

# Origin and Evolution of the Handloom Industry of Fulia and Its Present Scenario, Nadia District, West Bengal, India

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**Abstract:** This present paper is concerned with the origin and evolution of the handloom industry of Fulia with its present status and also indicates the problems facing by this industry. To prepare this paper, different types of literature have been studied and field survey has also been done. After studying and processing those data, it can be known that the weavers of Fulia came from Tangail Subdivision of East Pakistan (now a district of Bangladesh) during the partition in 1947 and the Bangladesh freedom war in 1971 and the *sharis* weaved by them known as '*Tangail Shari*'. Though after independence, the development of *Tangail Shari* took place at Fulia, in the next two decades it faced many difficulties like unjust wage, money lender exploitations, poor infrastructure etc. In this crucial circumstance, weavers started movement for their survival and a Co-operative has been organized in 1977. This development becomes possible not only for the Co-operative but also for the individuals venture. The productions are exported in different states of India as well as in different countries of the world. The weavers of Fulia are only carrying the traditional style of *Tangail Shari*. But this handloom industry of Fulia is now facing different problems like competition with powerlooms, increasing rate of raw materials, low wages, commercialization of electricity, imported sharis from Bangladesh, lack of organized marketing system, rejection of exporting clothes etc. So from the study, it can be concluded that the joint venture of both the Central Government and the State Government is highly solicited for the development of the handloom industry and also for the region as Fulia is only centre of Traditional *Tangail Shari* in all over the India.

**Keywords:** Co-operative Societies, Exportable Clothes, Handloom Industry, Tangail Shari, Weaver

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## 1. Introduction

In west Bengal, there are many types of cottage industries and they are the important source of Bengal's economy. In this field, handloom industry plays an important role. In Bengal, there are many districts like Murshidabad, Nadia, Bankura, Burdwan, Hooghly etc. which are famous for handloom industries. Among these districts, Nadia is famous for some special types of handloom sharis like *Tangail*, *Jamdani*, *Dhakai-Buti*, *Santipuri* etc. which acquire their own identity all over India and abroad as well. Handloom plays a pivotal role in the socio-economic status of this district. The traditional production on *Jamdani* of Nabadwip, *Santipuri* of Santipur and *Tangail* varieties of Fulia zone has been popular [1] and these three are the main centers of handloom industry of Nadia. Once upon a time, Santipur was an important and famous center of handloom sharis and the history of the

handloom industry of Santipur is very ancient. Probably from the beginning of the Sultani Dynasty, there were handlooms though they were not famous as '*Santipuri*'. In the reign of Lakshmana Sen, a few skilled weavers' family came to Santipur from Dhamrai of Dhaka. They mainly weaved the famous '*Muslin*' which after that converted into designed shari and known as '*Santipuri Shari*' [2]. During the Mughal Empire, these sharis got recognition and production increased to such an extent that the sharis were exported to Afghanistan, Iran, Arabia, Greece and Turkey [3]. During the rule of the East India Company, this handloom industry had been expanded and in independent India, the number of handlooms had been increased due to the migratory weavers from the East Pakistan. Though the number of handlooms and production had been increased, the quality and also the demand was fallen because of lack of choice, poor colour quality, usage of low quality cotton etc. [2]. In this

circumstance, a new weaver settlement was developed at Fulia, birth place of Kabi Krittibas Ojha, beside Santipur. Fulia became renowned all over the India as well as in the world for its '*Tangail Shari*'. In this paper, we have tried to throw light, how the *Tangail Shari* and Fulia are synonymous and what is the present scenario of the handloom industry.

## 2. Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are-

- To identify the origin and evolution of the handloom industry of Fulia.
- To study the present status of this industry.
- To identify the problems facing by this industry.

## 3. Materials and Methods

To prepare the paper, different types of journal, papers and newspaper cutting have been collected from different sources and literature study has been done. In field work, by using sampling technique, primary data were collected from 200

families related with handloom industry. Secondary data also collected from three main co-operatives of Fulia. The collected information has been studied through different analytical and interpretative methods. Data collected from secondary sources have been processed, studied, explained and presented for the perspectives of development.

