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## Harnessing tradition and preserving bomkai sarees of Odisha

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### Abstract

The original Bomkai is a handloom saree originated in the village of Bomkai in Ganjam district of Odisha. It is characterized by the use of coarse cotton, vivid colors, and high contrast borders and pallus. The characteristic of this traditional Bomkai lies in stepping and shaft formula to weave regular motifs remains the same in any composition. Uniqueness is that there is no fixed layout for the anchal panels brought out by extra wefts in various colours. The motifs used are Kanthiphula, Atasi flower (*linum usitatissimum*), Bitter gourd flower, Fly, Birds, Peacock, Fish, Lotus, Damru (*Maclura cochinchinensis*) etc. in geometrical forms. Rows of Kumbha (temple spires) are favourite border motifs. Traditional dyes for Bomkai sarees included lac, ochre, and myrobalan, which are natural colors. Cotton yarn of (10 to 40) counts were available in the market during 600 B.C. Vegetable dye with limited colours and shade range i.e. yellow (From Turmeric), Maroon (From bark of Aal trees-*Morinda citrifolia*), Blue (Nile) and black (Hirakasi and Chakda seeds-*Sonneratia griffithii*) were available for dyeing the fabric. The colour of vegetable dyes was not fast in the fabrics. Gradually, the widths of looms were widened up to (48 to 50) inches; mercerized yarns of finer quality (60 counts) were introduced. A popular weaver of the area Shri Kruthartha Acharya introduced chemical dyes. As a result of which, there was a revolutionary change in Bomkai tradition and a paradigm shift from Ganjam district to Sonepur district took place. Many weavers were trained to adopt the change. Dr. Acharya promoted the Bomkai saree of Sonepur district in other states by participating in exhibition and fair conducted by handloom department and Govt. of India. But the Bomkai saree of Ganjam District remained far behind in the contemporary market due to lack of patronage and further promotion by the weavers of that area. As Bomkai is one of the identified Geographical Indications of India, its revival, contemporarization should also be made to cater to the tastes and demand of the consumers. The supply chain and market linkage can be thought of. Incentives and other assistance should be given to the Start-ups, SMEs and emerging research scholars so that conservation and revival can take place.

**Keywords:** Bomkai saree, conservation, revival, sustainability

### Introduction

Bomkai sarees were initially made in a charming village called Bomkai in the Ganjam area. The Bomkai weaver uses a vibrant spontaneity of primary colors to create designs that, despite their power, are stunning. Examples of these combinations are a pool of jet black, a patch of blood red, and a hint of spinach green. The weavers' ancestors, who drew inspiration from their surroundings and religious themes, are responsible for their keen sense of color. For them, the color red represents life and blood. Green is a symbol for agriculture, which gives life. Yellow comes from mustard blossoms, and orange from the arid, reddish ground. These are the textiles' conventional foundation colors.

### Weaving Background

#### Bomkai Cotton Saree

With Dobby plain/Contrast/bandha/bandh-Dobby/2 Dhadi/3 Dhadi/Box(jalla& Dobby) with or without Ikat design Border/Plain/Buti/Buta/Box/(Jalla)/Bandha Motif/Srtipe/Check Body/and Single Chal/Double Chaal/Ganga-Jamuna/3-Dhadia/Bandh with jalla/Buti & Buta design Anchal and many more.

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**Specifications****Yarn:** Cotton

Cotton Yarn in Warp & Weft ranging from 2/60s to 2/120s: or any single Cotton Extra Warp & Weft-Art Silk/Cotton/Zari or Any suitable yarn for ornamentation.

**Size:** Length-5.00 To 5.50 Mts without Blouse & 5.60 to 6.30 with Blouse. Width-1.12 to 1.20 Mts.

**Bomkai Silk Saree**

With Dobby plain/Contrast/bandha/bandh-Dobby/2 Dhadi/3 Dhadi/Box (jalla& Dobby) with or without Ikat design Border/Plain/Buti/Buta/Box/(Jalla)/Bandha Motif/Srtipe.

