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Muslin on comeback trail



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The famous muslin, a lightweight cotton cloth of Bengal, is now set to make a glorious comeback, with a group of researchers on a quest to reproduce the original cotton, that holds the secret of the fabric, now extinct.

The cotton seeds, the yarn and the weaving technique, were destroyed by the East India Company's ruthless exploitation, and cast in oblivion.

Drik an internationally famed independent media organization-based in Dhaka, launched a project in 2014 titled, Bengal Muslin (BM), and commenced a unique journey in search of its origins.

The legendary name '**muslin**', identified a pre-colonial Bengal textile, which reached its peak in Dhaka in the 19th century. The near transparent fabric, described as 'woven air' was manufactured by special weavers, located around the city of Dhaka, Narayanganj up to Mymensingh.

Among the many qualities of the fabric, once weighed against gold, a particular variety, known as 'mulmul e khas' was considered to be the finest, and produced only for the Mughal emperors, kings and queens.

Many other varieties, such as Abrawan and Shabnam were produced and used by provincial governors, high officials and landlords upto the mid-19th century.

Always known locally as 'mul-mul' by Indians, 'muslin' was named by Marco Polo during the 14th century, after witnessing the high volume of fine cotton cloth in Iraq, Mosul being traded through that city.

Rare, delicate and fine, described as also 'skin of the moon,' muslin was the most sought after textile, and its height had reached across the globe, from Rome in the West to Jakarta in the East.

Bangladesh Post spoke to the lead researcher, Saiful Islam, CEO of DRIK (BM) to know about their mission. Islam spoke elaborately, explaining how DNA fingerprinting of cotton varieties, and matching trials with seeds imported from global research centers, is a close match having a hope of strong signs showing.