Selyn Handlooms: Sustaining Communities Through An Ancient Art

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A vibrant handloom saree with accessories to match

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Deep in the heart of the North Western province, in the humble village of Wanduragala, Kurunegala, an ancient tradition bursts into life. Cotton yarns dyed in a rainbow of colours are lined up, ready to be spun into bobbins of different sizes that shape the length and width of designs on a fabric. An intricate process thereafter unfolds, the slow, droning sound of the looms filling the air. Skillfully maneuvered by artisans at the Selyn Workshop, the loom weaves the fabric into uncommon styles and designs, producing a colourful work of art: a handloom wonder.

Determined to revive a fading tradition, Selyn began in 1991 with a modest team of 12 women. Led by Sandra Wanduragala, Founder of Selyn, this small team of women utilised their skills and talents and began manufacturing handloom fabrics. Its unpretentious beginnings 20 years ago have today transformed into a business that sells textiles and toys both locally and internationally. With workshops spread in villages in and around the Kurunegala vicinity and the Batticaloa district, Selyn today has two showrooms located in Wanduragala and Colombo under its wing.

The showrooms are a spectacle, an exhibition of skill and colour. Vibrant shades of blue, pink, red, yellow, orange, green and any other colour imaginable greet visitors as they walk through its doors and indeed, pervade throughout the entirety of the showrooms. Handloom products are enhanced by the presence of various vases and lamps, interspersed to exude that true Sri Lankan ambience. Items to decorate every room of one’s home lie neatly folded or displayed on shelves. Tablemats, cushion covers, pillow cases, curtains, wall hangings, decorative items for children’s rooms and other household linen present the talent of its creators; the artisans behind the loom. Their hard work and care infused into the creation of the product is evident in each style and design.

Selyn’s products are not merely limited to household linen; garments such as sarees, shirts, sarongs and blouses are woven in simple yet uncommonly attractive colours and designs. A recent addition to this range is a unique collection of handmade silk and cotton wedding sarees. Akin to a handloom creation that pieces together a variety of colours, Selyn too has combined a varied set of items which encompass stationery and accessories, reflecting its diverse product range and the myriad of handloom choices. The toys reveal their own little tale with dogs, cats, dolls and scores of other characters luring the children to poke at their funny little faces, captivating their little minds.

The newly opened showroom in Colombo while being infused with the same

characteristics as the Wanduragala showroom also caters to the spiritually minded providing joss sticks, hand-woven yoga mats and other items for religious purposes.

With a deep love towards the community, Selyn has upheld its commitment of providing a sustainable livelihood to its employees and empowering the lives of the women. Its heart of giving has seen over 1000 people join its cause to preserve a rich tradition and promote the use of handloom. Throughout the entire manufacturing process Selyn adheres to fair trade standards and strives to be socially and environmentally responsible; it is this principle that has enabled it to acquire membership of the World Fair Trade Organisation, an honour bestowed rarely.

Selyn is symbolic of a close knit family rather than just a business: a family, whose dedication, skill and love is spun and weaved into the fabric, creating patterns that reflect the spirit of the nation and reviving the art of the loom.

Selyn

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