## 4. Study Area

Fulia is well known for its handloom sharis but geographically it consists of Sukpukuria-58, Belgoria-57, Fulia Township and Buincha-70 mouzas of Santipur block of Nadia district. Though there is a mouza named 'Phulia' which is the birth place of Krittibas. In memory of Krittibas, the rail station has been named '*Fulia*' (*Phulia*) instead of '*Buincha*'. So all these mouzas are known as 'Fulia' based on its communication i.e. Fulia (Phulia) Rail station. But at present, according to census 2011, Sukpukuria-58, Belgoria-57, Fulia Township and Buincha-70 mouzas are joined together and named 'Phulia' as a Census Town [4]. This area is located in the south-eastern part of the Santipur block.

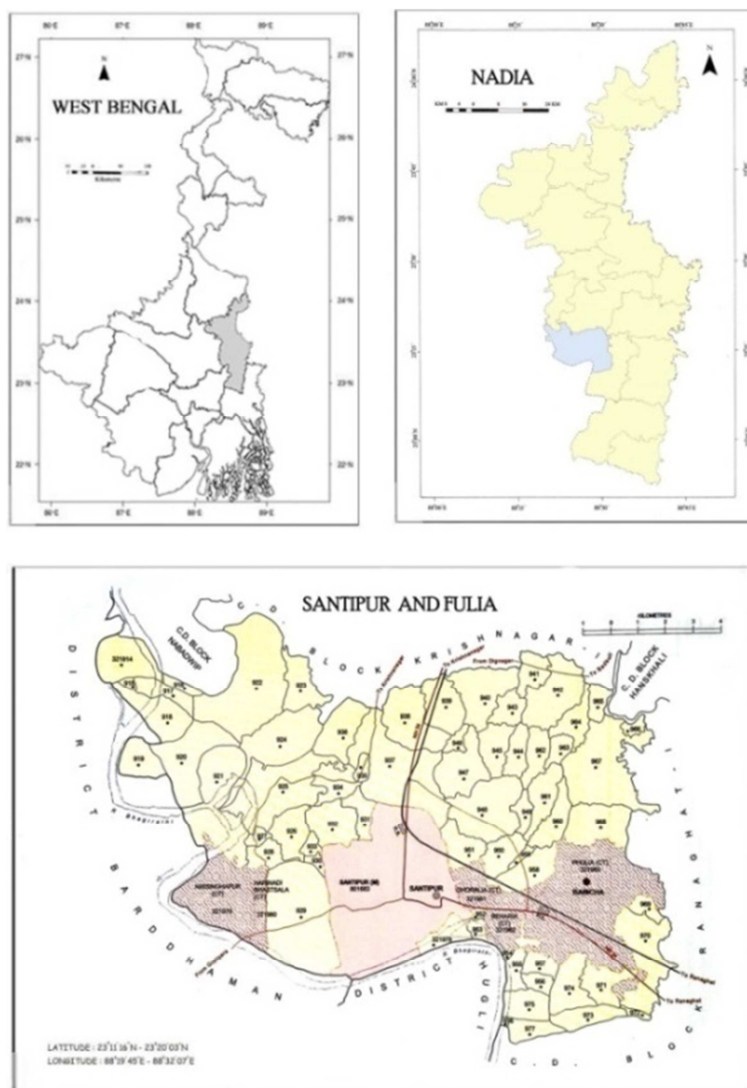


Fig. 1. Location Map.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. History of the Tangail Shari

Before the discussion of the *Tangail Shari* of Fulia, it is necessary to discuss about the origin and the history of this *Tangail Shari*. The *Tangail Shari* seems to be incomparable to the *Santipuri Shari* regarding to age. Probably hundred years ago, at the last decades of nineteenth century this shari was evolved in *Tangail* of undivided Bengal. The weavers of this *Tangail Shari* are the successors of the famous *Muslin* weavers. The weavers of Dhamrai of Dhaka and adjacent Chowhatta came to Tangail and its adjacent twenty two villages by getting invitations from the *Jamindars* of Deldwar, Santosh and Gharinda [2]. At first they weaved only *thann* and cloths of turban. Then in the year of 1880-85 they had begun to weave *sharis*. After that in 1923-24, the design in the *shari* had been started and in 1931-32, Jacard Machine was introduced for this purpose [5]. During the partition in 1947 and the freedom war of Bangladesh in 1971, the Tangail weavers came to West Bengal as refugee and most of them were settled at Fulia of Nadia District and Samudragarh of Burdwan and some were settled at Dhatrigram of Burdwan and Nabadwip of Nadia.



