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STATE OF INDIA'S HANDLOOM SECTOR REPORT 2024

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STATE OF INDIA'S HANDLOOM SECTOR REPORT 2024

Edited By

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List of Abbreviations

AIACA	All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association
AIHB	All India Handicrafts Board
AIHFMCS	All India Handloom Fabrics Marketing Cooperative Society
AIHHB	All India Handlooms and Handicrafts Board
APART	Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project
ASPIRE	A Scheme for Promoting Innovation, Rural Industry & Entrepreneurship
B2B	Business to Business
CAD	Computer-Aided Design
CAGR	Consolidated Annual Growth Rate
CAM	Computer-Aided Manufacturing
CBOs	Community-Based Organisations
CCI	Central Cottage Industries
CCIC	Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India Ltd
CE	Capital Expenditure
CEF	Community Enterprise Fund
CFC	Common Facility Centres
CfP	Centre for Pastoralism
CGTMSE	Credit Guarantee Trust Fund for MSE
CIP	Cluster Intervention Programme
CMIE	Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy
CSB	Central Silk Board
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DA	Designated Agencies
DAY-NRLM	Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana of National Rural Livelihoods Mission
DCC	Delhi Crafts Council
DGT	Directorate General of Training
EPC	Exports Promotion Council
EPCH	Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts
ESDP	Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programme
EU	European Union
EXIM Bank	Export-Import Bank of India
GI	Geographical Indication
GoI	Government of India
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HDI	Human Development Index
HEPC	Handloom Export Promotion Council
HHEC	Handicrafts & Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Limited
HM	Handloom Mark
HMA	Handloom Marketing Assistance
IGNCA	Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts
IHB	India Handloom Brand

IIE	Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship
IIHT	Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology
IME	Informal Micro Enterprises
INTACH	Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage
ITIs	Industrial Training Institutes
JSS	Jan Shikshan Sansthan
KVI	Khadi and Village Industries
KVIC	Khadi and Village Industries Commission
LLP	Limited Liability Partnership
MACS	Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies
MAI	Market Access Initiative
MFI	Micro Finance Institution
MGIRI	Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialization
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MoRD	Ministry of Rural Development
MSE-CDP	Micro and Small Enterprises Cluster Development Programme
MSME	Miro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MSMED	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development
MUDRA	Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency
MVIRDC	Visvesvaraya Industrial Research and Development Centre
NABARD	National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NBFC	Non-Banking Financial Corporation
NBMSME	National Board for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NCSBS	Non-Corporate Small Business Sector
NCVET	National Council for Vocational Education and Training
NE-SHILP	North East Society for Handicraft Incubation and Livelihood Promotion
NEC	North East Council
NEDFi	North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd
NEHHDC	North Eastern Handicrafts & Handloom Development Corporation Ltd
NER	North Eastern Region
NGO	Non-Government Organisations
NHDC	National Handloom Development Corporation
NHDP	National Handloom Development Programme
NI-MSME	National Institute for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NID	National Institute of Design
NIESBUD	National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development
NJB	National Jute Board
NRO	National Resource Organisation
NSDC	National Skill Development Corporation
NSDF	National Skill Development Fund
NSIC	National Small Industries Corporation
NSSH	National SC-ST Hub

NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
NSTIs	National Skill Training Institutes
NTP	National Textile Policy
ODOP	One District One Product
OFDD	Off-Farm Development Department
OFPO	Off-Farm Producer Organisation
ONDC	Open Network for Digital Commerce
PMEGP	Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme
PMKK	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra
PMKVY	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
PMMY	Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana
R&D	Research and Development
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RCIL	Rangsutra Crafts India Ltd
RMSS	Raw Material Supply Scheme
SANKALP	Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion
SC	Schedule Caste
SCDF	SIDBI Cluster Development Fund
SCLCSS	Special Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFURTI	Scheme of the Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries
SHGs	Self Help Groups
SIDBI	Small Industries Development Bank of India
SRLM	State Rural Livelihoods Mission
SSC	Sector Skill Council
ST	Schedule Tribe
STRIVE	Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement
SVEP	Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme
T&A	Textile and Apparel
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAP	Udyam Assist Platform
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	United States of America
USP	Unique Selling Proposition
WC	Working Capital
WEDS	Women Enterprises Development Scheme
WHIS	Weaver's Health Insurance Scheme
WSC	Weavers' Service Centre
YSS	Yarn Supply Scheme

Foreword

The handloom sector in India has long held proud creators of the most splendid fabrics for the world beyond its borders as well as for the humblest workers and farmers in its own country. It clothed millions in the pre-industrial age and many centuries ago even gave funds to kingdoms and temples. The oft-quoted phrase that the handloom sector was the second highest employer after agriculture, was valid at one time, but no systematic and credible survey has updated this figure in the past six decades. It should today be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt. Its inimitable qualities of providing not only sustainable, heritage livelihoods to already home-skilled millions but to use minimal energy and no production process that destroys the environment. It is a good time to shine a strong light on its present condition. Insightful surveys can guide us towards fulfilling its future potential by reminding and educating ourselves of what India's handlooms can offer the world.

In a flexible livelihood environment when many options present themselves in different sectors, and with the leapfrogging of powerlooms, then screen, machine and digital printing over a hapless handloom sector, today's handloom landscape will be mauled, sketchy, uneven and diminished. In certain oasis-like areas handlooms are flourishing whether through design institutions, government support ,or export outreach by weavers themselves, fashion designers or exporters. Sales of handlooms in successful marketing spaces are thriving. Customers are becoming interested, but slowly. At the same time, droves of semi-skilled weavers are leaving the profession and highly skilled weavers are finding their next generation often unwilling to eschew the lure of other, seemingly less laborious worlds opening up before them.

Everyone who works in the handloom sector has first hand knowledge of many of these aspects but today is a world requiring hard data, graphs, deep studies and statistics to validate the legitimate demands of the handloom weavers and the sector as a whole. In what is called the informal and unorganised sector, unfair misnomers, extensive and well-sewn together studies are required. These include attention being given to its many benefits like the sustenance of a cultural heritage, existing generational skills, sustaining collaborative and cooperative community livelihoods, as well as its important role in nurturing the environment.

I am delighted to know that the Report covers subjects like the issues and concerns of the handloom sector, policy landscape, trends, and desired changes within. It offers valuable information on major stakeholders including government agencies, entrepreneurial landscape in handlooms, the marketing scenario including export trends, and more. All this information was not only required but crucial so that an analysis to remove the asymmetry within existing data could be addressed. An interesting aspect of the report is that it brings into focus several ground-breaking stories from the field including some prominent handloom clusters of India.

