

# A Review Paper on Tangali Saree and GI Tag Dispute Between India & Bangladesh

Ketki Gupta<sup>1</sup>, Nikhila Rane<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student MSc –II (Fashion Design and Textile), PG Department of Textile and Apparel SNTD  
Women's University, Mumbai

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, PG Department of Textile and Apparel SNTD Women's University, Mumbai

## Abstract

Tangali Sarees, a six-yard dress worn by women in South Asian countries especially Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, are renowned due to their unique weaving techniques, designs, and motifs. Tangail saree is a traditional handwoven sari of Bangladesh. It originated in the Tangail district of the country. They have been associated with this work generation after generation. Tangail Sarees are famous due to their sophisticated designs and fine cotton and silk yarn, crafted on fly shuttle pit looms. Tangail Saree or Tant Sarees are Bengali cotton sarees originated in 1850s and flourished in 1890s decade. Basak community (Hindus) are its original weavers. The geographical indication (GI) conflict between Bangladesh and India about the Tangail Saree. The traditional weaving art of Tangail saree was recognized as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2025.

**Keywords:** Basak,

## 1. Introduction:

Sari, is a very common term in the Indian Sub-continent, indicates women's attire. Actually, the term sari evolved from Sanskrit *sattika* which means 'strip of cloth'. The word *sattika* is mentioned as describing women's attire in ancient India in Sanskrit literature as well as in Buddhist literature Jatakas. Zulekha Haque appropriately defines it as follows: Sari, the unstitched garment of about 6 yards [5.50 m] draped around the body in various folds and fashions, have lent

Handloom fabrics are handwoven fabrics created on a weaving device called a loom. The process involves entwining a set of vertical threads, the 'warp', with a set of horizontal threads, the 'weft'.

The loom holds the warp threads under tension to facilitate the interweaving of the weft threads over and above the warp using a weaving shuttle. This is done repeatedly to create the handloom fabric. Handloom weaving is a labour of love as much as it's a source of livelihood. It requires utmost patience, artistry, and technical skills not to mention physical strength! The weaver's hand is at the heart of this intricate process. They select the yarn, pattern, colour, texture, and precise technique to create their desired aesthetic. The fabric carries the energy and personality of the weaver and it becomes part of the garment's story.

## Tangali Saree Origin

The Tangail Saree traces its origins to the late 19th century, in the heart of East Bengal, which is modern-day Bangladesh. The district of Tangail, rich in natural resources like cotton and indigo, provided an ideal setting for the Basak community, a group of skilled Hindu weavers, to refine and perfect their craft. These weavers, who initially migrated from Dhaka, were known for their dexterity in producing fine Muslin—

one of the most sought-after fabrics in the Mughal courts. However, with the decline of the Muslin industry, they adapted their skills to create what we now know as the Tangail Saree.

These sarees became highly popular across Bengal, not just for their beauty but also for the stories woven into their fabric. The motifs, often depicting scenes from nature, mythology, and daily life, were a form of narrative art, each saree telling its own unique tale. The weavers of Tangail introduced the “jamdani” technique—an intricate weaving method that allowed for the creation of elaborate patterns and motifs directly on the loom. By the early 20th century, the Tangail Saree had become a symbol of Bengali identity, worn by women of all social classes during festivals, weddings, and other significant events. The weaver's family was involved in the weaving of Tangail sarees produced in undivided Bengal i.e. East-Bengal of British India. No weavers or labourer's were hired, which was the practice of not letting the weaving technique go outside the weaver's family. The Basak families were the original saree weaving families of Tangail. These weavers were mainly from the Hindu "Basak" community. After the partition of the country in 1947, most of the traditional weavers, including most of the Basak weavers' community, of this region started migrated to West Bengal from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh. Due to high cost of raw materials, non-availability of loans from the government, crisis in transportation of goods, lack of business security Hindu weavers gradually migrated from Bangladesh to India, which was mentioned in a research paper published in a journal in 2014.

At present, Muslim weavers also weave this saree along with the weavers of the "Basak" community in Tangail. Basak community maintained their weaving technique through many adversities. Most of the weavers with the help of looms brought with them from East Pakistan (East Bengal, now Bangladesh) and Others with the help of looms provided by the Government of India and Government of West Bengal continued to weave sarees even in refugee camps; many weavers joined the weaving industry of West Bengal as workers in looms owned by local weavers in Santipur, Dhatrigram and Samudragarh. The various types of Tangail handloom sarees produced include: Cotton Saree, Half Silk Saree, Soft Silk Saree, Cotton Jamdani Saree, Gas-mercerised Saree, Twisted Cotton Saree, Dangoo Saree, Baluchherri Saree, Gas-mercerised Saree, Twisted Cotton Saree, Dangoo Saree, Baluchherri Saree

### 1.1. Technical Details :



Tangail sarees in West Bengal are traditionally woven on fly shuttle pit looms using 100S cotton yarn, silk yarn of various counts (14/16-20/22 denier), tasar yarn and also synthetic filament yarn. Sarees are woven using two or more shuttles. The sarees have a variety of border features including plain border or extra warp jacquard designs, with simple traditional color patterns on the *anchal* or colorful cross borders with extra weft designs. The body of the fabric (saree) may be plain or decorated with booties using additional warp/weft with or without Jacquard. In this Tangail saree (Jamdani variety), extra weft threads are inserted to create an extra-weft design, maintaining a ratio of 1:2 between extra weft and ground weft.

The specialty of the design is that the edges of the design are like steps, which is similar to the graphical design.

