



by Mahdiya Ahmed
Paari

LOOKBOOK

*From Dhaka,
With Intention*

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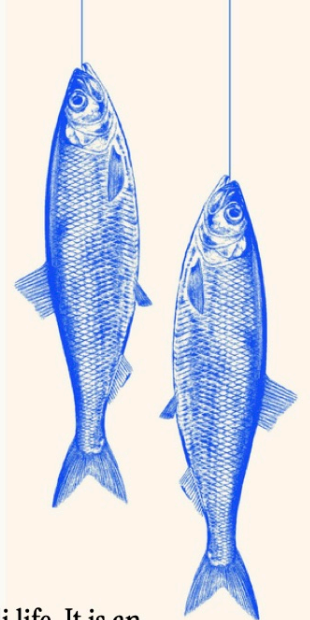
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Paari is a celebration of South Asian heritage through a contemporary lens. Based in Bangladesh, this collection is deeply inspired by the colours, textures, heritage, memories, and craftsmanship that shape our cultural identity.

Each piece is designed to honour tradition while allowing it to bring our heritage into the way we dress today. From intricate details to thoughtful silhouettes, every garment carries a story of artistry, identity, and place.

Paari believes fashion can be beautiful while creating something meaningful. Through craftsmanship and responsible production, we celebrate the women and artisans whose hands bring these stories to life.

This saree turns Bangladesh's most beloved fish into a garment. The whole surface is built from overlapping sequinned scallops in shifting teal, blue and green — each scallop a single scale, laid in rows the way scales lie along a living hilsa, so the drape catches and throws light exactly like the fish's famous silver body turning in water. The concept is unapologetically literal and joyful. Against all that shimmer, a pale raw-silk blouse in gold and silver handwork keeps the eye anchored.



The Hilsa Fish

The hilsa is the national fish of Bangladesh and one of the most culturally loaded foods in Bengali life. It is an anadromous, migratory fish that lives in the Bay of Bengal and swims upriver to spawn, and Bangladesh lands the overwhelming share of the world's catch — roughly 86 percent — with the Padma River's ilish prized above all for its taste. It is more than dinner: it was recognised as a Geographical Indication product of Bangladesh, it threads through festivals from Durga Puja to weddings, and since the 1980s the dish of panta-ilish — fermented rice with fried hilsa has become the defining meal of Pahela Baishakh, the Bengali New Year, a marker of Bengali identity itself. Nicknamed the "king of fish" and the "silver pride" of the country, the hilsa's shimmering, light-scattering body is precisely what this saree translates into sequins. Choosing it as a muse is choosing a national emblem you can taste — a fish that stands for the rivers, the seasons and the culture all at once.

The Saree

The scale effect is the whole engineering of the piece. Rows of hand-shaped scallops, each densely filled with graduated sequins and outlined in fine beadwork, overlap like roof tiles — or like real scales — so that as the wearer moves, the colour flexes from deep peacock blue to river-green, mimicking the way a hilsa flashes silver-to-blue when it turns. Concentrating the largest, most three-dimensional scallops across the pallu and tapering them down the skirt gives the garment the actual gradient of a fish's body, densest at the shoulder, finest at the tail-like scalloped hem. It is embellishment doing representational work rather than mere sparkle.

The saree fabric, Dhakain muslin matters here for two reasons: it is Bangladesh's own legendary cloth, so a saree about a Bangladeshi icon is built on a Bangladeshi textile, and its near-weightless translucency is what lets a fully scalloped, sequin-laden surface still drape and flow like water rather than hang stiff. The heaviest possible embellishment on the lightest possible cloth.

The Blouse

The blouse steps back into pale, watery silver so the saree can shine. Raw silk — with its natural slub, body and soft matte lustre — gives a sturdy, luminous base for two contrasting metal-thread crafts worked together.

Zardozi supplies the raised, sculptural richness while the gotapatti work brings a lighter, flatter shimmer to sit beside it: an appliqué technique from the royal courts of Rajasthan in which small shapes of gold and silver gota ribbon are cut, folded and stitched flat onto the cloth — famously light to wear yet grand enough for royalty, its motifs traditionally drawn from nature, leaves, flowers and birds. Combining the two gives the bodice depth and dimension — zardozi's high relief against gotapatti's smooth metallic leaves — the way scattered light plays across water above the fish below. Both crafts once lived under royal patronage and both survive as living heritage, which suits a garment that treats a humble river fish as something regal.