The Report also brings in important analytical information, insightful articles and the viewpoints of prominent authors and professionals engaged in the sector. I do hope this will become a useful and well-thumbed reference book for all stakeholders working towards the improvement of the handloom sector in India.

I wish ACCESS and the team who worked on the Report all the very best.

Jaya Jaitly

Preface

Handloom embodies more than just fabric; it symbolizes India's rich heritage and culture spanning centuries. Handlooms in the form of khadi played an important part in the country's freedom struggle. Further, as handlooms mostly use natural fibres like cotton and silk, and the production process does not consume a lot of energy, the fabric qualifies as sustainable fabric. With growing challenges of global warming, and growing consumer awareness about sustainability, handloom has a great future. However, the current situation of the sector is an anomaly. Thus, investing in handloom processes and promoting its consumption, only makes great socio-economic sense.

The handloom sector of India has had a very strong cohort of handloom lovers, supporters, researchers, experts, specialists, designers, practitioners, etc. advocating for the revival, revitalization, sustenance, value creation, and promotion of the handloom industry and its weavers and artisans. Major contributions, by multiple stakeholders, in terms of policies, programmes, business and industry development, marketing, ensuring weavers' and artisans' rights, and ecosystem improvement through decades have led to its strength and continuity. However, significant challenges remain owing to the scale and diversity of the industry, the changing times, globalization and liberalization, advent of digital technology, and insufficient support for integrated approach towards sectoral development.

Issues facing the handloom sector today range from inadequate availability of raw material, production inefficiency, to lack of contemporary designs and consumer awareness. However, the good news is that the ecosystem is gearing up to solving some of the glaring issues facing the sector. Government is proactively undertaking various schemes to help the weavers both on supply and demand sides. Civil Society Organizations are directly engaged with the weavers to mobilize them as collectives so that they have better bargaining power. Designers and fashion houses are collaborating with weavers to create contemporary products catering to the modern consumers. Another refreshing development is the new private investment coming from corporates.

These developments and trends point towards a bright future. However, there is still a big gap between the cup and the lip. Many a thing need to be streamlined. Supply and value chains need to be reoriented towards weavers' needs. The world of e-commerce is still a long way from the reach of the weavers; it's there, but not quite to the direct benefit of the weavers. Systems and processes need to be convenient enough for the weavers to directly deal in e-commerce.

In this context, ACCESS's flagship initiative, "Living Looms of India", supported by HSBC India holds special significance. "Living Looms of India" aims to revitalize and provide a competitive edge to the handloom weavers in the country through design, technology and market interventions, and position them in highest value markets. Under the program, currently ACCESS has been engaged in 8 handloom clusters across India, promoting livelihoods of 6000 weavers, and in the next 5 years, the goal is to reach 20 clusters covering 25000 weavers.

Apart from the cluster level interventions, "Living Looms of India" also undertakes sectoral initiatives in the form of colloquiums, events, networking, and bringing out knowledge products. "State of India's Handloom Sector Report" is an important endeavour under the program. The comprehensive report will serve as a valuable resource and reference book offering insights into the diversity of handloom traditions, entrepreneurial endeavours, challenges, and opportunities that exist within this sector.

The report in no way claims to be fully exhaustive, but it marks a starting point in bringing together facts and figures, various perspectives and critical thinking of the academia and practitioners, supported by case studies, to mainstream and demystify the understanding of this immensely valuable creative/ cultural industry of India.

The core team at ACCESS and the editor of the Report, Dr. Madhura Dutta followed a two-prong strategy to put together the chapters. On one hand, it was important to understand the perspectives of the

stakeholders in person, on the other, it was also necessary to invite thought leaders/ professionals in the handloom sector to express their views without any pre-conceived guideline.

Thus, the core team travelled to various parts of the country to meet grassroot organizations, government agencies and academicians to conduct in-depth interviews. This enabled the team to form their ideas on how to streamline the themes, and choose the most interesting and impactful initiatives to include in the report. The issues and challenges faced by the weavers and the organizations were understood thoroughly.

Simultaneously, the team approached several authors, thought leaders and professionals to contribute their ideas and experiences of working in the handloom sector. Some of them generously agreed to be part of the effort. The report includes their articles as chapters.

Divided into different chapters, the report focuses on various aspects of policy ecosystem, public and private partnerships/ investments, design and education, sectoral innovation, heritage promotion, marketing scenario, and contributions to Sustainable Development Goals in terms of women empowerment, sustainable consumption and production, dignity of work, economic growth, etc. The various chapters in the report also deal with the respective challenges and recommendations.

The report would not be possible without HSBC's support to the Living Looms of India initiative. I extend my gratitude to Aloka Majumdar and Romit Sen for their encouragement and wholehearted support.

The report is a collaborative effort by some of the key handloom sector experts, organizations and practitioners. Sincere thanks to the editor of the report- Dr. Madhura Dutta for the huge efforts she had to put in to pull off this exhaustive report in quick time. I would like to express my gratitude to the authors- Archana Shah, Shilpa Sharma, Geetika Sachdev, Purnima Rai, and Bijan Behari Paul for their time and efforts to contribute chapters to the report.

Vipin Sharma, CEO, ACCESS Development Services has been a guiding light for this report. My sincere gratitude to him for his constant guidance and time to summarize the report with a note on the way forward for the handloom sector.

