



**A Muslim Girls Journey
in Dress**

Written and illustrated by
Shafana Begum

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in Dress

Acknowledgments

To the two people who have picked me up when I was down and knew I can fight through the obstacles that came towards me

My best friend, Shumona

My sister, Farhana

Prologue

Shafana Begum is someone who is very close to me, someone who I have known since I was in the 8th grade, someone who had seen my ups and my downs and vice versa. My relationship with Shafana is quite unique compared to the relationship that I have with others, and it had developed slowly but surely it was a strong bond. We both went to our first BTS concert together, an artist group that we both look up to very dearly, and it had been one of the best experiences I had. I was able to be myself with the person who has seen me go through it all. Our time together that day had a very big impact on the development of our friendship. I feel like that was when we felt our red string of fate fully intertwine. Although this concert/artist is not the only thing that holds our bond so tightly together, it is something that is involved in our destiny with one another.

Another mention in this book would be my 20th birthday, where Shafana had worn an outfit that was very outside of her comfort zone in fashion but decided to wear it to make my big 20 special. Remember how I mentioned that Shafana had been there for me through thick and thin? This day is a prime example. I had been going through the worst year of my life to come and Shafana, along with my other friends, had done their best to make my 20th a day where I forgot everything that was happening in my life for at least one day.

Ultimately, Shafana may have not made any historical impact with her sense of fashion or style of clothing (yet), however I truly believe that someday she will be capable of conducting her own line of the clothes that Shafana hoped she could have found growing up as a hijabi in a modernized society.



Shumona Islam

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Visiting Florida

This is the earliest memory I have of travelling with my parents. We went to Florida to visit my cousin and her family. I was about three or four years old, and we went to a small attraction near her house. It is called the Coral Castle Museum in Homestead, Florida which had limestone structures. Every time I looked at a picture of me standing next to the large fountain there, I would immediately remember when my sister and I found a ping pong table near the restroom. Although I was not tall enough to play properly, we still gave it a try and we were not successful. But that memory stayed with me till this day.

At the age of three or four, I doubt I had a say in my chose in clothes. My mom or sister most likely dressed me and modified my look the way they saw fit. This day I wore a white graphic t-shirt with hot pink writing on it and a red and white plaid printed *mini skirt with a white button* in the middle at the waist. My hair was part in half with a *zig zag pattern* and tied in *two ponytails*. I cannot remember what shoes I wore, nor can I find a picture of me in them. I was adorned with a *handmade gold bracelet* that my mother got for me, and she treasured it very much.

The sad thing is I cannot remember what my exact emotions were or my attachment to the dress. After 18 years, I think it is expected to not recall such emotions, but I can guess them. I remember being attached to the very girly colors, clothes and wanting to look like the fashionable cartoons of the time, such as The Bratz or Barbie. The gold bracelet was and still is my favorite item from this day. The bracelet is such a personal item that was given to me by my mom leaving an emotional attachment every time I saw or wore it. Unfortunately, years later from this day I lost it and had to hear my mom complain about it with no end.

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Apu's high school graduation

Apu is my sister and in my culture, we refer to an older sister as Apu. It is like having formal speech in Spanish. She is 16 years older than me, and I see her as a mother figure because she took care of me most of my life. Any moments or events I spend with her are always memorable and dear to me. I never have an automatic memory of her high school graduation until I see a picture of us. In that picture we were standing outside of the area the graduation took place and I decided to give a sassy pose to the camera while my sister was on the phone.

I was wearing a salwar kameez, which is a traditional Bangladeshi attire that we also call a three piece. As a young kid I often did not dress myself or get the option to pick what I want to wear. As a result, my mom put me in a salwar kameez that was all that same print. It was a deep brown with some red undertones and had something like a *tie dye pattern*. We would call this a three piece for the simple fact that the attire was three pieces. It consisted of a top that would reach up to the knees, a bottom that was loose and poufy, and a *scarf to wear around the neck*. Although this was an occasion, there was nothing particularly special about my dress. My hair was simply put in a *ponytail* with all my baby hair flying away. Thinking back to that, I realize I would never wear something like that now.