Slisk

Bridal Wear



909

A\$1,000

This saree is a field of stitched storytelling. Across a soft ivory ground, coloured creepers, branching vines and scattered blossoms in blue, marigold-orange, violet and yellow wander the way motifs wander across a real nakshi kantha. The look is deliberately colourful and folk-joyful rather than formal, letting the pale base act as unbleached cloth and the coloured thread carry all the life. The bedazzled blouse then lifts that rural embroidery tradition into something jewelled and celebratory



Nakshi Kantha

Nakshi kantha is one of Bengal's most tender textile traditions — a centuries-old embroidered quilt art of Bangladesh and greater Bengal, its name from the Bengali naksha, meaning artistic pattern or design. Its origins are humble and beautiful: rural women layered worn-out saris, dhotis and lungis and bound them together with simple running stitches, even drawing the coloured thread from the borders of old saris, turning discarded cloth into coverlets, wraps and pillow covers. Over time the plain quilting blossomed into pictorial embroidery, and the motifs became meaning — lotuses, vines, birds, fish and scenes of village life stitched as records of family history, love and memory. Crucially, this was never a courtly craft commissioned by kings; it was made by women of every rural class and passed from mother to daughter, often into a wedding trousseau or in remembrance of the dead. The poet Jasim Uddin immortalised it in his 1929 work *Nakshi Kanthar Maath* ("The Field of the Embroidered Quilt"), and today the tradition carries GI recognition as a heritage craft. To build a saree from nakshi kantha's wandering florals is to wear a women's folk art — one about thrift, memory and storytelling — rather than a decorative motif.

The Saree

On this saree the technique is honoured but elevated: the characteristic running-stitch creepers and blossoms are worked over a fine, fluid ground so the embroidery keeps its handmade, slightly rippled, drawn-by-thread quality while still draping like a modern saree. Scattering the vines loosely — dense at the pallu, thinning as they climb — preserves the organic, unplanned feel of a real kantha, where the design follows the maker's hand rather than a printed grid. The multicoloured palette is not a stylistic add-on but true to the source: authentic kanthas took their colours from salvaged sari borders, so a riot of blues, oranges and violets on ivory is exactly how the tradition looks.

The Blouse

Where the saree is soft and folk, the blouse is structured and jewelled. The base is double georgette — a sheer crepe woven from tightly twisted yarns for a fine crinkled texture, doubled here into a denser, more opaque cloth with real body and a beautiful fluid drape.

Three metal crafts are layered across it. Zardozi supplies raised, sculptural richness and gotapatti adds a flatter, lighter shimmer beside it — an appliqué technique from the royal courts of Rajasthan, where small shapes of gold and silver ribbon are cut, folded and stitched onto fabric, prized for being light to wear yet grand enough for royalty. Stonework and bedazzling then catch the light in colour, tying the bodice back to the saree's coloured blossoms. The contrast is the point: a folk women's craft born of reused rags below, the goldwork of emperors and kings above — humble and regal in one garment.

Naksh

Daytime Wear



108

A\$950

The whole garment is conceived as that pond rendered wearable. A sheer, ombré mint drape that reads like water, with the lily colony blooming only where the fabric pools at the feet, exactly as lilies gather at a pond's edge. The pallu is left almost bare and translucent, like open water, so the eye travels down to the dense, hand-painted hem where the flowers, pads and buds cluster.



The Flower

The choice of the white water lily is the national flower of Bangladesh, known locally as *shapla*, botanically *Nymphaea nouchali*, the white water lily called "Shada Shapla," extremely common across the country's waterways. It sits at the heart of the national identity: the water lily rests at the centre of Bangladesh's national emblem, bordered by sheaves of rice and surmounted by connected jute leaves, adopted shortly after independence in 1971. On that emblem, the flower represents the many rivers that run through Bangladesh, which is precisely the reading this saree wants: a garment about water, and a flower that stands for a riverine land. The shapla is so woven into daily life that it appears on the currency, is worn by women as hair decoration, and is even eaten and used in traditional medicine. To paint the shapla onto the hem, then, is not to add a motif — it is to sign the garment with a nation's emblem.

The Saree

Fine Bengal muslin, spun and woven around Dhaka, was so gossamer it was known as "woven air" — made from "phuti karpas," a hand-spun cotton yielding threads barely visible to the eye, traded to Rome and Persia and prized in the Mughal court. Empire ruined it: cheap British mill cloth and colonial taxes crushed local weavers, and the phuti karpas plant slipped into extinction. Only recently has Bangladesh revived the fabric, retraining spinners and weavers where the old industry once stood.

Choosing a mint-dyed Dhakai muslin as the ground therefore does something the water-lily motif alone cannot. The fabric is the water — its natural translucency reads as the surface of the pond, and dyeing it a soft, ombré mint rather than leaving it white gives the illusion of light passing through shallow water. Hand-painting, rather than machine print or heavy embroidery, is the right technique precisely because muslin was always an artisan's cloth: the story of the garment is the story of the hand. Working on muslin places the piece within a living, protected craft tradition rather than a costume of it.