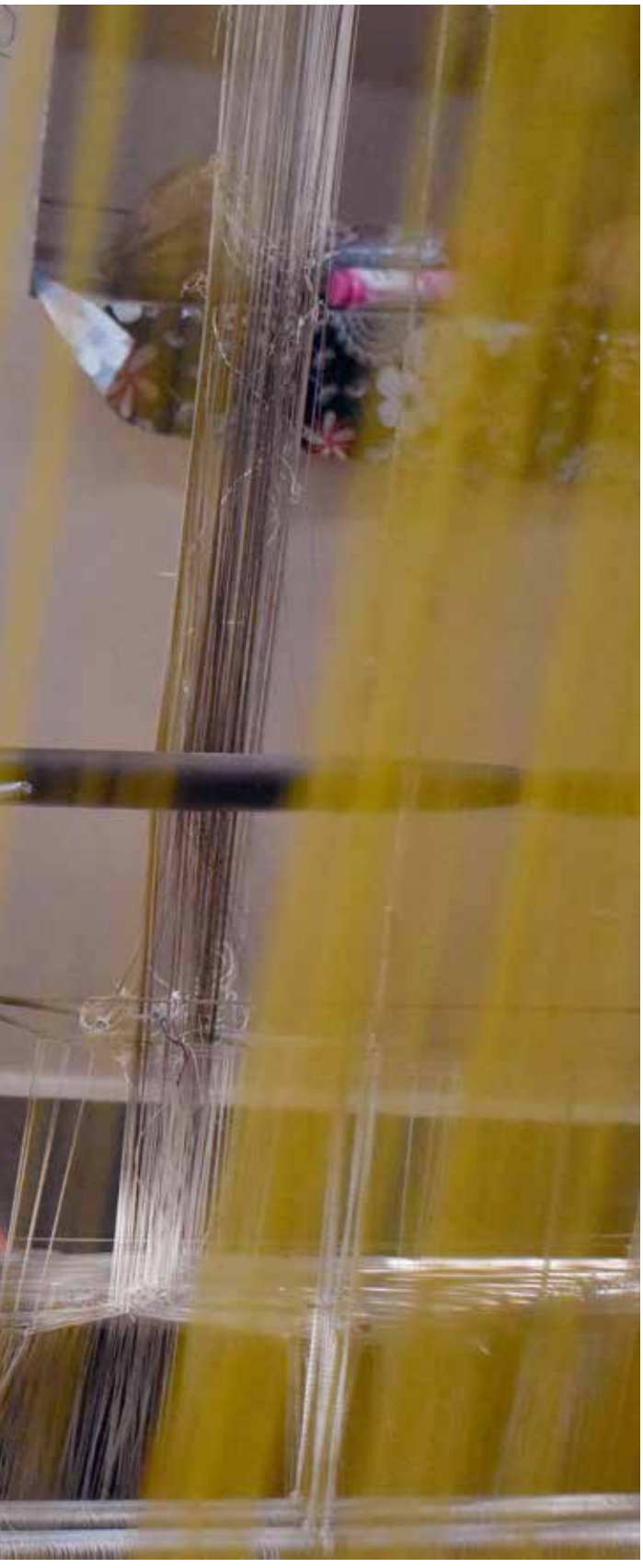
Last but not the least, my team working incessantly and steadfast on various fronts to make the report a reality. Anchal Kumar, Project Manager, Living Looms of India, Anvesha Dasari, Sumit Gavankar, Shreya and Priyanka Subarno worked diligently to conduct primary and secondary research, coordinated with various stakeholders, and put together important data for the report. The administration and communications team- Shilpa and Tanya made it possible to publish the report in time. The copy editor Avantika Singh has ensured that the report is clear, consistent, complete and credible. My sincere thanks to all of them.

Finally, I sincerely hope that this report will prove to be of immense value to practitioners, professionals, academics, organizations, Government, and other stakeholders engaged in the promotion of the handloom sector. The report will be released at an event on 28th Match, 2024 at the India Habitat Center. We plan to make this an annual publication. Any feedback on how to make the report more interesting and valuable is appreciated.

Suvendu Rout
Vice President
ACCESS Development Services

Photo Courtesy: ACCESS Development Services

Photo Courtesy: ACCESS Development Services



Handlooms – A Living Tradition of India

Dr. Madhura Dutta

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The timeless legacy of handloom weaving in India is a living, breathing, and growing tradition despite the many setbacks that it has received. It is one of the most resilient cottage industries that has survived for decades and impacts the livelihoods of millions of people from across the country. The products of handlooms are not just material objects of utility and fashion but essentially embody the passion, creativity, emotions, and love of the producers who toil to give forms to exquisite textiles. Moreover, it signifies the very high technical skills of the producers, which have been organically passed on through generations since age-old times. A first-hand experience of a handloom weaver's work sitting on his loom at his rural home and weaving can leave an observer spellbound not only because of what is being produced from a simple hand technology but because of the dexterity and assiduity with which the maker produces it. The producers are artists, mathematicians, and livelihood earners, all in one, creating their own designs, choosing their own colours and materials, adhering to specific measures and counts, and fulfilling consumer requirements. How a bunch of threads transforms into a gorgeous piece of textile, mainly using rudimentary hand-operated wooden or bamboo machines (looms), is truly magical. No less amazing is the Indian tradition of draping oneself with unstitched textiles in different ways and patterns, which add to the diversity of attires and decorative clothing.

In India, different weaving styles exist in various parts of the country, and even one region can have as many as 20-30 different traditions and processes. The country has much to offer from simple plain fabrics, tribal designs, geometric motifs, tie and dye, block printing, and hand-painting to highly complex woven patterns. A few of these extraordinary handlooms include Varanasi brocade weaving from

Uttar Pradesh, Murshidabad silk Baluchari weaving from West Bengal, Muga silk weaving from Assam, Handloom silk weaving from Jharkhand, Mangalgiri cotton and handloom weaving of Prakasam and Guntur districts of Tamil Nadu, fine cotton and silk Ikat weaving from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Woraiyur silk weaving from Trichy, Bhagalpur Tussar silk weaving from Bihar, Kanjeevaram silk weaving from Tamil Nadu, Sambalpuri Ikat weaving from Orissa, Kalamkari hand painted textile from Andhra Pradesh, Bandhani or tie and dye from Rajasthan and Gujarat, Patan Patola weaving from Gujarat, Kosa silk weaving from Chhattisgarh, Kunbi handloom weaving of Goa, Kullu shawls weaving from Himachal Pradesh, handloom weaving of Nagaland, Manipur and other tribal communities from Northeast India, and Pashmina weaving from Kashmir.

Losing these handloom traditions and their diversity is one of the saddest realities that India has been facing for various reasons. Fortunately, being a living heritage, handlooms have also enjoyed active multi-stakeholder convergences of varied creative, technological, financial and human resources to protect and promote handloom weaving practices and their actual practitioners. Research, documentation, grassroots entrepreneurship development, applications of innovations, partnerships, and collaborations with weavers and artisans, promotion of handmade textiles, and proper marketing have all been part of policies, programmes, projects, regulations, etc., supporting the handloom-based rural creative and cultural economy of the country.

Four All India Handloom Censuses have been conducted so far. These comprise the official data sources of the handloom industry at a national level. A comparative review of the four censuses for total numbers of weaver households, total number of weavers, rural-urban percentage of weavers, female percentage of weavers, and type of employment of the weavers may be interesting.

The reports indicate that although the data indicators are broadly the same, they do not exactly match across reports, making it difficult to compare the data correctly. The definitions of the indicators may also have changed over time, making it difficult to comprehend the actual change on the ground.