**Specifications****Yarn:** Silk

Warp-2-4Ply Organzine silk of different denier.

Weft-2-6 Charkha/Organzine/Malda Silk of different denier.

Extra Warp & Weft-Art silk/silk

**Traditional Bomkai**

The inscriptions found in the OrissanKhandagiri caves' stones indicate that the in Orissa, weaving was practiced before 600 B.C. Likewise, several carvings found in the Sonapur cluster temples (Baidyanath) suggest that weaving was practiced in the region before the ninth century B.C. In addition to weaving with cotton yarn, other materials used for weaving included wool, lotus stem fibers, and wild silk (Tassar).

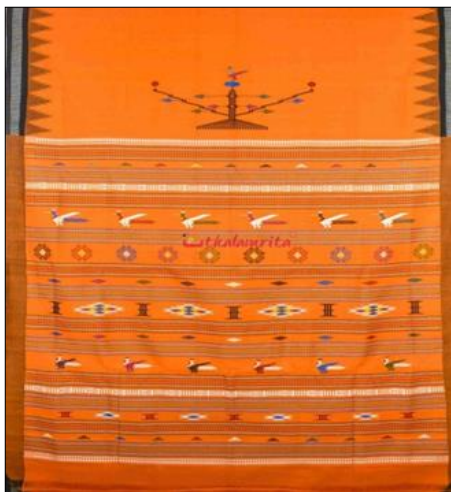
The Ganjam district's little, charming hamlet of Bomkai is where the original Bomkai saree began. The stepping and shaft formula to weave regular patterns remain the same in whatever composition are the feature of this classic Bomkai. What makes them unique is that the anchal panels made with

additional wefts of different colors may be arranged in any way. Kanthiphula, the bitter gourd blossom, the Atasi flower (linumusitatissimum), and geometric shapes such as the bloom of the bitter gourd, flies, birds, fish, lotuses, damru (Macluracochinchinensis), etc. Temple spires are popular border motifs.

The Bolangir District Gazetteers revealed that the "Bhulia" community's primary activity was weaving. They weave cotton and tassar textiles with great skill. Another name for them is Meher. The looms used by the weavers were narrow, and they wove 12-foot-long and 36-inch-wide cotton sarees. Sonapur is a hotspot for warping.

The stepping and shaft method for weaving regular patterns in any composition, regardless of the weaver, is a distinctive trait of traditional Bomkai weaving. Another feature is that there isn't a set design for the fact that the anchal panels have no set arrangement is another feature. Even his own work cannot be replicated by a weaver from memory unless it is copied.

Cotton yarn with counts ranging from 10 to 40 was available on the market at that time. In the past, weavers would bring yarn for more weaving and spend the money they received from selling their handmade sarees at the local market. Since there were no chemical dyes available at this time, yarn was mostly dyed using vegetable dye. The colors of vegetable dye were restricted to yellow (derived from turmeric), maroon (derived from the bark of Aal trees, Morindacitrifolia), blue (Derived from Nile), and black (derived from hakda and hirakasi seeds, Sonneratiagriffithii). Vegetable dyes did not quickly change color in the textiles. The restricted color spectrum of vegetable dye restricts the design possibilities for tie-dye materials.



Bomkai originates in Ganjam District of Odisha Bomkai original Mustard Cotton sarees

**Modern-day Bomkai**

The Sonapur handloom industry saw several upgrades in the middle of the 1960s. Loom widths were increasing to 48 to 50 inches, and finer-quality mercerized yarns (60 counts) were introduced. Chemical dyes were also introduced by the well-known weaver in the region, Shri Kruthartha Acharya. To accept the change, several weavers received training.

The advent of chemical dyes expanded the color spectrum, enabling weavers to create a wider choice of designs for their tie-dye textiles. Other cluster weavers embraced the new innovation gradually. Dr. Acharya also promoted Sonapur products and explored additional markets in other States through participation in fairs and exhibitions organized by the

Indian government's handloom department. In addition, he used to buy woven sarees from weavers and provide them with raw materials and designs. This made it easier for the weavers to focus only on manufacturing tasks rather than product promotion.