Fig. 2. Traditional Tangail Shari.

Though these refugee weavers made some changes in weaving techniques in different areas but the weavers of Fulia revived their own traditional weaving techniques without any change. In spite of immeasurable poverty, deprivation, exploitation, they developed this industry ceaselessly very fast. The *sharis* which they weaved with fine texture and finishing, diversified design, excellent colour; charm the Indian and foreign market and known as *Tangail Shari* [2].

### 5.2. Origin and Evaluation of the Handloom Industry

The name 'Fulia' has been coined by Narosingha Ojha (ancestor of Kabi Krittibas Ojha, author of Bengali Ramayana) as this place was the living place of 'Mali' [6]. From that time (approx. thirteen century) to since

independence, there was no handloom industry at Fulia. After independence and partition in 1947, the weavers of Tangail Subdivision of Mymensingh District, East Pakistan (Now Tangail is a district under Dhaka Division, Bangladesh), came to India and settled at Fulia. The weavers, who were mainly the '*Basak*' community, lived in the surrounding twenty two villages of Tangail town. These were Nolsodha, Gharinda, Tarototia, Bhatkura, Ashokpur, Bajitpur, Pathraiel, Suruj, Kagmari, Santosh, Puithajani, Bhukta, Bartha, Bororiya, Kokdohora, Sahadebpur, Gosainjoyaer, Joyaer, Chandi, Brahmankushiya, Bangra and Aloya. Fulia was selected by the State Government and a colony had been set up for the weavers. About 125 families were settled there. But then the innumerable refugees were coming from East Pakistan. They had no other option besides taking shelter in the *Mahajan's* houses because of little space in the rehabilitation colony. When the numbers of weavers were increasing day by day, to accommodate the weavers, *Mahajans* settled the weavers by purchasing lands in a very cheap price. In this way Buincha, Mathpara, Chatkatala, Bahannabigha, Taltala etc. weaver's settlements were formed. Though after independence, the development of *Tangail Shari* took place at Fulia, this development faced various difficulties in the next two decades like unjust wage, money lender exploitations, poor infrastructure etc. For these reasons, the weaver community faced many problems and they were compelled to choose alternative occupations to earn their daily bread. Some were decided to back in East Pakistan (Bangladesh). In this crucial circumstance, weavers started movement for their survival. At that time the number of handlooms exceeded ten thousand [2]. At that time, in the year of 1973, under the supervision of Mr.T.K.Bagchi, the branch manager, United Bank of India, Santipur and with the co-operation of some local weavers, an organization named '*Fulia Tangail Shari Bayan Silpa Samity*' was set up on March, 1974 to protect the interest of the weaver community. Due to increasing number of members, another organization had to establish on September, 1974. The organization's name was '*Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samity*'. But in course of time, these two organizations faced different adversities. When the number of members increased leaps and bounds, therefore, these two organizations were divided into three organizations for the three areas of the village and converted into three Co-operative Societies by registration under West Bengal Co-operative Society Act with the help of State Handloom Department and Co-operative department in 1977. These Co-operative Societies are-

- 1) Fulia Tangail Shari Bayan Silpa Samabay Samity Ltd.
- 2) Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samity Ltd.
- 3) Natun Fulia Tantubay Samabay Samity Ltd.

Although above mentioned three Co-operative were set up, there was no permanent buildings. With the help of Local administration, permanent land was acquired for the Co-operative in 1980 and permanent building named '*Samabay Sadan*' was established in 1990 near the 'Phulia' rail station. It was a joint venture of West Bengal Govt. and National Co-



operative Development Corporation (NCDC). [7]

Hence, the desired development of this industry happened from 1980. This development becomes possible not only for the Co-operatives but for the individual venture also. At present, this handloom industry is well appreciated in our state as well as in India and worldwide.



Fig. 3. Samabay Sadan (Co-operative Societies of Fulia).