Table 1: Comparative Review of Four All India Handloom Censuses

	1st Census (1987-88)	2nd Census (1995-96)	3rd Census (2009-10)	4th Census (2019-20)
Weaver Households (lakhs)	**30.6**	**25.25**	**22.68**	**25.45**
Rural (%)	86	86.9	87	87.4
SC (%)	-	10.76	9.8	14.3
ST (%)	-	25.5	22.1	19.1
Weavers (lakhs)	**43.7**	**34.71**	**29.09 (18+)**	**26.73**
Full-time weavers (lakhs)	22.4	16.5	18.47 (18+)	13.24
Allied workers (lakhs)	23.7	27.8	9.38 (18+)	8.48
Weavers + Allied workers (lakhs)	67.4	62.51	38.47 (18+)	35.2
Female (%) among weavers	-	-	77.9 (18+)	72
Independent weavers (lakhs)	12.1	9.9 (out of full-time weavers)	17.74	19.57
Part of Cooperatives (lakhs)	4.5	2.4 (out of full-time weavers)		1.68
Under Master Weavers (lakhs)	3.4	2.9 (out of full-time weavers)	9.89	5.08

For instance, the composition of allied workers is not consistently presented in the reports, and so the readers' interpretation is required to identify who the allied workers are. Specifically, in the third Census, data was given for 18 years and above whereas no such break-up was given in the other reports. In the second Census, the professional engagement of the weavers has been enumerated from the full-time weavers. No such condition has been mentioned in the other reports for the same set of data. However, the data still shows a drop in the weavers' households between the first and fourth Census, and although the number of households in the fourth Census is more than in the third census, it does not show a marked rise in numbers in the fourth Census. There is a clear drop in the total number of weavers over the years, with the fourth Census reporting the least. A very interesting observation is the substantial reduction in the number of allied workers (those who engage in pre-loom and post-loom activities as per the reports). Gender data show that a large portion of the weavers, more than 70%, are female. However, detailed data also show that NE India, where almost all weavers are women, accounts for a large proportion of the weaver population of the country, so the gender difference is not as high in the rest of the country as the overall figure might suggest. This is an important factor of consideration for analysing gender implications in handloom weaving from across the country. Overall, the data does show a snapshot of the situation of the handloom industry over a period of 30 years, but owing to discrepancies the reliability of the data is affected.

The most serious threat posed to handlooms has been the proliferation of powerlooms, which can imitate handloom products easily and make them in much less time and effort. Several actions have been taken to address the rising unequal competition between handlooms and powerlooms and the resulting plight of the handloom producers, the most significant of which is The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985. There are different viewpoints on the origin and growth of powerlooms in India. Whereas some suggest that local Jagirdars initiated it to improve the living standards of weavers, others believe that composite mill managements financed the growth of powerlooms to circumvent excise duty, as well as the monopoly of certain places in the production of dhotis and sarees. In 1964, the Powerloom Enquiry Committee was constituted to find out the problems of the powerloom industry. As the powerlooms made inroads into the markets of handlooms and started affecting the livelihoods of the handloom weavers, a high-power Study Team was constituted in 1974, under the Chairmanship of Mr B. Sivaraman, the then Member of Planning Commission. He made the following observation concerning the effect of powerlooms and employment in the handloom sector in their report: 'Every new powerloom itself put out of action six handlooms in the country. A handloom actually is a family industry and not an individual's field alone. When National Policy is to support the expansion of the rural industry of handloom in order to give more employment in the rural sector, we shall be working at cross purpose in encouraging at the same time powerlooms to displace a large number of handlooms." Based on this textile policy statements were issued from time to time. The handloom sector being second only to agriculture in generating rural employment nationally, The Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985 was launched to protect the handloom industry.

However, the Handloom sector continues to suffer because of the lack of effective implementation of the Act, consumer and market awareness about diverse handloom traditions, and proper value creation of handmade textile industries. It also suffers from the rampant sale of fake powerloom and machine-made products in the name of handlooms though at a much lower price. Ensuring that the powerloom industry does not grow at the cost of the handloom industry or replace the latter is the most urgent need of the hour and a matter of collective national responsibility. Failing to protect the handloom industry will lead to large-scale rural unemployment and migration of the rural population to the urban industrial areas leading to unsustainable and unhealthy habitats, in addition to loss of India's exclusive, almost 5,000-year-old and most coveted creative industry.

No other country can boast of such an exclusive and wide range of rich textiles, even today. Every handwoven textile is a piece of art created with local hand skills and creative inspirations. It portrays the cultural essence of the producer communities, integrally linked to their beliefs, rituals, festivals, etc. Compared to handlooms, powerloom products lack human skills and creativity and are mechanical outputs of a power-driven machine that provides no sense of achievement or pride to its producer. An analogy may be drawn here of handloom weaving with painting or art, where replacing a handloom with powerloom is equivalent to the death or obsolescence of an artist because of the existence of computer-generated art.

Dying handloom traditions and skills is a national crisis requiring multi-stakeholder attention to promote and protect this sector. Diversification is a major necessity not only for expanding product and design repertoire but also for safeguarding specialised skills, varied processes, hand technology, community knowledge, and cultural diversity. Young minds should be exposed to and educated in the vast cultural wealth of Indian handlooms for both knowledge and practice. Consumers should be made aware of the immense opportunity of adorning themselves with varied styles and designs of ethnic and cultural clothing. Allied sectors such as education and tourism should be integrated with the knowledge of the country's innumerable handloom traditions and clusters for creating national pride and cultural identity. The low carbon footprint of handloom technology and its people-centric community-led production systems, should be highlighted to position India's contribution towards a sustainable economy. Handlooms, thus, play a critical role in India's economic, social, and environmental sustainability and the overall well-being of its people.

Photo Courtesy: Kharghewala

Photo Courtesy: Creative Bee

Policy Landscape of the Indian Handloom Sector: An overview

Dr. Madhura Dutta

2

I. INTRODUCTION

The handloom sector of India is one of the oldest and most well-renowned industries of the world, referred to in ancient and world histories, travelogues, cultural studies, and accounts of colonisers. The sector has enticed the world with its exquisite craftsmanship and extraordinary diversity for centuries, and continues to occupy a distinct and unique place in the Indian economy. India has been known to the world for extensive use of cotton and silk products since ancient times. For millennia, India held the world monopoly in the manufacturing of cotton goods.[1] Different parts of India produce exclusive and distinct styles of handlooms, adding to its cultural and creative richness. Some of the most celebrated and classical Indian handlooms include Muslin, Chanderi, Varanasi brocades, Ikat, Patan Patola, Jamdani, Pashmina, and Muga silk weaves. Traditionally, handloom has been a rural cottage industry that engaged communities of particular geographic and cultural origins. Families have been working as units of production where all or most family members are involved in the production process and activities ranging from pre-loom processes to actual weaving and post-loom work.

