Artisans considered their designs as physical memories, inspired by events, festivals or emotional myths of ancestry. The study showed that each motif is a ‘text’ and is a visual script that conveys encoded meanings among the weavers.

- **Rituals and Spiritual Practices:**

A weaving is performed in conjunction with rituals that obtain help from the otherworld—aide from the ancestors, help of the gods. Some weavers reflected that they would pray or fast before beginning a new piece. Other motifs, especially those involving water or stars, were thought to necessitate some sort of moral or ritual purity. This spiritual layer imparts a mystical aspect to what might otherwise seem a super technical process of Jamdani weaving, demonstrating how folklores and beliefs permeate the everyday practice of artisans.



- **Gendered Transmission of Knowledge:**

The research reveals that women are the custodians of the oral history of Jamdani. Though many men are loom masters in various cultural contexts, women tend to hold the information about the intangible the meanings of the motifs, the interpretation of the symbols, the family stories associated with the designs. Weaving or housework songs serve as memory aides for the passage of both technique and feeling.

- **Aging out Folkloric Elements in Modern Practice:**

The process of the commercialization and modernization is erasing the folklore of the Jamdani weavings. Machine-loomed motifs and simplification of aesthetical intervention and numbing of intergenerational storytelling is creating an abyss between motifs and their very reason of existence. There were dozens of young weavers, who, when questioned by me, admitted to the ability of copying motifs, while not knowing their history, meaning or use. This indicates a transition from popular narrative storytelling to marketable beauty.

- **Rejuvenation through Community and Cultural Action**

Notwithstanding, a few non-profits, museums and artisan cooperatives have begun to document the oral history, archive motifs and run educational programs to revive Jamdani folklore. Other exhibitions have featured audio installations of weaver voices, and now designers are working directly with weavers, referring images to their story source once again. These interventions suggest an increasing awareness of the importance of oral tradition to the authenticity and long term sustainability of Jamdani.

What these results show is that Jamdani is more than a textile, it is a storytelling medium, a spiritual process and a holder of cultural identity. The oral traditions that envelope Jamdani are not accidental, they are central to its meaning, use and survival. Maintaining the intangible is as important as the maintaining the weaving.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our results demonstrate that Jamdani weaving is not only an art or craft but a complex cultural enterprise anchored in oral tradition, folklore, and symbolism. The following suggestions are proposed for the conservation, rejuvenation and the culturally meaningful presentation of this traditional knowledge.

- **Oral Traditions and the Documentation of Heritage:**

Heritage organizations, ministries of culture and museums must undertake documentation beyond objects to oral histories, weaving songs, legends and symbolic readings of motifs. The recording and documenting of these ephemeral aspects in digital and analogue ways would also contribute to preserving the story dimensions of Jamdani, and allow them to flourish for future generations.

- **Promote Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer:**

For the survival of the symbolic content of mythology and rituals, projects should foster the informal and community-oriented transfer of techniques of storytelling. That means helping organize story-telling circles, apprenticeships, and oral mother-daughter workshops in weaver villages. By reclaiming these cross-generational relationships, the folklore will feed into the practice and philosophy of weaving as well.

- **Curriculum Development and Communication Material:**

Introduction of Jamdani motif symbolism and folklore into school-college-university curricula, vocational courses, and designs education would help build greater awareness and appreciation among many youngsters. "Taking the teaching approach for the stories behind the designs will make the students feel of the culture, history which the story tells, not only the weaving skills.



- **Promote Ethics in the Collaboration of Designers and Weavers:**

Jamdani designers and those in its fashion entrepreneurship need to articulate stories of design with integrity for the oral traditions of the motifs they commodify. Weavers as cultural co-creators, not just laborers, should be part of collaborative design processes. Labels and exhibitions should provide motif meanings, along with the weaver's voice.

- **Uphold Community Museums and Living Archives:**

Support should be provided to community-based museums, heritage centers, and digital storytelling initiatives that are based on weavers' perspectives. Living archives organized by artisans themselves should be promoted and funded. These spaces play a dual role as attractive educational tools and cultural refuges for preserving folklore in its original habitat.

- **Leverage Media for Folklore Amplification:**

Documentaries, pod casts and social media could be used to tell weavers stories at a national and international level. Media depictions need to move away from visual-only interpretations, and start telling the stories embedded within the cultural socio-symbolism of Jamdani.

- **Acknowledge Women as Guardians of the Culture:**

Women's participation in the preservation of stories and motifs and in the oral pedagogy should be officially acknowledged in cultural policy and programming. Craft knowledge, spiritual practices and the transmission of folk lore to women through their programming, can both empower craft and community.

- **Incorporate Folklore into Intangible Cultural Heritage Policies:**

Finally, it may be desirable for states and international bodies today, notably, UNESCO to reconsider craft-based listings of intangible heritage, and to elaborate these in a manner that will represent fuller the oral, spiritual, and symbolic dimensions of the tradition. Jerry: Not in my book - I think that is why certain requirements have been established for the recognition, that folkloric context along with technical capability should be requisite.

These propositions intend to see that Jamdani is preserved not just as an archival product but as a living tradition – where memory, myth and identity seep into and out of the weavers' hands and voices.

CONCLUSION

The author of this study was particularly interested in investigating the historical development and folkloric well-spring of Jamdani weaving in Bengal, and how oral narrative, symbolic iconography, and material cultural practices insure the character of this celebrated fabric. Using a qualitative and interdisciplinary research method which involved field work, interviews, archival research and motif analysis this study has revealed a subcutaneous layer of intangible heritage, largely invisible under the shimmer of Jamdani but always present in the dominant discourse about it.

The article reveals that, Jamdani is not just a matter of technical virtuosity or visual seduction, it is a repository of woven folklore, spiritual belief, ecological awareness, and gendered pedagogy. Patterns are not just decoration but cultural media, suffused with myths, dreams, and generations of stories. Oral narratives, from weaver songs and bedtime stories, to motif legends, are a key aspect of the weaving tradition, one that informs how the weaving is taught, remembered, and redone.

At its core, Jamdani is a community of artisans - they are, as Barmon articulates to me during my visit, not only skilled laborers but storytellers, ritual performers, and keepers of cultural memory. In particular, women have assumed important roles as carriers of oral knowledge, that is to say, by ensuring the continuity of a



narrative patrimony handed down through song, oral tale and symbolic action. But the study warns that a series of developments – modernization, commercialization, and now mechanization – have already started chipping away at these intangible aspects – leading to a disconnection between motifs and their sources and endangering the unbroken line of oral descendants.

In reflection of these dilemmas, this article argues for a comprehensive appreciation of Jamdani, as that not for something simply crafted, but for an entire cultural system in which the concrete and the abstract are inseparable. The conservation work must therefore move past the preservation of looms and patterns and delve into documenting, reviving and continuing to show respect to the stories, rituals and significances that provide Jamdani with its soul.

Finally, this research closes a larger conversation on intangible cultural heritage by showing that folklore is not simply an accessory to the textile tradition, but is in fact the textile tradition. By privileging the voices, experiences, and stories of Jamdani weavers especially in a framework of folklore and ethnography. This study makes the case that the preservation of Jamdani is the preservation of a culture of memory, myth, and meaning woven through lifetimes.

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