When being as young as 4 years old, I never had any attachment to many of the traditional clothes that I owned. I never hated them either and there were two reasons for this love and hate relationship I had with it. I used to feel weird whenever I wore any traditional clothes because it was not what everyone else is wearing and sometime, we got weird looks. Then, at home the women of my family or of close friends would wear the salwar kameez comfortably and proudly. This created the confusing emotions I would have to wearing traditional clothing until I was well into my teen ages.

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Red scooter and lunch

I can remember this moment like it was the other day. There was no special occasion for me to remember this so vividly. This was when I lived in Greenpoint, Brooklyn and my fathers' store was only one long block away from home. I was riding my red scooter to my father's store to give my older brother his lunch. The reason I recall this day easily is because I fell off my knock off scooter and got a bloody knee on the way. This happened right around the corner from our store, so I had to limp the rest of the way in tears.

I wore a handmade salwar kameez that had a very similar concept to the one from my sister's graduation. The outfit was all one print again just in a bigger size and different pattern. This salwar kameez was the same color but had small paisleys all over. My mom tied my *coconut oil covered hair in a tight braid*. This is a common style in our culture for having long hair. I had the *scarf hanging from the back of my neck*, so the front pieces were covering my chest. After I fell off the scooter my bottoms were ripped at the knee of one leg and at the shin of the other.

Although the memory I have of this outfit is not a happy one, it is one of the most memorable ones I have. I was around the age of 14 when this happened and was comfortable in what I was wearing. Whereas few years before that I would have been be conscious of wearing traditional clothes outside on a normal basis. When I found that the bottoms ripped after the fall I was upset because it was a handmade outfit my mother got made from Bangladesh. It was also one of my favorite summer attires because of the lightweight material that was used to make it.

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Apu's Wedding

My sister's wedding is supposed to be a happy memory for me, but it was the total opposite. She got married on July 3, 2009, in Dhaka, Bangladesh which is our home country. After the vows and everyone was saying their goodbyes to the bride, my nine-year-old self got lost in the big crowd and couldn't hug her goodbye before she left. Since I share a very deep connection with her, it was important to me to be there next to her during such a precious moment. From the overwhelming amount of people and emotions after they said "I do" people gathered to say their goodbyes before the couple went off. Unfortunately, no one remembered the little sister of the bride wanting to hug goodbye. I clearly remember crying all night because I did not get to see her before she left for her in-law's house.

I wore a traditional Bengali dress called an anrkali, which is like a salwar kameez or three-piece set. The dress was a Persian pink Anarkali with matching pants and scarf. There were *brass-colored beads all over the chest area* making an intricate design and small stones randomly places around the bottom half of the dress. I had the scarf even *hanging from my right shoulder* as it is a common style with this kind of attire. My *hair was washed* with Garnier shampoo and smelled *fruity*. Due to the lack of time to get ready I let my hair air dry and *let it out and be frizzy*. I had my cousin help me put on black *eyeliner along my waterline* and on my *lids for a winged look*.

Around the age of nine to twelve I was very fond of this style of dress. It was a go to style for most occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, and Islamic holidays. I loved the dress, but I didn't pretty because of the lack of prep for everything else. The main reason I remember this dress is the sad memory of feeling separated from my sister. It is hard to forget especially when you are in a crowd of people dressed so neatly and pretty while only having a nice dress.

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First day in Al-Noor School

This was my first day in the Islamic private school I stayed in till high school. I transferred in 2013 to this school in 8th grade which seems like an odd time to change schools. The school's name is Al-Noor School located at 675 4th Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11232. My first day there hold a unique moment that is hard to forget. I was the only new student in my grade and at morning line up the girl in front of me said "Welcome to hell". I ironically felt welcomed, and I found it funny because she wasn't completely wrong. This day was the beginning of a new chapter in my life that changed a lot of aspects in my life.