Ancient trade routes show that the handloom industry has catered to domestic and export markets for ages and has enjoyed patronage and prosperity combined with international exchange and collaborations. Evidence to that effect can be found in the country's pre-British regal history. During British rule, the handloom industry was severely exploited, with the skilled self-employed producers relegated to cheap labourers, pushing

the entire sector into distress. The Indian freedom struggle initiated a regeneration of the traditional handloom industry as part of the reconstruction of India's cottage industries, primarily to achieve self-sufficiency and dignity of work.

As much as India is proud of its handloom legacy, today, it also deals with several issues and challenges arising from changing times, threatening the sustenance of this heritage economy. The complexities are increased by the industry's essentially home-based and family-based character, categorising it as an informal and unorganised sector, thereby undermining its potential as a robust creative industry. The handloom industry also consists of several sub-industries based on local specialisations subsumed under it. These sub-industries include hand spinning of fibre into yarn, dyeing, bobbin winding, warping, street sizing, card punching, setting up the looms, and weaving. Usually, separate groups of people or allied communities fulfil these tasks requiring special skills, thus engaging a large population of workers beyond just the weavers.

A typical operational model of the traditional handloom business has three important actors: individual weavers, master weavers (*Grihastha*), and *gaddidars* (*Mahajan*). These home-managed businesses usually have a separate working cum production space in the house. These spaces/ workshops mostly have multiple looms owned and managed by the master weavers. The individual weavers work under the master weavers, who manage the entire production and mediate transactions at the local level through a network of weavers based in and around their village. The individual weavers are found to work against wages either on their own looms or the looms of the master weavers. The master weavers depend on the *gaddidars* to market and sell their products. The *gaddidars* act as the middleman between the master weavers and retail store owners, earning the maximum profit share. Within this archetypal framework of traditional business, new entrepreneurs emerge who were earlier either individual weavers choosing to create their enterprises or carrying forward their family's legacy.

Currently, India is the third-largest exporter of Textiles & Apparel (T&A) in the world, and the textiles and clothing industry is one of the pillars of the national economy.[2] As per the Annual Report 2022-23 of the Ministry of Textiles, the share of T&A including handicrafts in India's total merchandise exports stood at a significant 10.5% in 2021-22. India has a share of 4.6% of the global trade in T&A. Major T&A export destinations for India are the USA, EU-27, and the UK. The Handloom industry mainly exports fabrics, bed linen, table linen, towels, tapestries and upholstery, carpets, and floor coverings. The major importing countries of handloom products from India are the USA (biggest importer of Indian handloom products), UK, Spain, Germany, Italy, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Australia, South Africa, Netherlands, and the UAE.[3] During 2022-23 (April-September), the country imported handloom products worth US$33.75 million. The exports to the UK, which was the second-largest importer of handloom from India during the same period increased to US$6.50 million. Some of the other handloom importers from India are Canada, Brazil, Greece, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and others. During 2021-22, these countries accounted for 37% of India's total handloom exports.

With this backdrop, the following sections of this chapter delve into the current policy landscape pertinent to the handloom sector of India, understanding the roles and responsibilities of various government bodies and departments, and a critical overview of the on-ground situation.

II. THE POLICY LANDSCAPE – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The government of India has had policies, regulations, programmes, and schemes to support the handloom sector relating to market facilitation, value chain support, infrastructure development, skilling, and protection of authentic handloom products. However, industrialisation, globalisation, and digitisation have contributed to significant changes, advantages, and bottlenecks making this sector highly competitive, hopeful, volatile, and vulnerable – all at the same time. Hence, the complexities therein have been sweeping, resulting in a constant state of flux in the sector as a whole.

The policy landscape, shaped and reshaped by the different phases of national administration, has tried to establish a panoptic programme dedicated to advancing the sector. Yet, owing to the sector's vastness, diversity, and fragility, there have been challenges in effectively implementing government programmes. The private sector and other stakeholders have responded to the opportunities and challenges in their own capacities and interests, contributing significantly to the sector. Despite the difficulties, India's handloom sector has proved to be a highly resilient industry that has overcome the test of time and continues to be a potentially coveted economic sector subject to effective and broad-

based policies, regulations, and programmes across different ministries, departments, and organisations of the government of India, as well as robust private sector partnerships.

After independence, the nation prioritised decentralisation of economic activities, recognising the strength and importance of artisanal cultures and industries based on local skills, raw materials, and production methods. The national government emphasised the need for the revival and development of the cottage industries and organised an Industries Conference in 1947. The Conference focused on the problems faced by cottage and small-scale industries, including handicrafts and handlooms. The issues identified were: 1) lack of finance; 2) outdated techniques of manufacturing; 3) defective marketing; 4) non-availability of raw materials; and 5) competition from mechanised goods, both imported and locally made. The Conference strongly recommended that the Union Government form a Cottage Industries Board to look after traditional occupations and save them from crisis.

In response to the need for strengthening rural and cottage industries for income generation, equitable wealth distribution, and development of entrepreneurship ability, the government set up an **All India Cottage Industries Board in 1948**[4] with a Standing Committee to address the challenges of handloom weavers. The All India Cottage Industries Board recommended setting up an Emporia at the Centre and in the states to market cottage industries products. **The Central Cottage Industries Emporium** was, thus, established to popularise and market products made by these traditional producers. The Central Cottage Industries (CCI) Emporium today has showrooms in New Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Gujarat. It continues to work towards developing, promoting, and marketing authentic and high-quality Indian handicrafts and handloom products in India and abroad procured from the artisans/ weavers/ craftspersons. Marketing is carried out through various channels such as Emporia, e-commerce, exhibitions, institutional/corporate sales, exports, and interior decoration projects. The CCI now also has an online shopping website shoponline.cottageemporium.in. The setting up of CCI was followed by the establishment of the **All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB)**[5] in 1952 by Smt. Kamladevi Chattopadhyay. This Board laid the foundation for the policy framework and necessary institutional and programmatic support for the sector. The Board developed a number of new schemes for training in selected crafts combined with design development, improving tools, techniques, and facilities for the producers, and extending the marketing network in both domestic and international markets. The AIHB was trifurcated into the **Handloom, Handicrafts, and Khadi and Village Industries Boards**. It may be interesting to note that an **All India Handloom Board** was first established in **1945** and was functional till 1947, after which it was again re-established. Following this branching of the Boards. several bodies and regulations were formed, namely, the **Khadi and Other Handloom Industries Development Act 1953,**[6] **All India Handloom Fabrics Marketing Cooperative Society (AIHFMCS) in 1955,**[7] the **Khadi and Village Industries Commission in 1957**, the **Handicrafts & Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Limited (HHEC) in 1958**.[8] The separate Handicrafts and Handloom Boards were again reconstituted as the **All India Handlooms and Handicrafts Board (AIHHB) later**.