The Blouse

Against all that airiness, the motka silk blouse is deliberate contrast. A slubby, hand-reeled silk with body and soft sheen, it holds structure where the saree flows and catches light differently from the smooth muslin. The pearls carry the pond metaphor upward — water-born and cool-toned, reading as clustered droplets or the pale hearts of the lilies, tying the bodice back to the painted hem. The result is a balanced silhouette: dense and sculptural above, sheer and watery below.

Lilypad

Daytime Wear



SO1

A\$850

The green is not a decorative choice; it carries meaning fixed at the birth of the nation. The flag of Bangladesh is a red disc on a deep green field, offset slightly toward the hoist so it appears centred when flying. It was officially adopted on 17 January 1972. Its green field stands for the lushness of the land and, in Bengal's secular reading, for the vitality and youthful hope of its people, while the red disc represents the sun rising over Bengal and the blood of those who died in the Liberation War of 1971. The design has a genuine origin story: an earlier wartime version, carrying a yellow map of the country inside the red circle, was first raised by student leaders at Dhaka University on 2 March 1971; after independence the map was dropped, partly because it was so hard to reproduce accurately on both sides leaving the clean green-and-red form still flown today. Dyeing the saree in that specific bottle green, rather than any fashionable emerald, is what anchors the whole look to a flag rather than to a mere colour.

The Saree

The drape is Rajshahi silk — Bangladesh's own luxury silk, which makes it the natural cloth to carry a national colour. Rajshahi, on the banks of the Padma River, is known as "the Silk City"; its conditions for sericulture made it a hub of silk production and gave it lasting fame. For this design, Rajshahi silk does precisely what the concept needs: a weighty, liquid fall with a quiet, deep lustre. The pleats hang in long unbroken columns and the surface catches light so the green stays rich and grave rather than bright, giving the flag's colour the seriousness it deserves.



The Blouse

Against the smooth saree, the matka silk blouse adds texture. Matka is a slubby, hand-reeled silk with body and a soft, matte sheen. Its irregular surface reads differently from the fluid Rajshahi drape and, crucially, gives a base substantial enough to hold heavy, jewelled embroidery without buckling.

That embroidery is zardozi, and its lineage matches the regal weight of the concept. Zardozi is metal-thread embroidery whose name is Persian — "zar" meaning gold and "dozi" meaning embroidery. It came to the subcontinent with the Mughals and reached its height in the imperial courts under emperors like Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, adorning not just robes but canopies, saddles and royal regalia. What sets it apart is dimensionality: layers of metallic thread, coiled and bullion wire are stacked and stitched so the pattern physically rises off the fabric — bold, sculptural and unmistakably royal. Its motifs have always favoured flowering vines and scrolling foliage, which is why the curling goldwork across this bodice feels historically true. Set into that goldwork, real rubies and emeralds turn the flag's palette into something you can wear. Like the silk and the flag itself, zardozi is a craft that lost its royal patronage and declined under colonial industrialisation before being revived, so lavishing it on a flag-green saree returns it to exactly the courtly world it was made for.

Emerald

Evening Wear



S06

A\$800

This saree takes its entire palette from a single building: the soft, sunlit blush of Ahsan Manzil, the Pink Palace on the banks of the Buriganga. The concept is deliberately monochromatic — a whole look held in one rose tone. The smooth, fluid Rajshahi silk drape stands in for the palace's grand plastered façade; the zardozi on the bodice translates its ornamental domes and carved detailing into raised, gold-touched thread. It's architecture worn as clothing.



Ahsan Manzil

Ahsan Manzil is one of Dhaka's most beloved landmarks — the former residence of the Nawabs of Dhaka, built between 1859 and 1872, its pink façade blending Mughal and European styles. Beyond its beauty, it is a genuine seat of history: the decision to form the All India Muslim League was taken here in 1906, and today it stands as a museum under the Bangladesh National Museum, its Indo-Saracenic architecture crowned by an iconic dome. The palace glows most beautifully at golden hour, when soft sunlight warms the pink stone. That specific, warm, late-afternoon blush is the exact rose this saree is dyed to.

The Saree

The drape is Rajshahi silk — Bangladesh's own luxury silk, and a natural partner to a Dhaka landmark. Rajshahi is known as "the Silk City," its position on the Padma River and favourable conditions for sericulture making it a hub of silk production and global fame. The craft runs deep: silk production in the region dates to the 13th century, when it was known as Bengal or Ganges silk. Today the region's sericulture accounts for almost the entire silk output of the country. For the design, Rajshahi silk gives exactly what the concept needs: a clean, weighty fall with a quiet sheen. The pleats hang in long, unbroken columns like the palace's plastered pilasters, and the fabric's soft lustre catches light the way the façade does at dusk.