For the first time I had to wear a uniform to school every day. The uniform was a white hijab, black or white shoes, and a black abaya (dress). There were strict dress codes to be followed. That morning, I made sure to *brush every nook and cranny of my mouth* possible. Then, I *brushed my hair back* and clipped it in a half ponytail, so it is easy for me to put on my hijab. I picked out my best black abaya that had *black stones along the mid bottom* are creating a bridge like design. I made sure to *wrap my cleanest and whitest hijab* in the style that I felt flattered my face best. My shoes were a pair of grey and white Supra low sneakers with floral design all over the top.

Since this was the first day in a new school that was also an Islamic school, it made me extremely nervous. There were a lot of things that were different from a normal public school that I had to learn and get used to. I was initially uncomfortable with the uniform because it was out of the ordinary for me. I went from wearing regular clothing with a hijab to wearing an abaya every day to school. I used to feel like people would look at me weird for it but overcame that after a few months.

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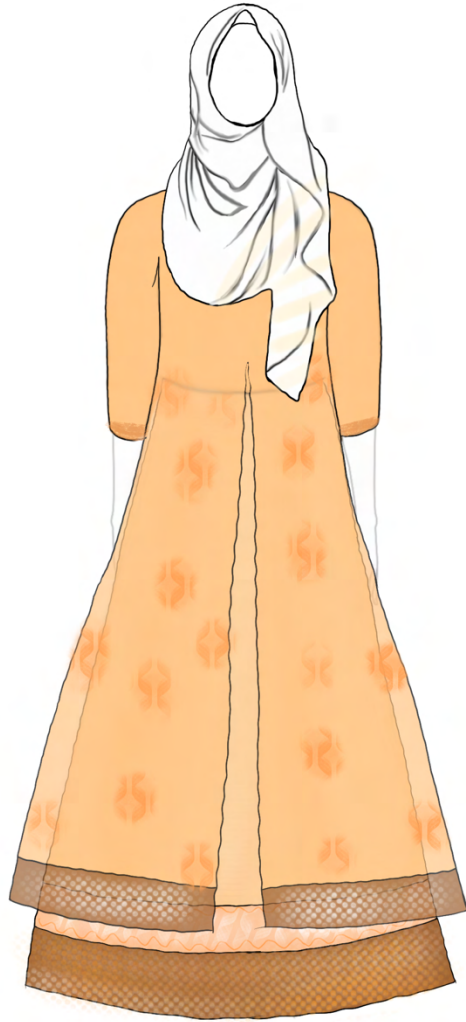
Mejo Bhiyah's wedding celebration

Mejo Bhiyah is what I call my second oldest brother in my culture like how I call my sister, Apu. Most Bengali weddings are celebrated over 3 to 4 days, the third day being a general celebration of the bride and groom being married. In February 2018, we were in my dad's hometown at a Community Center in Kishorgonj, Bangladesh. Again, it was a very unhappy memory like my sister's wedding. Everyone was dressed beautifully but towards the end of the celebration a fight began between the two families and caused my mother to faint. This day is always unforgettable when the main thing I remember is being concerned for my parents' health.

I was around the age of 17 or 18 and by then I had full control and choice over what I wore and how I did my own makeup. Since I wear the hijab, I *brushed my hair and clipped it into a half ponytail*. I put on some concealer and foundation to *even out my skin tone* and have a *smooth look*. I did a *warm toned eye look* with browns and golds and did a *thick winged liner* to accentuate my eye shape. I added my go to lip stick shade which was a deep pink red and *emphasized my cupid's bow with a bit of highlight*. Lastly, I put on a Kat Von D setting powder to finish my makeup. I wore a gorgeous gold color Anarkali that was *tailored to fit my body* perfectly. There were *gold beaded designs along the chest* and around the skirt of the dress. This dress was 2 layers to give a more volumed look from the waist down.