In the 1950s, the chairperson of the Handloom Board, Smt. Pupul Jayakar established the **Weavers' Service Centre (WSC),** formerly the Handloom Design Centre. The **WSC** nurtured partnerships between traditional weavers and trained artists to expand and strengthen the traditional weaving skills and design vocabulary of the handloom sector. The Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology (IIHTs) were also set up to provide higher education in the handloom sector, including various aspects of handloom technology, design, dyeing, weaving, etc.

During this period, small-scale power looms entered the handloom weaving sector, posing a much greater threat to handlooms than the mills. In **1952**, a **Textile Enquiry Commission**[9] was set up to make a comprehensive study of the situation. It revealed that the market share of 6,500 million yards of fabric was 75% mill-made, 3.5% power loomed, and 21.5% hand loomed. The Commission also eventually recommended a progressive conversion of handlooms into semi-automatic looms and power looms to increase the speed and size of production. During the second Five Year Plan, in 1955, 200 mn yards were allotted to the power loom industry considering the economic impact on the country.[10]

In **1955,** the Planning Commission appointed the **Village and Small-Scale Industries Committee**[11] (popularly known as the **Karve Committee**) for the growth of small-scale industries and rural development. It emphasised a state-wise and industry-wise scheme for improved planning and managing of resources as earmarked for the development of village and small-scale industries, and particularly the handloom industry.

The **Textiles Committee** was established in **1964**[12] under the ***Textiles Committee Act, 1963*** to ensure the quality of textiles for both the internal and export markets. Its functions include the promoting textiles and textiles exports, researching in technical and economic fields, establishing standards for textiles and textiles machinery, setting up laboratories, and collecting data throughout the country.

The **Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC)** was set up in **1965**[13] as a nodal agency under the Ministry of Textiles to promote exports of all handloom products like fabrics, home furnishings, carpets, floor coverings, etc., and guide the Indian Handloom exporters and international buyers for trade promotion and international marketing. HEPC organises and participates in International Trade Fairs and Buyer-Seller Meets in India and abroad.

In **1974**, another committee called the **Sivaraman Committee on Handlooms**[14] was constituted to study the problems specific to the handloom industry. This requirement arose because, by this time, powerloom had gained a strong position in the Indian economy, alongside handloom and mill-based textiles, thus generating concerns for the handloom sector. Upon re-evaluation of the issues of the handloom sector, the Committee pointed out that for every powerloom setup, six handlooms were rendered dormant. Consequently, for every job created in the powerloom sector, 14 handloom weavers were displaced. This called for the government's urgent attention to introduce appropriate policies and adequate support for the sustenance and growth of handlooms. The Committee put forward the need for increased and efficient production for increased consumption, provision of better infrastructure facilities like supply of yarn, pre-loom and post-loom facilities, financial assistance, and marketing support. Its recommendations led to the setting up of the **National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) Ltd.,** a public sector undertaking, in 1983[15] to ensure a steady supply of quality raw materials such as yarns, dyes, and chemicals for the handloom sector, promote marketing of handloom fabrics, and provide assistance in the implementation of the projects connected with the production and modernisation of handloom fabrics including technological developments. The government first created a Textile Policy in 1978, which was further revised in 1981.he more comprehensive textile policy was the **National Textile Policy (NTP) in 1985 which focused on promoting handlooms and removing constraints and restrictive policies of previous years to make the industry more market/ consumer-facing.**[16] **The *Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act*** *1985,* was passed in the same year with the objective of protecting the cultural heritage and livelihoods of the handloom weavers. It initially reserved 22 textile articles for exclusive production by handlooms violating which would be a cognizable offence, which was then revised to 11 textile articles in 1996.[17]

The office of the **Development Commissioner for Handlooms** was set up in **1975** under the **Ministry of Commerce. It is currently under the Ministry of Textiles.**[18] The Development Commissioner of Handlooms was mandated to ensure the sector's scientific growth by implementing various developmental and welfare schemes for the benefit of the handloom weavers. This is the primary government agency dealing with the sector. Under its ambit, various programmes and institutions have been set up to strengthen the sector. The Ministry also has under its purview statutory bodies such as the National Jute Board (NJB), Central Silk Board (CSB), and Central Wool Development Board, which are engaged in developing the silk, jute, and wool industries, respectively. They assist in the marketing, quality improvement, R&D, and price stabilisation of these products. In addition, the Cotton Corporation of India (1970) and Jute Corporation of India (1971) are public sector organisations mandated to support the cotton and jute growers, and the textile industry.[19]

The **Handloom Reservation Act** was challenged by power loom associations in 1986 in the Supreme Court, which ordered a stay on implementing it on the grounds that it violated fundamental rights. The stay became null and void in 1993.[20] However, during the seven years of the stay, the powerloom industry proliferated and captured the handloom market with mass production and low prices, which was a severe blow to the survival of the handloom industry.

Other important national organisations established under Jayakar's leadership, with a mandate to conserve, promote, and institutionalise education for handlooms and handicrafts include the **National Crafts Museum** set up in **1956**, the **Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)** set up in **1984**, the **Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)**, established in **1985**, and the **National Institute of Fashion Technology** set up in **1986**. She was also instrumental in conceiving the idea of the **National Institute of Design.** The Crafts Museum

set up initially in 1956, underwent shifts till it was permanently established at its present location in Pragati Maidan over an area of 20,000 square metres. The Museum, under the Ministry of Textiles, was renamed the National Handicrafts and Handloom Museum in 1986 and the National Crafts Museum and Hastkala Academy in 2019. The **Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH)** is another important marketing arm of handicrafts and handlooms, established under the Companies Act in 1**986-87** as a non-profit organisation. It engages in supporting and promoting export of Indian handicrafts.

III. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND PROGRAMMES

The Government of India supports handloom activities and enables handloom-based businesses providing a sustainable source of income to the traditional weavers in the country by way of schematic assistance through Central Sector Schemes. Financial assistance has been accorded to 613 Handloom Clusters from 2015-16 to 2022-23 (up to December 2022). The financial assistance from 2018-19 to 2022-23 (up to December 2022) was about ₹160 Cr.[21]

Reviewing the government schemes and programmes for promoting the handloom industry may be useful to understand the current scenario better. It is also important to note that although the Ministry of Textiles is the line Ministry for handlooms and introduces and manages schemes for the sector, there are other Ministries that also have relevant policies and schemes that can significantly contribute to this sector. These include the Ministry of MSME and the Ministry of Skill and Entrepreneurship. The critical issues and gaps addressed by government schemes and programmes have fundamentally remained unchanged over decades. How those are being dealt with by multiple stakeholders and emerging new actors through changing times has been an important factor affecting the evolution of the policy landscape of this sector.

