

# living blue

H A N D M A D E



Living Blue is a dream, stitched & dyed, made for a lifetime,  
by men & women of high craftsmanship & dignity.



Living Blue started as Nijera Cottage and Village industries private limited, back in 2008, being owned by the community. Now, Living Blue is evolving as a social enterprise, owned in partnership by the community as NCVI and CARE Enterprise Inc, the social business wing of CARE. This effectively means, the farmers, artisans and dyers of Living Blue has ownership over the business, voice over its decisions being represented in the Board, profits to go to them and they shall have coverage in health and other social issues by the company. It's a brand owned by the community.

Nijera was a project of CARE Bangladesh, where the work was to train men and women as 'leaders', who would work with the local government to identify issues in their community and find their solution. One of the demands that came up strongly from the community was they need work. North was back then known for their seasonal famine called 'Monga'. The people needed work to survive the lull agricultural period.

CARE carried on an extensive research. They were out to identify what would be the product that these men and women, living in the northern Bangladesh, could do. The work has to be supported by their indigenous skill and raw materials available within the country. This was 2006.

One was the quilting technique. North Bengal has a heritage of quilting, and particularly known as 'Lohori'. This Persian work translates to 'wave'. The texture of the quilted fabric would be wavy. This skill was not widely practiced, since it took time and there was no market. Few would do that for their own use. What they did was simpler Kantha's we have in our home, done in villages, with old sarees, where the stitches are wide. The heritage quilts are where the stitches are narrower, takes longer time and are simply, turns out to be pieces of art, made with love, precision, skill and patience.

The other product that was identified was indigo. The indigo that is laced with taboo. However, this has always been in Bangladesh/Bengal, as a native plant. Indigo plant is being still called 'maal gaacch'. The memory of the 'neel' out of indigo plant was absent among the farmers. Experts from CARE tried and tested with the plant and they got the magic dye out of it. Thus, indigo was re-discovered!

Once these two things were identified and accepted as products and skills to move forward with, another technique was added. And this is not local. This is Shibori, the resist-stitching tie-dye technique of Japan. Therefore, natural 'True Bengal' indigo of the highest quality, heritage quilting skills, and the acquired skill of shibori now today personifies Living Blue.

The big part came in mobilizing the artisans and farmers. For the farmers, indigo leaves are collected from their fields. Women were trained in the specific quilting techniques. And here comes the quality, the standard, the brand – Living Blue.



The quilting women, known as artisans, were given intensive training. Some of them, for their high level of skills, considered to be the Master Artisan, were given responsibility to train and guide other women. Each of these Master Artisan, today manages few scores of artisans.

One of the techniques we follow in Living Blue, to ensure utmost quality is, there is a gradation among artisans. One who starts is an apprentice. They work under senior or master artisans. Once their workmanship develops, they are given more intricate work, usually smaller pieces that need less time. Slowly, depending on the skills acquired and demonstrated, they are given finer work. This is one of the key ways in Living Blue we maintain our quality. Skills, workmanship and complexity of work define their grade and payment terms.

Our fabrics are procured from weavers in Bangladesh. Therefore, directly playing a role in local economy too. Some of our artisans, whom we bestow with the title of Master Artisans, are the ones who produce the White on White Quilts, Living Blue's premiere product. One of these quilts can take up to 5 months to produce. The indigo shibori quilts, can take up to 3 months to produce. Stoles and shawls take also two to three months.

The indigo that is original to Bangladesh is True Bengal, or *Indigofera Tinctoria*. This indigo is considered by dyeing experts home and abroad to be the finest they have used. Yes, like the jute from Faridpur belt, mangoes from Chapainawabganj, we do have the finest indigo too. Living Blue is proud to be among the foremost and largest producer of this dye from Bangladesh.

The shibori technique that we acquired has also come to define Living Blue. Considered by enthusiasts and shibori experts to be of high workmanship. This is not a difficult technique to learn, but hard to master and evolve new designs.

Living Blue is a high fashion, luxury brand. And why do we call ourselves that?

Well, it is not a self-claim. It is rather a natural claim. A luxury product claim is a strong one. And we completely understand the responsibility and honesty that it entails to preserve. Our indigo, is farmed and processed by our farmers and processors, under our watchful eyes. When the leaves are collected, there are strenuous standards and methods to be maintained. So it is, when we process it, and

ultimately when we use it to dye. Being natural dye, never two dyes are the same. The true Bengal indigo happens to be the finest because of its maturity, of its luster, richness and variety of shades it gives out. We have taken farther measures to continue to improve the quality.

Our quilting skills are monitored. As already mentioned, there is a grade among quilters. The quilting technique is unique to northern Bangladesh. We continuously work with them to make each work of art. There is grammar in quilting, yet it is a creative job. A fine marriage between adhering to the grammar, to the standard and at the same time evolving their workmanship to introduce motifs and patterns signifies our quality. Each quilted fabric is different to the other. One quilted item can never be truly reproduced.

It is hand-made. Dyed with finest indigo. Made by artisans whose skills have been handed down by generations. Products are made to order. Customizable. Indigo is our flagship product, and quilting is the defining skill.

The high level of skill, quality of raw materials and eventually the final product that comes out from the Living Blue workshop tells a story of a luxury good. Someone back in the villages of Bangladesh has given their time and skill and made with love. This is luxury for the end user.

Living Blue has traveled to prestigious fairs and shows like to Santa Fe to attend International Folk Art Market, to Berlin to attend Greenshowroom, an off-site event of Berlin Fashion week, and to Maison d'Exceptions in Paris. Our products are always sold under the brand name of Living Blue by our partners, retailers and designers who work with us, spanning from Los Angeles to Osaka, London to Sydney, and, New York, Santa Fe, Paris, Brussels, Geneva, Delhi, etc in between.

Sona Rani Roy of Living Blue is a Loewe Craft Prize 2017 finalist for her Moyur – the peacock quilt, from a global submission of 3951 craft work.

Living Blue is still growing. There is lot to come and lot to offer. In next few years we plan to partner with major brands, work with dedicated designers and retailers, come with more variety and make a name for the country, for our community, and be recognized as the high fashion, luxury brand from Bangladesh.