### 5.3. Present Scenario of the Handloom Industry

Handloom Industry is one of the main sources of economy of Nadia District. Though there are many places are popular for this industry but Fulia has its own identity. Fulia region is an area where weaving is the main occupation for the majority of people living there [8]. There are approx. 35,000 handlooms at Fulia and the annual production is about Rs. 450 crores [9]. Nowadays, the *Tangail Shari* of Fulia is also known as '*Fulia-Tangail*' all over the country and abroad as the artisan-weavers have introduced new styles and designs in the traditional *Tangail Shari* and these designs have made the *sharis* more attractive. Though the *Tangail Shari* is famous and accepted all over the world, there are no proper development policies. So there is no proper statistical data about the handloom industry of Fulia to analysis the present conditions. We have tried to draw a scenario of this industry with the help of sample survey on the people related with this industry and the co-operative societies.

To know the present scenario of the handloom industry of Fulia, we have made a sample survey on 200 families who are attached to this industry and three Co-operative Societies. By analyzing the collected data, we have tried to draw out the present condition of this industry and the condition of the people related to this field. Out of total surveyed families, 83 percent families have own handlooms and the family members are associated with weaving handlooms and 15 percent families are '*Mahajans*' who are related with business of *sharis*. Remaining 7 percent are labours who have no handlooms and are weaving in exchange of money. Though 83 percent families have handlooms but only 44.31 percent handlooms are operated by the family members. The handlooms are mainly operated by the labours came from Coochbihar. This is because, at present the average no. of

handlooms of each family is three and the families can't supply sufficient labours. As a result, the families are dependent on the migratory labours. In case of production, a handloom can produce average four *sharis* in a week. The economic conditions of the weaver families are not so good. About 37 percent families earn less than 3000 rupees per month which is not sufficient to maintain the livelihood at present. About 37.5 percent families earn 3000-6000 rupees per month which is also insufficient to maintain a standard lifestyle. Only 11.5 families earn above 12000 rupees per month. In this circumstances the young generation are not interested in this field and they have engaged themselves in other professions i.e. teacher, different govt. and private jobs etc. for a secure future. The parents are also encouraging them to get other jobs as they feel insecure in handloom industry for its various problems. Most of weaver families (57 percent) maintain the handlooms by getting capitals from *Mahajans* and 43 percent families have own capital. Maximum weavers (80.5 percent) of this industry are not involved with co-operative societies and only 19.5 percent families are involved with different co-operative societies. At the initial stage of the development of the handloom industry at Fulia, the weavers started weaving by the help of *Mahajans* and many weavers can't release themselves from the web of the heavy loans. For this, they couldn't get the opportunity to involve with the societies. Low carrying capacity of the Co-operative societies also is an obstacle in this regard. On the other hand, many weavers didn't associate with the societies willingly.



Fig. 4. Different stages of weaving Tangail Shari.

At present, though there are many societies but only three societies play a vital role for the development of this industry. These societies not only produce *Sharis* but different exporting products also i.e. Scarves, Stoles, Made-ups, Dress-materials etc. since 1985. These various kinds of cloths are weaved by using different fibers like cotton, silk, wool, linen, tussar, muga, matka etc. These all productions are exported in different countries of the world like Japan, Germany, Italy, USA, Denmark, French, Switzerland, Australia etc. through Merchant Exporter.

**Table 1.** Statistical data of the main three Co-operative Societies of Fulia.

Sl. No.	Name of the societies	Members	No. of handlooms	Production (Rupees in Lakh)	Marketing (Rupees in Lakh)	Net Profit (Rupees in Lakh)
1	Fulia Tangail Shari Bayan Samabay Samity Ltd.	636	535	248.37	230.87	NA
2	Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samity Ltd.	524	525	644.23	687.90	15.19
3	Natun Fulia Tantubay Samabay Samity Ltd.	543	454	522.25	605.12	8.27

Source: Samabay Sadan, Fulia, 2012-13.

From the above table it is noticeable that though above mentioned Co-operative societies no. 2 and 3 respectively have fewer handlooms; selling amounts are high, as these two societies produce exportable clothes. This export clothes production business is increasing day by day and spreading among the private traders and individual weavers as well. The *sharis* are exported to different cities of South India like Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Vishakhapatnam, Bijaywada, Bangalore etc. Nowadays, a new type of *Tangail Shari* has been invented by the handloom artisan-members of Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samity Ltd. known as *Non-Traditional Tangail Shari* which is based on *Tangail Gharana* but other than *Tangail Shari*.

**Fig. 5.** Traditional Tangail Shari.**Fig. 6.** Non-Traditional Tangail Shari.

These *sharis* are of very simple designs and patterns and need not to starch. Not only co-operative members but also many weavers are now weaving this newly invented *Tangail Shari*.