A. Ministry of Textiles

The vision of the Ministry's handloom department has always been to facilitate and ensure prosperity and growth through a strong, competitive, and vibrant handloom industry by ensuring sustainable livelihoods and inclusive growth of the handloom weavers. As discussed earlier, many departments and sub-departments are working towards this vision with specialised portfolios.

The National Textile Policy, revised in 2000, reiterated the objective of developing a strong and vibrant industry that can contribute to sustainable employment and the nation's economic growth by producing high-quality fabrics and increasing their share in the global markets. The Policy states, "*The Government is committed to providing a conducive environment to enable the Indian textile industry to realise its full potential, to achieve global excellence, and to fulfil its obligation to different sections of the society. In the fulfilment of these objectives, Government will enlist the cooperation and involvement of all stakeholders and ensure an effective and responsive delivery system.*"

The Policy emphasises improving the quality and availability of raw materials at reasonable prices, facilitating R&D for improving fibre quality, and development of specialised yarns or fabrics of a wide variety to suit the tastes of the global markets. The Policy focuses on cotton, silk, wool, jute, and man-made fibre for ensuring quality, productivity, price stabilisation, clustering of reeling and weaving activities, and strengthening linkages between the producers and the industry through proper technology transfer and effective processing units. Other focus areas include modernising the spinning sector through technological advances and ensuring adequate supply of hank yarn to the handloom sector.

The Policy prioritises the handloom industry and recognises its immense heritage value and the legacy of traditional and excellent craftsmanship. It also highlights the strength of the industry in providing livelihood to millions of weavers and craftspersons, their resilience and flexibility in responding to changing market scenarios, applying innovations, and their immense possibility of growth. Thus, the Policy aims to promote and develop the exclusiveness of the handloom sector for the global market. It includes in its scope providing support to smaller weavers with appropriate training, comprehensive welfare measures, a better working environment, exposure to contemporary trends, and training on using information technology to be at par with globalised modern markets. The Policy considers marketing and merchandising central to this initiative to be undertaken through various market-oriented schemes and programmes to strengthen the brand equity of handlooms in the world market. It also recognises the importance of processing finished goods in the handloom sector and envisions setting up modern processing units meeting international quality and environmental

norms. It intends to introduce and expand CAD/CAM, computerised colour matching, and testing facilities. The use of natural dyes, revival of traditional motifs, improvement of production efficiency, and application of energy efficient and waste management technology are some of the other focus areas. The government also emphasises utilising the full potential of e-commerce supported by suitable market intelligence and infrastructure.

In alignment with the policy, the Ministry of Textiles has designed and implemented various schemes and programmes with specific targets and operational frameworks, covering the entire gamut of the industry. These can be broadly categorised into three major umbrella schemes for the handloom sector: the National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP), the Raw Material Supply Scheme, and the Scheme for Protection of the Handlooms and Implementation of the Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985.

National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP)

The NHDP, formulated for implementation during the period 2021-22 to 2025-26, has been designed to facilitate an integrated and sustainable development of handloom weavers into independent, cohesive socio-economic units. The scheme is fairly inclusive considering the handloom weavers' holistic, business-oriented, and welfare-oriented development. It addresses not only cooperatives but also Self-help Groups and unorganised weavers. There are provisions of support towards comprehensive handloom cluster development (targeting development of Mega Handloom Clusters); raw materials, design inputs, technology upgradation for reducing occupational hazards, and improving production efficiency; capacity building of handloom workers in technical and business skills; collaborations with designers for diversity and innovation; digital literacy, partnerships between IIHTs and other handloom/handicraft/fashion institutes; documentation and preservation of the heritage of handlooms; award based recognition for encouraging sustenance of exclusive handloom skills and traditions; brand building for handlooms as eco-friendly, sustainable and premium products; revival of untouched or non-commercial pockets of languishing crafts having export potential; prioritising weavers in the Northeast where there is limited outreach; credit facilities, marketing support through exhibitions, permanent infrastructure development in the form of Urban Haats, marketing complexes, initiation of handloom village tourism; weaver welfare schemes,[22] etc. Under the Mega Handloom Clusters development, the government has undertaken eight Mega Handloom Clusters for development; these include Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Sivasagar (Assam), Virudhunagar (Tamil Nadu), Murshidabad (West Bengal), Prakasam and Guntur districts (Andhra Pradesh), Godda and neighbouring districts (Jharkhand), Bhagalpur (Bihar), and Trichy (Tamil Nadu).

Export and market enhancement are major goals of the Ministry. Handloom Marketing Assistance (HMA) is an important scheme under NHDP that provides direct market linkages to weavers and handloom organisations through various marketing platforms. HMA, thus, facilitates domestic marketing through the organisation of expos, exhibitions, and craft *melas* at the national, state, and district levels. It also promotes handloom export for handloom cooperative societies, corporations, and encourages handloom exporters to participate in international events, buyer-seller meets, and various promotional events. It also extends support on the latest design trends, colour forecasts, etc. To promote the marketing of handloom products, the corporation organises special exhibitions like Silk Fabs and Wool Fabs and National Handloom Expos. HMA also facilitates brand promotion through the Handloom Mark and India Handloom Brand and Geographical Indications.

The government facilitates exports through 11 Exports Promotion Councils (EPCs) representing various segments of the textiles & apparel value chain, such as readymade garments, cotton, silk, jute, wool, power loom, handloom, handicrafts, and carpets. These Councils work in close cooperation with the Ministry of Textiles and other ministries to promote the growth and export of their respective sectors in global markets. The Councils participate in textiles and apparel fairs, exhibitions, and standalone shows in India and in overseas markets to enhance exports and access new markets. The objective of the handloom export promotion is to assist the handloom cooperative societies, corporations/ apex and handloom exporters to participate in international events, buyer-seller meets etc. and to make available the latest designs, trends, colour forecasts etc. Under this component, assistance is given for participation in international fairs & exhibitions, and organisation of buyer-seller meets and various promotional events.