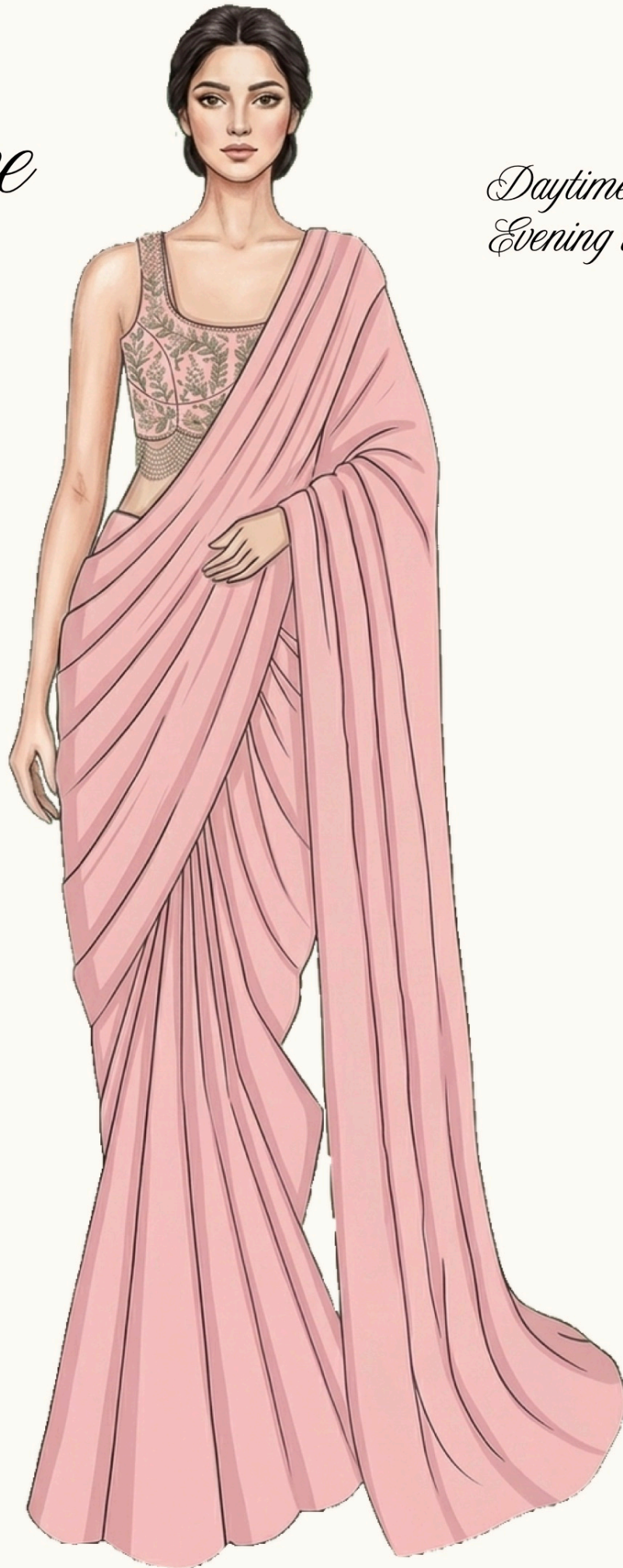
The Blouse

Against the smooth saree, the motka silk blouse adds texture. Motka is a slubby, hand-reeled silk with body and a matte-to-soft sheen, a base substantial enough to carry heavy embroidery.

That embroidery is zardozi, and the choice is loaded with the same Mughal lineage the palace carries in its architecture. Zardozi is metal-thread embroidery whose name is Persian — "zar" meaning gold and "dozi" meaning embroidery. It came to India with the Mughals and flourished in the royal courts under emperors like Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. What distinguishes it is dimensionality: layers of metallic thread, bullion wire and coiled wire are stacked and stitched to create patterns that physically rise from the fabric — bold, sculptural and regal. Its motifs have always favoured flowering vines, roses and lotuses, which is why the delicate creeping floral work across this bodice feels historically true rather than merely pretty. Like muslin and like the palace's own fortunes, zardozi is a craft that lost its royal patronage and declined under British occupation and industrialisation before being revived — so placing it on a garment named for a Nawabi palace restores it to exactly the world it was made for.

*Pink
Palace*

*Daytime &
Evening wear*



NO3

A\$750



*"All the best for a future that I also
dreamt of. You will fulfill that dream,
Insha Allah"
- Ammu*