The introduction of silk yarn in the early 1980s was one of the cluster's other significant improvements. The silk fabric's body portion and Anchal was made using silk yarn and a cotton tie and dye method respectively. It took two-three years to create Jala design which allowed-the weaver to design the cloth in easy way.

The design of Bomkai was created in the late 1980s and debuted in the Sonapur cluster in the beginning of the 1990s.

Since then, the cluster has been experimenting the permutation and combination of designs incorporating Bomkai, Jala, tie-dye, etc.

Later on, the fabric's worth was increased by using Zari, and the body design was also enhanced to make the cloth more appealing. The main companies involved in the handloom industries were weaver cooperatives. These societies had a sizable membership in the middle of the 1990s. Beginning in the 1980s, individual dealers and entrepreneurs began to enter the market. Padmashree Chaturbhuj Meher made a fine-count Bomkai saree in 1983 when he was employed at the Weavers' Service Center in Bhubaneswar.

Nevertheless, in addition to the traditional bandha pattern of the Anchal, weavers have recently begun producing Jala

designs in the region, accounting for shifting consumer requirements and desires in specific styles. The animal characters and flower patterns are more prominent and appealing in this Jala design process. The weaver uses his sketch in the graph to guide him while working on the loom to create this pattern; he does not need to tie and dye the Anchal weft yarn by placing it in a different frame.

Separate heddles or jacquards equipped with a number of strong threads or strings are attached to the loom in order to create the Jala pattern in the final border. A weft yarn pick is sent through the shed with each up or down movement of the paddle. After being fired by the shuttle, each pick of weft yarn is pounded and compressed by a device known as a reed (a comb/pania).



Sonepur Bandha Pure Silk Saree



Sonepur Bomkai, Body-Pure Mulberry Silk, Pallu-Art Silk

### Specific procedures in the weaving process

Numerous tasks, including warping, sizing, winding, dyeing, preparing the bandha, and drawing graphs, are involved in the weaving process.

### Tying method

The yarn is then brought to the tie and dye frame for tying the design from the tie and dye grouping frame or tie and dye grouping machine. To ensure consistent tension, groups are handled by hand after the grouping threads are kept in the frame. Next, the pattern is tied while being observed from the bigger graph paper. Starting from the middle of the frame, where any excess or loose lengths are brought to the margin on both sides, is how the technique for tying is done. The design is then flawless.

In addition, 30s and 10s tying threads are now widely accessible in the market. For fine yarn, use fine threads; for course yarn and course design, use loose threads.

The weavers in Sonepur have a custom of tie-dyeing the weft, or buna in their native tongue. Typically, the warp beam yarn is plainly colored in one color, and each family does this on its own.

### Preparation of the Warp

The hank yarn is wound around the warping frame in proportion to the length of the warp after being initially transferred to a traditional winding mechanism called a Natai. The family members who do not weave often carry out this task, primarily women. It is then coiled around the frame that

is warping. Before it is carried to loom, the warps are straightened after that to complete the sizing process. Silk yarn is now being offered in the form of a 13-meter warp, which may be used to make two sarees.

### Preparation of the Weft

Weft preparation is required while weaving Bomkai sarees since their borders must be knotted and colored to have a noticeable appearance. In this procedure, the hank yarn is moved to "Natai" and thereafter wound according to the width of the sarees to be woven by a machine called as "Bandhi Pura" locally. The border section is then wound with pirn and knotted and colored according to the border's width.

### Sizing

In order to make the warp yarn more resilient to the reed's pounding during the weaving process, sizing is applied. It also imparts a sound and even woven appearance to the cloth. Only cotton yarns are sized using the left over from rice preparation known as "Mud" in the local tongue, made with the use of a sizing brush known as "Kunchi" in the area. Usually, the sizing takes place in the open area closer to the village's weaver home. The weaver used to do this with the assistance of his family's female members.

### Getting Ready for Bandha

The white yarn is straightened with the aid of a wooden frame called a "Kamada" before the yarn is knotted according to the design. The yarn is first warped to get the appropriate length.