This is one of the few dresses I treasured after wearing once. Since this dress was especially tailored to fit me, I felt good in it more than my other dresses. I felt beautiful and like a Disney princess. Unfortunately, even though I felt that in the beginning of the day by the end of the party everyone was distressed and on edge because of a random feud that broke out between the bride and grooms' family. So, the celebrations ended with everyone dressed in beautiful garments but crying their makeup off.

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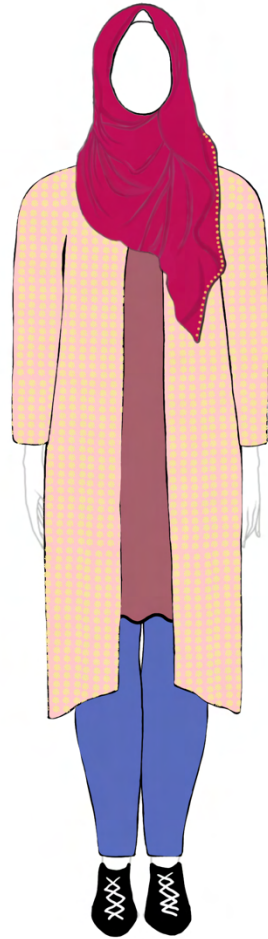
18th Birthday/WiTNY

This was a happy day in my young adult life because I finished a coding program with Cornell Tech, and it was my 18th birthday. I got into a summer internship in Summer 2018 for college women interested in coding. The program was called WiTNY, which stands for Women in Technology & Entrepreneurship in New York. The last day was on July 13 at the Cornell Tech Campus on Roosevelt Island – 2 W Loop Rd, New York, NY 10044. My group and I had to present our final application idea to the instructors after 4 weeks of training. It was a very significant time in my life because it was my birthday and I spent time with my group learning more about coding which I enjoy as a side hobby. suspended

I decided to wear something of my mom's that she handed down to me to celebrate the day. I wanted to dress comfortably while still being dressy casual for the special day. I wore a long sleeve stretchy ribbed dress that was a mauve pink color, dark blue washed skinny jeans, and my mom's light pink long button shirt dress. The ribbed dress from Forever 21 was very form fitting so I chose to *drape* the shirt dress over to lessen the view of my curves. The shirt dress was very loose and similar to the cut of a coat dress. The skinny jeans pulled the outfit together by *wrapping* around my toned calves. I finished the outfit with a hot pink colored hijab that had golden colored squares along the parameters of the *hijab*.

The shirt dress is the main reason I have a strong emotional attachment to this dress. Wearing something that belonged to my mom made it feel special, like I had her support with me that day even if she wasn't there with me physically. I also felt like I was embracing myself for who I was at the time. I also remember this dress because a photographer took a picture of my group which later ended up in the CUNY Thursday briefing emails. This day and dress is attached to the feeling of being an over achiever and growth.

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My first BTS concert

My best friend, Shumona and I got tickets for a BTS concert on October 6th, 2018. This was truly an unforgettable experience for both of us. The concert took place at Citi Field at 41 Seaver Way, Queens, NY 11368. At the time I lived in Queens, NY so I was able to go to the concert without getting in trouble with my parents. This day holds a lot of significance for a few reasons. Shumona and I have been friends since middle school and only became closer as time progressed, until this day we are very dear friends to each other. We both became passionate fans of the K-pop boy group called BTS in 2015. Both of us wished to experience a BTS concert together since the band meant a lot to us and was the core of our friendship at the time.

We both matched outfits in case we lose each other and thought it would be cute. We both wore pink shiny button up jerseys and black jeans. I wore a maroon-colored long sleeve shirt under the pink baseball jersey to cover my arms and chest. I paired this with black skinny jeans that *wrapped* around my legs very tightly. This clearly showed the curves of my hips and legs. I chose to match my *hijab* with my inner shirt and *wrapped* it and *pinned* it in a shorter style so it would not be difficult to handle during the concert. I went with my worn-out Converse sneakers since they were comfortable, and I would be standing during the whole concert.

