East Star Handlooms: A Celebration of Colour

Posted on
The flagship East Star Handlooms in Natpaddimunai, Kalmunai

Vibrant shades of cotton and silk thread are transformed into beautiful designs on the loom by East Star Handlooms in the eastern town of Kalmunai.

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Photographs Menaka Aravinda

Situated in Natpaddimunai in Kalmunai, East Star Handlooms has introduced novel concepts to create clothing that are modern and stylish designs with simple handloom. Established by S S A Carder in 1999, the business was destroyed by the tsunami. In 2012, his son A C A Niyas, CEO, re-launched East Star Handlooms and since then the business has progressed with vigour and innovation. The product portfolio has been expanded to include a range of cotton and silk sarees, ladies and gents clothing as well as accessories manufactured with handloom material such as bags and jewellery.

As A C A Niyas explained, “previously everyone produced handloom sarongs only. They did not weave sarees or any other handloom garments. We introduced new and innovative handloom products to the market.” All stages of manufacturing are done by East Star Handlooms: that is from design to production (including dyeing of thread), finishing and quality checking. However, what is unique is that the entire community is involved, especially rural women. While production facilities, which mainly employ men also contribute, women work from their homes either weaving, making tussles or sewing garments. Thus this gives them the ability to earn an income within the traditions of the community while tending to their children.

Manufacturing and distribution have always been done from the head office in Kalmunai and in June 2018, the new three-storey building was completed. Encompassing a showroom as well, all operations including designing, finishing, dispatching of online orders and administration are done from Kalmunai.



A vivid and attractive collection of ladies (Elenna) and gents (Sapta) wear to mix and match with the jewellery and bags

A C A Niyas' wife, I L N Hafeela is the main designer. Together they match colours and develop designs. "Everything we do is from experience. We also ensure that we receive feedback from our customers so that we can cater to their requirements," the duo explained. Initially, the sarees were of cotton or silk with geometric designs. However, as time progressed they introduced glossy cotton as well as exclusive sarees that incorporated bead and lace work. The colour palette and designs vary according to the regions of the country and thus East Star Handlooms ensures that they fulfill the fashion needs of their customers in all areas. Venturing a step further, they have also introduced their own brands: Elenna for ladies wear that include blouses and kurthas, and for gents, Sapta that includes shirts and sarongs. Jewellery and bags too have been created using handlooms thus ensuring all elements of a complete attire are provided.

With showrooms also in Colpetty and Maharagama, East Star Handlooms has created awareness by having an online presence and free delivery island-wide. Their customers are not only from Sri Lanka, with many from countries such as Australia, Canada and Singapore making purchases on a regular basis.



Striking colours and designs of the exclusive saree collection

East Star Handlooms has come a long way from its beginning to become one of the leading manufacturers and whole-sale suppliers of handlooms. They have been able to transform the traditional loom to create innovative and modern style and fashion while also providing a livelihood to the communities in Kalmunai.

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