Parts called Ganthis are created by setting the ends apart. The Ganthis are now knotted in accordance with the design, and the entire set of tied and untied yarns, referred to as "Chhanda", is dipped into the first color bath. As a result, the untied section gets some of the color. The colored sections are then loosened to dye in a new color as needed by the pattern. Tying and dyeing are continued in this manner until the Chhanda acquires its Bandha pattern. The Chhanda are fully dried after dyeing, and all knotted areas are released and strengthened in preparation for weaving.

### Styling

The cotton and silk yarns were colored by the weavers in their hamlet. Usually, two or four pieces are colored at once. Silk yarns are dyed with acid dyes, whereas cotton is mostly dyed with vat dyes. Before dyeing, the silk yarn undergoes another procedure known as degumming to remove its sericin, or layer of impurities.

### Reversing the Tie and Dye

The knotted threads are removed once the tie and dye have dried. It is then coiled on the Natai first and held in a quick. Then, with a Charkha's assistance, it is injured on a pirn from Natai.

### Setting up the Looms

When a loom is being set up for the first time if its warp count is changing, the following steps must be taken. Warp threads are simply twisted by hand to the terminal section of huge sarees in the case of an antique loom when manufacturing continued with the same count of warp.

### Creating Drafts

Drafting is the process of feeding the warp threads through the loom's heddle in accordance with the design to be woven. This aids in the weaving process when a broken yarn becomes pliable as a result of the head and also aids in process design. The Sonapur cluster has replaced the head with nylon rope, which serves the same purpose as wire/varnish head.

### Denting

The weavers fill the reed, which is called "pania" in the native language, with threads using a comb. During the beating process, Reed's job is to position the pick yarns where they fall on the cloth. The majority of the reed utilized in the cluster is composed of steel. It is modified according to the yarn's count.

### Design Setting

Either "Jala" or "Dobby" or both carry out the designing setup. Jala utilized to add more weft thread, whereas Dobby serves the purpose of adding extra warp thread in accordance with the pattern.

### Weaving

After that, the pirn-wound tie-and-dye yarn is sent to the loom to be woven. The body component of this invention was free of warp. In order to make it easier for the general public to grasp how it is brought about through a laborious procedure, the weft tie and dye that was previously prepared is only weaved on the border position.

The warp threads weave between the comb's teeth in the gaps between them. The swinging batten or wooden frame (Tanta) that holds this comb in place swings just in front of the two main heads. In addition to keeping the warp threads apart, the

comb aids in beating the weft threads. The number of teeth in the comb even determines the density of the clothing, and the number of teeth in the comb determines how the threads for the warp are set. The cloth is thinly woven if the comb's teeth are arranged thinly; thickly woven if they are arranged thickly. Weft thread is charged into the shuttle used for weaving using a pirn (Nali or Kanda).

Thus, to weave cloth on a handloom, the warp (Tani) is kept artificially stretched and expanded while the weft threads (bharani) are intertwined with it. The warp is fastened to a yarn beam at one end and a fabric beam at the end closest to the weaver or operator. To maximize the amount of space in the loom shed, the warp is coiled up in the yarn beam, with a section of it stretched out on the loom's frame (Tanta) and secured in place with a rope. This rope is fastened to the yarn beam at one end and a solid pole or pillar elevated on the loom shed's floor at the other.

A horizontal plane is the setting for the warp. Two pegs positioned slantwise on the ground hold the fabric beam in place. One of these two pegs has a forked design, while the other has a point at the end. To fasten the piece of the beam with the sharper peg, a hole is bored at one end, and the other end is inserted into the forked peg.

After weaving a certain length, the weaver stops, reveals a shorter warp length from the yarn beam, rolls the completed fabric up on the cloth beam, and then resumes weaving. Additionally, it is discovered that Sonapur weavers use certain techniques to create silk sarees with Jala or deha bandha designs with the assistance of a kid or adult to raise the Jala threads at regular intervals so that different designs may be made during the weaving process and to weave the weft yarn appropriately.

