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Packing: A poem

By Qazi Mustabeen Noor¹

Abstract

For the student planning to venture out of their home and set sail for higher studies, the busiest time of the year is in the Fall. University application season is hard, but it is harder still to pack one's bags and leave everything familiar behind. The international student feels especially divided at a time like this: the excitement of experiencing something new and the feeling of bereavement while leaving their world behind. "Packing" speaks of the act of taking with one the things that are important, special, and worthwhile. Though it is virtually impossible to carry one's whole world in two suitcases, it is still worth trying to fit in as much as possible.

Keywords: study abroad, higher education, international students, women travelers, Bangladesh

Packing

Take just one *shari* when you're going abroad, just the one.
Take two pairs of jeans. One with a darker wash than the other, for that smart casual look.
Maybe take the one formal pant, black or gray.
Take a lot of *kurtis* and tops from Taaga, Jatra, Aranya, whichever *deshi* brand you love, or something really quirky from Warehouse. Trust me, those will get you the compliments.
Ditch that *orna*. That nuisance is gone from your life. If you're a *hijabi*, fortunately or unfortunately, then take your best scarves (not the *jhilimili* ones though). The *pashminas*, the embroidered ones. The foreigners have never seen anything half as beautiful.
Take three or maybe five sets of *salwar kameezes* to appease relatives. Keep two of them for the two Eids, if you're Muslim. Maybe ditch a *kameez* and take an extra *shari* if you want to.
Take your junk jewelry, noisy *jhumkas*, nose pins. I took my septum ring and wore it to events.
Take zero books but load your laptop and your Kindle with goodies.
Take zero cosmetics except the ones you immediately need.
Call your cousins, distribute the makeup among them. Take the remaining stuff, stuff you can't part ways with.
Take 5-10 sets of underwear (trust me)
Take just two pairs of *mota* socks (trust me)
Depending on how cold it is, take just two sweaters. Buy the rest from where you're going, especially the winter coat.

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Take a *bodna*.

Take maybe two *khatas* and a pack of 10 Matador pens, depending on how much you write.

Don't take your hair dryer but buy one from there.

Put the rest of your money in a fixed deposit thingy.

Spices? Maybe, but you'll find a semblance of home at the Indian grocery store(s)

Pack your head with memories.

Glossary

Shari: A variation of “saree” in the Bengali pronunciation.

Kurti: A long top to wear with salwar or pants, usually considered casual office wear.

Taaga, Jatra, Aranya, Warehouse: Bangladeshi fashion brands targeted towards the youth.

Orna: A piece of fabric traditionally worn with salwar kameez, also known as dupatta. Wearing the orna is often considered a sign of modesty and young women find themselves facing “ornapolicing” if they choose not to wear it “properly”, or not at all.

Hijabi: A person who wears the hijab, the traditional headscarf donned by Muslim women.

Jhilimili: Shiny, shimmery, sparkly

Pashmina: A variant of spun cashmere originating in Kashmir, it is one of the most prized textiles of South Asia. Pashmina shawls and scarves are intricately woven handicrafts.

Salwar kameez: A traditional suit for women which includes a long top (the kameez), a pair of trousers (salwar) and the orna or dupatta.

Eid: The Muslim religious festival

Jhumka: Layered, dangly earrings.

Mota: Thick

Bodna: Locally used portable bidet for toilet hygiene.

Khata: A notebook or copy book.