The emotional attachment I had to this dress was that it was solely picked out to match with my best friend and to go to a concert we both wanted. At the time I felt like I looked very nice and pretty. The combination of being excited to see my favorite band for the first time and spending that experience with Shumona was the key memory attached to this dress. The memory of Shumona and I on the floor admissions, singing to the lyrics during the concert will always be unforgettable. This was also the few occasions I was outside without family but instead with a person I care very much about.

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Sister date

After my sister's marriage in 2009, we barely spent time together years after she moved out. Later, she had a baby and until after my niece turned 4 or 5, we were able to have a day to ourselves. We both needed some time away from family and responsibilities, so we planned a lunch date. We went to an all you can eat sushi restaurant in Lower Manhattan. My sister and I share a deeper connection in my family compared to everyone else. As the only 2 daughters we are able to relate our life struggles and be there to support each other. That day we shared the struggles and hardships we were going through with family and friends while enjoying spicy tuna rolls and California rolls.

I wanted to dress up for this day as it was a while since I spent time with my sister. I wore a dress my mom got made from Bangladesh with a beautiful blush colored lace layered over a black fabric. The dress was a long drop waist dress that reached my feet and *draped* over my body very loosely. I modified the dress by *wrapping* a black belt I bought from Target around my waist to *accentuate my slim waist*. This transformed the drop waist dress to look more like an A-line dress. I wore a pair of black pointed flats from Payless and *wrapped* a maroon-colored hijab on my head. I put a thin layer of foundation to my face to create a *smooth surface* on my skin. I added a thick winged eyeliner to *elongate my eyes* and finished with a red-pink matte lipstick for *plump looking lips*.

I always love the dresses my mother gets made for me in Bangladesh since it is so personal and made just for me. I had this dress for about 3 years at the time, but it was one of the few dresses that made me feel beautiful. The way it fit and flowed on my body gave me confidence and boosted my self-esteem. When I wore this dress to spend quality time with my

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sister, it added to the experience and memories I had with the dress. The dress means so much that I kept it as inspiration to create more like it in the future.



Princess dress

It was *Eid-ul Adha* in 2018 and I was spending it with friends at the piers. We went to the Hunter's Point South Park located at Center Blvd, Long Island City, NY 11101. This dress is something that my mom had made for me on her trip to Bangladesh, my home country. My mom has this routine where whenever she travels to Bangladesh, she will buy fabric from here, take it to Bangladesh, and come back with the most beautiful articles of clothing I have ever set my eyes on. In a way, you can say that this is where I get my interest in fashion. Amongst the many dresses she had brought back for me, the purple dress I had worn on this day had to be my favorite.

It was an amazing deep purple net layer with flowers over a purple satin fabric that had a slit in the front. I started getting ready by taking a shower and spraying my favorite perfume, making me *smell like a meadow of flowers*. I decided to curl my hair using a curling iron, so would take a small chunk and *wrap* it around the heated wand. This gave my hair more *shape in my curls and volume*. I buffed in my foundation to create a *smooth* look on my face and *contoured* my nose to make it look *narrower and more pointed*. I applied glue to my lash line and *adhered* lashes to make *my eyes appear larger*. I finished my make up with a dark mauve lip stick and made sure to *apply* it slightly over my natural lip shape to make them *more rounded and plumper*. I *brushed my hair slick* and then tied it in a ponytail. I *wrapped* my tan hijab around my head and *pinned* it in place, so it does not move throughout the day.

This long dress was very special to me for a few reasons. The way it fit me was very snug. It flattered my curves while also giving me the modest look that I was looking for in the moment. It was almost princess-like and made me feel very dressy in such a simple, one-piece dress. I always loved this dress for the way it gave me confidence and made me feel feminine.

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My most confident self

Growing up, I had always struggled with self-confidence and self-love. It's something that I try to get better with as time passes. On this day, I decided to accompany Apu to a birthday party that her friend, Sharifa, was holding for her son. I knew that I would see familiar faces and wanted to look my best. I went to Sharifa's private residence located near Chelsea Market, New York, NY 10011. I met my old friend, Sultana, who is also Sharifa's younger sister and her college friends at the party. We were catching up with each other and I got to get closer with her friends. They were such sweet people and were constantly complimenting me on my makeup and fashion sense.