### Uniqueness

A handloom pattern called "Bomkai" is created using the Jalla method. In addition to being limited to geometric shapes and sizes, the design can also be flowery, ornate, and visually appealing. Examples of these types of patterns include dancing dolls, chariots, trees, ducks, tortoises, fish, Buta, Buti, and creepers. It is an additional weft pattern on the fabric that uses either a single color or many colors.

Special Jalla set attachments, such as Bouy (naka threads), Dandi Rasi (pagia threads), and Langal (ankda), are added to the loom to create bomkai designs on fabric.

When hoisting the jalla during weaving, the weaver needs the assistance of one helper. The textiles have one side that is woven with the patterns. Ikat method is also used to merge the body patterns, anchal, and solid border. By using one or more jalla sets, there is potential for numerous designs to be created on the body or anchal of the cloth. Extra weft is used to weave the design using four to eight plies.

### Materials and Methods

- Desk search as textual and visual content analysis,
- Field visits and observations.
- Pre-tested structured schedule cum interviews,
- Interviews, and interactions (with the saree weaver's communities), the lifestyle of the weavers.

### Tools and techniques used

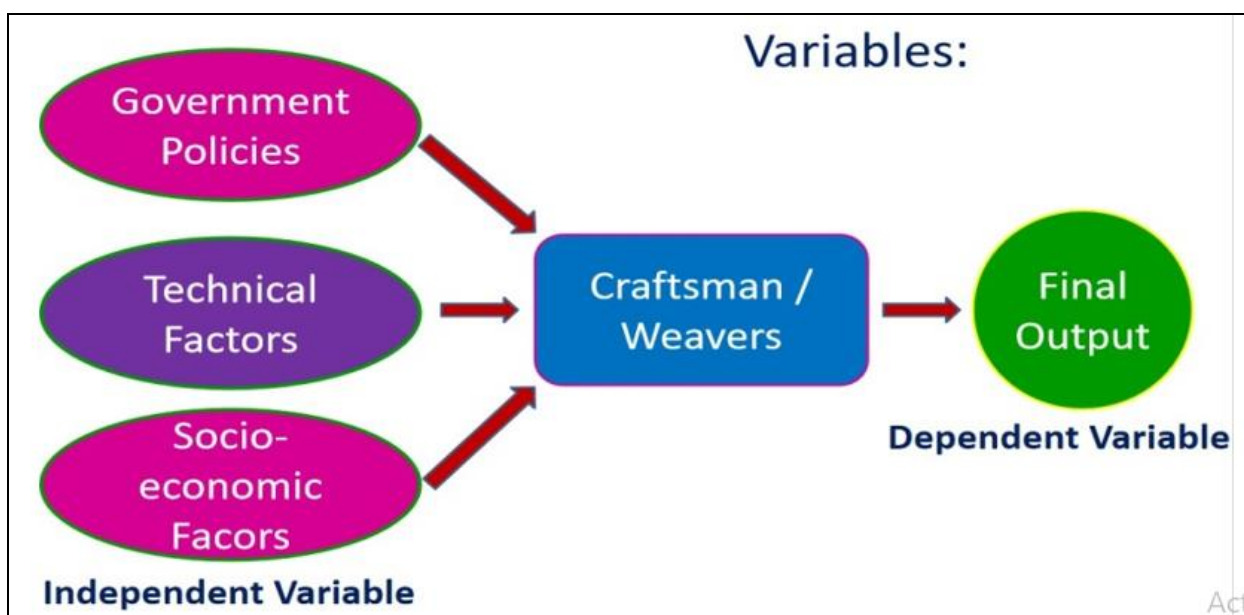
Primary data for this study was collected through structured and unstructured interviews, observation, focus group discussion and questionnaires with different scale.

Different annual reports of Handlooms, Textiles and Handicrafts dept. published articles/papers, textile magazines,

different books, and internet sources helped to gather information and are considered secondary data for the study.