The traditionally produced Tangail saree in West Bengal is characterized by a special physical finish, which makes it free from "reed mark" (*jorebhanga*) giving it a special look and feel. Also characterized by the stiff finish reed mark

The "Basak" weaver community was the first to start making this saree. In 2024, 20,000 weavers are involved in Tangail saree weaving in Nadia and Purba Bardhaman districts of West Bengal. This saree is folded in *Guti Bhanj*. The motifs of Tangail handloom sari can be divided into such categories: flora (gaachh-buti, pata, padma, lata-padma, phoolkali, aam, minakari), fauna (maachh, maachhi-buti, prajapati), foodstuff (chamcham, phata-chamcham, biscuit), objects of daily life (chain, chatai, karat, jhalor, ball, phata-ball, kathi), geometric form (buti, ruiton), celestial object (tara) and religiously valued item (temple, trishul)



## 2. Gutti banj

The economic sustainability of the Tangail saree industry is a complex issue. The industry is significant, with around 325,000 individuals, including weavers, owners, and trader buyers, actively engaged in this profession<sup>8</sup>. However, the industry is currently facing risks arising from the escalating prices of looms, dyes, and other raw materials, coupled with challenges in transportation facility management. Despite the appreciation of Tangail weavers' sarees from various countries in Europe, America, Japan, and various states across the country, the supply of raw materials is not readily available, and the cost of production goes up due to increase in prices of various parts including raw materials. In terms of measures for long-term sustainability, the Bangladesh government has taken steps to secure the Geographical Indication (GI) for the Tangail Saree.

### 2.1 Gi Tag Dispute

The dispute over the Geographical Indication (GI) tag for Tangail sarees between India and Bangladesh highlights complex issues of cultural heritage and intellectual property rights. GI certification is a form of intellectual property protection granted to products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are closely linked to that origin<sup>11</sup>. This certification helps to prevent unauthorized use of the geographical indication and ensures that only products meeting certain criteria are allowed to be labeled as such. It not only protects the reputation and uniqueness of the product but also promotes economic development in the region by encouraging producers to maintain traditional methods and quality standards.

However, there is still confusion regarding whether the country is following the right and effective course of action given the task at hand. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and the National Crafts Council of Bangladesh (NCCB) had an initiative to protect Bangladesh's Geographical Indications (GIs) and a paper was published titled 'Protecting Bangladesh's Geographical Indication Interests The Case of Jamdani' in October 2014. A team of experts led study that helped the Bangladesh government use the GI Act (2013) to protect Jamdani as a product of Bangladesh and register other GI products. CPD has been always vocal.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), through its 2014 paper "*Protecting Bangladesh's Geographical Indication Interests: The Case of Jamdani*," established the blueprint for this struggle. Critical Oversight: The paper highlights that while Bangladesh enacted its GI Act in 2013, it was initially slow to register products compared to India's aggressive registration of shared heritage (e.g., Jamdani and Tangail). Legal Standing: Under the WTO's TRIPS Agreement, GI is strictly tied to geographical origin. Bangladesh argues that "Tangail" is an eponymous name that cannot exist outside the Tangail district. India argues that the "human factor"—the skill of the Basak community in West Bengal—constitutes a distinct "reputation" tied to their new geography.

The Tangail Saree dispute is a classic case of trans-border heritage. While India has successfully registered the *skill* of the migrated weavers, Bangladesh has reclaimed the *origin* through its own GI and the 2025 UNESCO recognition. The path forward, as suggested by experts at the CPD and NCCB, requires: Vigilant Documentation: Bangladesh must proactively register its 64+ traditional products to prevent further "trademark squatting." Diplomatic Resolution: Potential collaboration on "shared GI" status, acknowledging both the geographical root (Bangladesh) and the artisanal diaspora (India). Economic Protection: Ensuring that the high cost of raw materials and the decline of handloom looms do not render these legal victories hollow for the actual weavers.

### 3.CONCLUSION:

The Tangail saree stands as a testament to the shared cultural fabric of the Bengal region, transcending modern political borders. Originally rooted in the Tangail district of Bangladesh and perfected by the Basak community, the craft followed the weavers during the 1947 partition, establishing a second, equally vibrant home in West Bengal, India. This dual heritage is at the heart of the current Geographical Indication (GI) dispute.

The conflict underscores a pivotal challenge in international intellectual property law: how to protect a tradition that is geographically rooted in one nation but preserved through a diaspora in another. While India's GI tag recognizes the skill of the migrated Basak community in Nadia and Purba Bardhaman, Bangladesh's claim is anchored in the undisputed historical and geographical origin of the craft. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the Tangail saree, the following must be addressed: Legal Reconciliation: International frameworks may need to explore "cross-border GI" status or shared heritage recognitions to prevent market confusion while honoring both the origin and the practitioners. Economic Support: Both governments must address the escalating costs of raw materials and the economic vulnerability of weavers to prevent the "labor of love" from becoming an obsolete profession. Heritage Preservation: The 2025 UNESCO recognition should serve as a catalyst for global branding, shifting the focus from bilateral disputes to the collective preservation of an "Intangible Cultural Heritage."

Ultimately, the Tangail saree is more than a commodity; it is a narrative art form. Whether woven in Bangladesh or West Bengal, the preservation of its "Guti Bhanj" folding, its intricate "Jamdani" motifs,

and its unique physical finish is essential for maintaining the cultural identity of the Bengali people. The resolution of the GI dispute will likely set a global precedent for how the world handles the intellectual property of displaced indigenous crafts.

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