I wore a turquoise and pink *salwar kameez* that was gifted to me by my mom during my graduation. I put on my foundation by buffing it in for 5 minutes which gave me *smooth and blurred surface of skin*. I colored in my brows to make them *even and symmetrical*. I applied blue and pink eyeshadow to match the dress. I drew on eyeliner to make my eye look *longer and cat like*, I also *adhered* wispy lashes to make my eyes *wider*. I contoured my nose and cheeks to make my face *slimmer*. I finished my makeup with a sheer pink plumping lip gloss that made my lips look *thicker and fuller*. I completed my outfit by *wrapping* my light pink hijab around my head and pinning it in place.

The day I was wearing this dress, I was going to be seeing family friends that I had not seen for a long time, as well as some new people. I felt that it was the perfect time to wear this dress because it made me feel confident. I took this as a chance to show my growth as a person. When I had finally arrived at the party, I got a compliment from almost everybody I spoke with. The compliments helped me feel more comfortable in wearing traditional clothing as well as boosting my confidence.

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Flight to Florida was cancelled

My parents and I had a flight to Florida for an Islamic holiday that was cancelled three times. This was not an eventful memory, but it was a memorable one because I was very sick all that time. We were at LaGuardia Airport in Queens, NY 11371. It was in August 2019 and the weather was very cloudy and rainy which caused our flight to be cancelled and delayed 3 days in a row. We were planning to spend the holiday with my cousin and her family in Homestead, Florida. Luckily, we were still able to but we did not get to stay as long as we originally planned.

I wore a what I found to be comfortable and stylish. It was a black tunic with gold embroidery along the upper chest are. The tunic was knee length and fit around my form very well. I felt that I looked very pale and sick, so I put on light makeup to help me look livelier. I *applied* a light layer of brown eyeshadow over my eyelids and a few coats of mascara on my lashes to make my eye look *bigger*. I *rubbed* on some scented body oil on my pulse points, leaving me *smelling sweet yet musky*. I *wrapped* my nude color *hijab* around my head and let it lightly sit over my shoulders. Lastly, I tugged on my thick shawl and wrapped it over my upper body to *keep warm* from the air conditioning.

black jogger pants, a black hijab, and a brown shawl that was gifted to me by my sister-in-law.

I was feeling extremely run down and tired this day but the choice in my outfit was able to help alleviate some of that. It was a very cozy outfit that managed to make me feel stylish and laid back. I did not want to sacrifice me looks only because I was sick and wanted to be comfortable. When I put on this outfit, I mentally was in a better space that helped me feel better to a certain extent. It is like putting on a sweater when you feel a chill at home, you feel warm and toasty inside. Eventually, the warmth and comfort puts you in a good mood.

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Smiles on a hot day

I recall having a great time with people I considered close friends, but I wore a very warm outfit for that sunny day. I underestimated the heat on this day and wore one too many layers. I left for classes earlier in the day when it was a bit chilly. When it was afternoon, and I finished my classes the sun was beaming down. Since it was such a beautiful day, I thought spending some time with friends would be ideal. We went to Fort Greene Park at Dekalb Ave & S Portland Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11205.

I was wearing a black turtleneck with a cream knitted cropped sweater on top and a pair of blue jeans. I *wrapped* a dark green *hijab* around and let the extra fabric hang over my shoulder. I used to do light makeup when I had classes. My routine was to *paint* on medium thick wing eyeliner to make my *eyes narrower*. I would *brush* on a light layer of nude eye shadow shades and give depth to my eyes. My last steps would be to *tint* my lips a deep wine red and use the same lip tint as a blush. I would *pat* on the blush on the apples of my cheek for a youthful look.