**Variables:** The independent variables are various technical

factors and economic factors, while the craftsman or weavers will be the mediating variable and the final output will be the dependent variable. As a result, the final output of the products will be determined by all of the independent factors.



**Fig 1:** Show Independent variables are various technical factors and economic factors

**Table 1:** Show education level, engaged in weaving, adoption of weaving, weavers who left the profession

Age (N=120)	Nos. (%)	Sex		Education level (N=120)			Engaged in weaving	Adoption of Weaving		Weavers who left the profession
		M	F	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	Graduation		Caste	Profession	
17-27	32(27%)	20	12	08	20	04	25	19	06	7
28-38	45(37.5%)	32	13	10	30	5	40	33	10	5
39-49	28(23%)	20	08	11	15	2	28	20	08	0
49-58	15(12.5%)	09	06	12	2	1	09	08	01	6
Total	120(100%)	81(67.5%)	39(32.5%)	41(34.2%)	67(55.8%)	12(10%)	102(85%)	80(78%)	22(22%)	18(15%)

**Results and Discussion**

All the weavers belong to the age group between 17 to 58 years of age, but the productive age was found to be 28 to 38 year according to 37% of weavers, followed by 27% of weavers of 17-27 years of age. It was also found out that as the age advances, weavers detach themselves from the weaving profession. When enquired about the reason, they opened that the continuous strainer on eyes, the long hours of sitting resulted in back ache (Prolapse Intervertebral Disc) in most cases of the weaver.

Sex wise segregation revealed that male involve themselves more in comparison to females. Education wise classification revealed most of them have completed 12<sup>th</sup> standard followed by 10<sup>th</sup> standard pass. About 10% weavers after completion of their graduation engaged themselves in weaving, when further investigated it became visible that they want to opt it as profession, some of them also have diploma in weaving. Out of 120 respondents, belonging to weaving community, 85% are engaged in weaving. Weaving is largely accepted by weavers' community (known as Bhulia Community) by caste (78%), rest (22%) adopted it as profession.

**Table 2:** Monthly household income of weavers

Income per month in Rs.	Nos. (N=102)	%
10,000-15,000	12	12
15,000-20,000	18	18
20,000-25,000	22	21
25,000 & above	50	49

Monthly household income of 49% of the weavers is found to be Rs. 25,000/-and above. Rest of the respondents (51%) income ranges between Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 25,000/-per month. It can be stated otherwise that weavers' household income in general is meagre to run their household. That it must be the reason that they are leaving their profession gradually. In this study it is found to be 15% in case who left the weaving profession.

**Suggestions**

It is suggested that the Department of Handloom and Textiles of Odisha establish a core team comprised of the experts from Sambalpuri Bastralaya, Weavers Service Centre, boyanika, researchers, members from various Textile organizations in order to ensure the revival of Bomkai saree (both silk and cotton) in Ganjam district as well as guaranteeing the items' integrity, quality, standards, and consistency.

There are only four traditional Bomkai saree weaving families remaining in the Ganjam area, hence it is recommended that these families get urgent care and support in order to preserve the traditional Bomkai weaving art in the area of Ganjam, where it first appeared. Officials at all levels should be involved in the revival and sustainability strategy, which should be implemented on a war footing basis and extended to other districts.

Given that bomakai is one of the recognized geographic indications of India, efforts should be taken to revive and modernize it in order to satisfy customer demand. One might

consider the market connectivity and supply chain. To enable conservation and resurrection, Start-ups, SMEs, and young research academics should get incentives and other forms of support.

### **Conclusion**

Bomkai sarees, originating from the village of Bomkai in Ganjam, represent a rich tapestry of tradition and innovation. From their vibrant colors to intricate weaving techniques, each saree tells a story of cultural heritage and craftsmanship. Despite challenges, including changing consumer preferences, Bomkai sarees continue to thrive, adapting to modern markets while preserving their roots. The journey from ancient times to the present underscores the resilience of the weavers and the importance of supporting their craft. Bomkai sarees are not just garments; they are symbols of artistic excellence and cultural identity, deserving of recognition and preservation.

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