



# THE FADING CRAFT:

## Can we save Tangail's handloom industry?

For over 40 years, Mohammad Shajahan, a 60-year-old weaver from Balla Union, Tangail, has dedicated his life to the intricate craft of handloom weaving. He learned the trade from his father, who was also a weaver, and in turn, his daughter now works with thread, continuing a generational legacy.

But despite his experience and skill, Shajahan earns no more than Tk 200 a day — a sum that barely covers basic necessities. His earnings depend on how many sarees he weaves, which, on a good day, amounts to two or three sarees. He uses semi-automated looms, while his daughter, like many women in the village, contributes by spinning, dyeing, and preparing the threads. These women, working from home while juggling household responsibilities, earn only Tk 40 to Tk 50 a day.

With visible worry on his face, Shajahan shared his concerns about the future: "Children don't want to take up this work anymore. I keep saying, this craft should continue, but they don't see a future in it."

**An industry on the brink of collapse**

"At one point, Balla Union was home to around 50,000 weavers, each household buzzing with the sound of handlooms. Today, fewer than 3,000 to 4,000 remain. The rest have abandoned the trade, unable to pay their debts, forced into other forms of labour," informed Abu Talha, President of the Balla Union Traders' Association.

The history of Tangail taant is rooted in the artistic expertise of Bengal's weavers. Tangail sarees have long been celebrated for their lightweight texture, fine weaving, and elegant motifs, and both men and women engaged in the intricate



process, from spinning the yarn to dyeing, designing, and finally, weaving the fabric.

However, this craft is slowly fading and our glorious taant industry is on the brink of collapse.

### Handwoven vs power looms: A struggle for fair prices

While the charm of handwoven sarees lies in their craftsmanship, their survival is threatened by cheaper, mass-produced alternatives. When asked about whether they still use traditional handlooms, Abu Taher, a *mahajan*, explains, "Handwoven sarees have greater value. But how much can we even sell them for?"