**Fig. 7.** Different types of Exportable clothes made in Fulia.





Fig. 8. Raw materials like Matka, Wool, Linen etc.

From the above discussion, it is crystal clear that the present condition of the handloom industry of Fulia is not satisfactory and this industry is now oppressed by different problems.

#### 5.4. Problems

The handloom industry of Fulia is now facing different types of problems.

- *Competition with the powerlooms:* According to Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for production) Act, 1985 and 2008, 11 items of clothes are reserved only for handloom industry in our country. As per rules, these items can't be weaved in powerlooms and it is punishable offence [10]. But so many powerlooms have been running illegally in the adjacent areas of Fulia and easily producing almost same quality of *Tangail Shari*. As a result, handlooms are failed to compete with them.
- *Marketing:* The weavers and co-operative societies are dependent on the private traders for marketing of handloom goods and do not able to get the reasonable price of their products. There is no central organization for the marketing of these handloom goods.
- *Wages:* The weaving wages of weavers are not sufficient to maintain their livelihood and as a result a large number of weavers are choosing other occupations for a better and comfortable lifestyle.
- *Raw materials:* The most common problem is the increasing price of raw materials i.e. cotton, silk, muga, jori etc. and handloom equipment. As the raw materials are imported from other states like Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Gujrat, Maharastra, Assam etc., the problem is becoming much critical.
- *Capital:* In the handlooms industry of Fulia, there is low opportunity to get financial support from the commercial and co-operative banks. As the banks refuse the weavers to lend money, they are compelled to take loans from the local money lenders at the highest rate of interest which affect badly the whole industry.
- *Electricity:* The weavers are bound to pay the commercial electricity bill which is unfair as the handlooms are not operated by the electricity. It creates an extra pressure to them. The govt. doesn't take any necessary steps in this regard.

- *Export:* The handloom products like *Tangail Sharis* are exported into different countries which act as an encouraging factor for the industry. But rejected products i.e. little weaving defects, colour defects, designing defects etc. are returned to the weavers which is one of the main problem related to export.
- *Import:* In September 2011, a deal has been signed between India and Bangladesh where in it was mentioned that 47 types of cotton cloths are being imported from Bangladesh [11] which is the cause of 'cloth-flood' in the market of *Tangail Sharis*. As a result, the handloom industry of Fulia is facing a competition with those cloths.
- *Investment:* The amount of investment by different financial bodies is comparatively low in the handloom industry. Both the Govt. and Co-operative banks give a very low amount of loan to the weavers. So, the simplification of the policies of loan is very much desired.
- *Infrastructure:* There is no proper infrastructure in the handloom industry. Necessary infrastructure for the development of export is unavailable.

## 6. Conclusion

From the above discussion it is evident that the handloom industry is the backbone of the economy of Fulia and the weavers of Fulia are only carrying the traditional weaving techniques with new advanced thoughts and designs of *Tangail Shari* whereas the weavers of other places have made some changes from their ancestral weaving patterns. Not only this, the artisan-weavers also have invented a new type of *Tangail Shrai* which is well appreciated by the customers. So it can be easily said that Fulia is just not a village (now known as Census Town) of *Tangail Shari* but only centre of Traditional *Tangail Shari* in all over the India. But it is a matter of regret that this traditional industry is now oppressed by various problems. As a result many handlooms have been stopped and the weavers are choosing other professions for a better earning. The Co-operatives which can play a pivotal role for the development of this industry, is also suffering different obstacles. In addition, some policies of Government like importing of cotton cloths from Bangladesh, indifference for the implementation of the Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for production) Act, 1985 and 2008 etc. make a big question mark on the future of the handloom industry of Fulia. If it continues, in near future the world famous traditional *Tangail Shari* will only stay in the history of Fulia, not in reality, like that of *Santipuri Shari* of Santipur. It can be concluded that though the State Government has taken some initiatives like grant of financial aid to install 'Natural Dying Unit', establishment of 'Modern Dying and Processing Unit' [12], set up of 'Indian Institute of Handloom Technology' [13] at Fulia for the development of this industry but these are not sufficient. So it is a crying need that the Central Government and also the State Government take necessary steps for the overall development of handloom industry and also for the region.

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