

TAANT TALE- COTTON SAREES OF BENGAL

Written by

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FADE IN:

The hands of a person is seen weaving a saree on a handloom.

MAIN TITLE: TAANT TALE

Cotton sarees of Bengal

INT. COTTON COOPERATIVE - DAY

Weavers are seen working on handlooms to make cotton sarees.

EXT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

The coloured cotton threads are being wound on large bamboo drums.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Taant saree weaving is a centuries old craft from Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. The taant sarees are very lightweight as they are woven with cotton threads and hence are considered very comfortable for the hot and humid climate of Bengal. The weavers who make the taant sarees are known as taantis.

INT. COTTON COOPERATIVE - DAY

An artisan is seen making a cotton bundle on solar powered spinning wheel.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Coloured cotton threads are being dried in the sun.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Traditionally, handlooms were used to weave the sarees but now many are using powerlooms as well. It is not only the weavers who are involved in the process of making taant sarees. The cotton is first made into bundles which are then dyed in different colours. The threads are then fed into the looms for weaving.

INT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

Designs made on cardboards that are hanging from the handlooms and ironed taant sarees kept in a corner of the workshop.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The designers make perforated patterns on soft cardboards that are then used by the weavers to finally weave the sarees. The final products are then ironed and sold in the markets.

Map of Gangarampur in West Bengal where the taant sarees are made.

EXT. GANGARAMPUR ROADSIDE - DAY

Scenes from Gangarampur town from a moving vehicle. Handloom workshops and coloured threads drying in the open can be seen.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Gangarampur town in the northern zone of West Bengal is famous for its taant sarees. There are several workshops on both sides of the national highway and everything that is required for making a saree from threads to dye can be found here. Each workshop employs around 150 people who work in various aspects for making the sarees. The people working here get an average daily wage of 150 to 200 rupees. Also, cooperatives in the nearby town of Sujapur employ people to make the cotton bundles and weave the sarees.

INT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

Different weavers are working on the handlooms and an artisan is spinning cotton bundles.

TITLE: Step 1A: Making cotton bundles using solar powered spinning wheels

INT. COTTON COOPERATIVE - DAY

Various artisans are spinning cotton bundles using solar powered spinning wheels in a cotton cooperative in Sujapur, West Bengal.

Sub-Title: Before the arrival of solar powered spinning wheels, the cotton threads were made with hands which took longer hours.

ARTISAN 1

Working with the old machines was tough work, we learnt it with much difficulty.

INT. COTTON COOPERATIVE - DAY

Artisan is showing a finished cotton bundle.

INT. COTTON COOPERATIVE - DAY

Artisan is wrapping the final product of cotton bundles after taking them from the spinning wheels.

ARTISAN 2

This cotton bundle known as laachi has 150 threads and weighs 6.45 grams. The weavers won't be able to weave the sarees if we don't make the cotton bundles. We come in the mornings to separate the cotton threads enough to make 10-12 bundles. It takes us four hours to do that. It takes us five minutes to make a bundle and around two hours to make 10-12 cotton bundles.

TITLE: Step 1B: Making cotton bundles using traditional spinning wheels

INT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

Artisans are making cotton bundles using traditional spinning wheels.

Sub-Title: It takes 30 minutes to make a bundle of cotton threads. Each cotton bundle fetches them Rs 5 (\$0.06).

TITLE: Step 2: The cotton bundles are dyed into different colours.

EXT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

The process of dying the white cotton bundles by dipping them in hot water filled with dye.

Sub-Title: Dye is added to boiling water where the cotton bundles are dipped. The coloured bundles are wrung and left to dry.

TITLE: Step 3: The coloured cotton bundles are left to dry

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

The dyed cotton bundles are hung on ropes and left to dry in the open.

Sub-Title: The coloured cotton bundles are dried in sunlight for a day.

TITLE: Step 4: The cotton threads are immersed in rice water

EXT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

The dyed cotton threads are immersed in a pot of rice water.

Sub-Title: The coloured cotton threads are then boiled in rice water known as bhaater madh to make the threads strong.

TITLE: Step 5: The threads are prepared for the final weaving

EXT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

An artisan is feeding a bamboo drum with coloured cotton threads.

Sub-Title: The dyed and boiled threads are wound around large bamboo drums so that they can be fed into the looms for weaving.

TITLE: Step 6: Patterns for the taant sarees are designed

INT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

Perforated cardboards hanging from the looms.

Sub-Title: The designs on the sarees are made by artists and the patterns are then copied on soft cardboards by making perforations.

INT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

A weaver is using a perforated cardboard to weave a taant saree on a loom.

Sub-Title: The perforated cardboards are then suspended from the looms.

TITLE: Finally after all these steps, it is time for the weavers or the taantis to weave the sarees.

TITLE: Step 7: Weaving taant sarees

INT. COTTON COOPERATIVE - DAY

Various weavers are working on looms weaving taant sarees.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Cotton work is done throughout the year, unlike silk that is seasonal. The festive season enhances the demand of the taant sarees giving more work to people and increases the sales and profit during this time. Depending on the intricacies of the designs, a saree can be completed in a few days to a week.

INT. COTTON COOPERATIVE - DAY

Ashit Das, a taant saree weaver is weaving a saree on a loom and is telling about his working hours and what does he think of his children deciding not to be a weaver.

ASHIT DAS

We work everyday from 8 AM TO 4 PM. I have been working for the last 31 to 32 years. We are taant saree weavers by caste, no one had to teach us this work. I have not taught this work to my children. They don't want to learn this craft and they won't be working in this area.

TITLE: Step 8: The final products are ironed and ready to be sold in the markets

EXT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

The finished products of taant sarees are being ironed by a person.

Sub-Title: After receiving the sarees from the workshops, the sarees are folded and ironed.

INT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

A person is arranging the folded and ironed sarees in a room.

Sub-Title: After arranging the ironed final products, the sarees are then distributed in shops. The weavers cannot directly sell the sarees.

INT. HANDLOOM WORKSHOP - DAY

An artisan making cotton bundle in a traditional spinning wheel, a weaver weaving a taant saree and general view of the inside of a handloom workshop.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Even though the various stages of work are divided based on gender, with the weaving solely done by men, it is safe to say that making taant saree is not a one man's job but is the result of collective group effort.

FADE OUT.

END CREDIT

A film by Amrita Kundu