This day did give me a great picture to use for my Linked In profile even though I was sweating. This dress was not exactly a favorite one, but the bad decisions made it a memorable outfit. I felt comfortable in how I managed to combine a very casual look with something that was fit for a professional profile picture. I used to hide my body shape around this time, so the oversized sweater was a favorite item to wear. I was able to feel safe and relaxed in this dress along with having a good time with friends.

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Shumona's 20th birthday

This day was my best friend's birthday and we all dressed up and went out to eat. We went to a restaurant called Arirang Hibachi steakhouse at 8814 4th Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11209. I decided to wear something out of my comfort zone. Shumona, as mentioned before, is my best friend who is constantly begging me to try out styles that are a bit different than what I usually wear. The significance of this outfit on this day was to make Shumona feel special with her birthday outing and showing her that I actually can go outside my comfort zone and look good while doing it.

I started getting ready with a shower to be fresh and clean. While letting my hair air dry I began with my makeup. I *brushed* on the foundation and gave myself a *smooth surface* to work on. I *filled in* my eyebrows using a brow gel and made them *symmetrical* to each other. I patted on some brown eye shadows to do a smokey eye look. I *painted* on a thick winged eyeliner to *elongate my eyes* and *adhered* some natural lashes. I *contoured* my nose and jaw using a darker color, which made nose look *narrow and slim*. I finished my makeup with a bold red lip, while slightly overlining my lips so they appear *bigger*. I wore the black corset top and *tightened* the strings to shape my waist, giving me the *hourglass body*. Then I paired it with a pair of gray pants. Lastly, I wrapped my white *hijab* and hung the extra fabric over my shoulders.

Since this was out of my comfort zone, I was uncomfortable at first. However, this did not mean I didn't love how I looked in the outfit. I feel that it is completely normal to be uncomfortable when trying out a new style, hence being outside of your comfort zone. Despite trying something new for the first time and being a bit anxious about how the night would play out in this outfit, I found that it was not too bad. I actually really loved the way the outfit looked on me. It was a first step towards broadening my horizons in different styles.

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Moms' Sari

My mom had a *sari* that was gifted to her in her early years of marriage but never wore. I decided to be closer to my cultural roots and wear that for an Islamic holiday, *Eid-ul Adha*, and it was the best decision ever. During *Eid*, I would usually wear an *Anarkali*. Seeing that this year my plans had been different than the past years due to Covid-19, I decided to try something new and wear my mother's *sari*. I did not regret it one bit. It was such a beautiful piece of clothing that it almost made me sad to hear that my mother had never worn it after receiving it as a gift. This *sari* had such a huge impact on me that I looked everywhere for something similar to it. Unfortunately, I could not find anything like it, which just makes it even more precious to me.

It was a cream *sari* with a green and gold border along the lengths of it and small floral design throughout the cream base. I started by wearing a petticoat and long sleeve shirt to put on the *sari*. I took the long fabric and began *wrapping* it 3 times around my waist. Then I make about 5 pleats and tuck them into the top of the petticoat. I continue to take the rest of the long fabric and *drape* it over my opposite shoulder to gain maximum coverage. After tucking the fabric in all the right places, I *pinned* them in certain points to stay together. Lastly, I take a green hijab and *wrap* it in a shorter style to show off the *sari*.

This was a very memorable moment and day in my life. I felt extremely beautiful and confident. The *sari* made me feel even closer to my Bengali culture and even helped me see the beauty in our traditional clothing. Since *saris* are known to usually be worn by older women, I felt a little more mature and my age wearing it. Wrapping on a *sari* takes a bit of effort with the pleating and the folding, but it just goes to show that a little effort goes a long way.

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Authors Biography



Shafana Begum

I grew up in a practicing Muslim family with 4 older siblings and my parents. At a young age I have always struggled to find clothes for myself because of the lack big sizes and modest clothes. This caused me to want to major within the fashion industry and in the future to have my own line of clothes. This helped me decide to pursue fashion design as career choices. With the help of City Tech and its Business and Tech of Fashion major I look forward to use this and have a business of my own for all people, not just Muslims.