In order to generate a special space in the market, the government has undertaken schemes for authentication and branding in order to provide

assurance to the customers. The India Handloom brand launched on the occasion of the first National Handloom Day on 7 August 2015 promises the handloom products are of superior quality, meet all product quality parameters, have zero defects and zero effect on the environment, and meet all social and environmental compliances. The Handloom Mark Scheme launched in 2006, on the other hand, provides assurance to the consumers about authenticity of handloom products. The National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) Ltd., as the implementing agency for the promotion of Indian Handlooms as a Brand, is mandated to undertake a 360-degree promotional campaign for boosting the premium quality of handloom products in international and domestic markets, as well as participate in various events to increase the visibility of the 'Indian Handlooms' brand. Interesting campaigns have also been launched by the government, such as the #Vocal4Handmade (2020) and #MyHandloomMyPride (2021-23), which have created a great impact on improving the appreciation and consciousness about handlooms. To celebrate Indian handlooms nationally, the government also designated 7 August as National Handloom Day, contributing to substantial awareness for generating interest in handlooms among mass consumers.

Raw Material Supply Scheme (RMSS)

The Raw Material Supply Scheme (RMSS), previously known as the Yarn Supply Scheme (YSS), addresses the need for a smooth supply of yarns for the weavers. Yarns are produced mainly by spinning mills, for which traders control the market, thereby making the handloom weavers dependent on the former for their yarn procurements. The open market scenario subjects the weavers to escalation, changing yarn prices, and shortages in supply. Since different kinds of yarns are in production and use, based on the various types of fibres available in specific areas of the country, the weavers need to source the yarns from outside their area, which adds to the cost of transportation. These factors increase the production costs of smaller weavers, affecting their income and profit margins. To reduce such vulnerabilities, the government established the Mill Gate Price Scheme in 1992 for the supply of yarn at the price it is available at the Mill Gate and for reimbursement of transportation expenses by the government.

Furthermore, a price subsidy on silk and cotton hank yarn was also introduced in January 2012. The existing scheme provides eligible handloom weavers with quality yarn and blends at subsidised rates. The scheme also sets the benchmark price and quality standards for yarn in the open market to keep prices within reasonable limits and ensure a consistent supply of yarn. It also makes dyed yarn of consistent quality available to enable product diversification and improve the marketability of the produce, helping handloom weavers compete with mill and powerloom products. The scheme provides yarn price and transport subsidies, managed by the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC), state directorates of Handlooms & Textiles, State Handloom Corporations, and state-level Apex Societies. Individual weavers, handloom weaver collectives and producer companies, and weaver entrepreneurs with handloom production can all benefit from this scheme, which makes it broad-based and designed to promote the business of handlooms in the sector.

Implementation of the Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act

The third scheme on Protection of the Handlooms and Implementation of the Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985 aims to safeguard handlooms through effective enforcement of the Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act of 1985. While the government endeavours to facilitate the harmonious growth of the entire textile industry, the Act also shields the much-celebrated handloom industry of the country from the infiltration of powerlooms. It aims to support the sale of genuine handloom products and prevent marketing and sale of fake products through awareness generation and effective application of existing instruments of Handloom Mark (HM), Indian Handloom Brand (IHB), and geographical indication (GI) tags. Under this Scheme, the state handloom departments and offices are entrusted with the role of conducting regular awareness programmes and generating demand for original handloom products amongst buyers. The key components include establishing mechanisms for enforcement of the Act including training and resource allocation for inspection, verification and appropriate action, promoting and implementing the certification processes of HM and IHB, and preventing misuse of these labels through legal mechanisms.

IV. OTHER ALLIED MINISTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS

The other allied ministries supporting the capacity development of the non-farm industry are the Ministry of MSME and the Ministry of Skill and

Entrepreneurship, which have several relevant schemes, too. It is important to understand the objectives and programmes of these allied ministries, given the multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder nature of the Indian Handloom industry.

B. Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)

The **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)** plays a crucial role in supporting the industrialisation of rural and backward areas, thereby reducing regional imbalances and assuring a more equitable distribution of national income and wealth. This sector is considered a highly vibrant and dynamic part of the Indian economy with the potential to significantly contribute to the country's socio-economic development. Khadi, Village, and Coir are important industries under MSME.

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act was notified in 2006 to address policy issues affecting MSMEs. This draft policy was created to promote competitiveness, technology upgradation, infrastructure, cluster development, dedicated credit, procurement of products and financial assistance to MSMEs.

The vision of the sector is to stimulate efficiency and productivity to generate income, employment and become a part of the domestic and global value chains. The objectives include building a vibrant eco-system for the rapid growth of the MSME sector; creating physical infrastructure and linkages (backward & forward) amenable to MSMEs; ensuring access to credit, risk capital, raw material and marketing facilities for MSMEs; developing a framework for accessible and affordable technology upgradation and capacity building for MSMEs as well as harnessing the potential of technological advancement to deliver services to stakeholders especially MSMEs; and promoting a conducive business environment covering 'ease of doing business' (EoDB) and suitable exit code.

The implementation of policies and various programmes/ schemes are carried out by the Office of the Development Commissioner MSME, National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC), Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC); the Coir Board, the National Board for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (NBMSME), and three training institutes, the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD), NOIDA, National Institute for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (NI-MSME), Hyderabad, Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE), Guwahati and Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialization (MGIRI), Wardha a society registered under Societies Registration Act, 1860.

The Ministry has a large portfolio of schemes such as Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme and Other Credit Support Schemes, Development of Khadi and Village Industries (Khadi Gramodyog Vikas Yojana), Revamped Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI), Coir Vikas Yojana (along with associated schemes for promotion of Coir industry), A Scheme for Promoting Innovation, Rural Industry & Entrepreneurship (ASPIRE), Marketing Promotion Schemes, Technology Upgradation and Quality Certification schemes, Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programme (ESDP), Infrastructure Development Program, Promotion of MSMEs in NER and Sikkim, Schemes of National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC).

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is the most pertinent for implementing schemes affecting the handloom industry, specifically Khadi. It works towards strengthening the rural economy by developing and promoting khadi and village industries and providing employment opportunities in rural areas. Under KVIC, the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) aims to generate employment opportunities in rural as well as urban areas of the country, targeting traditional and prospective artisans and unemployed youth, through setting up new self-employment ventures or micro-enterprises. It also focuses on the wage-earning capacity of artisans. The Credit Guarantee Trust Fund for MSEs (CGTMSE) creates a collateral free credit facility (term loan and/ or working capital) extended by eligible lending institutions to new and existing micro and small enterprises. The Modified Market Development Assistance scheme enables Khadi products to be sold at market-oriented prices. The Interest subsidy eligibility certificate scheme helps in mobilising additional fund requirements from the financial Institutions/ banks for the Khadi programme by providing a concessional rate of interest at 4% per annum for Capital Expenditure (CE) and Working Capital (WC) as per the requirement of KVI Institutions. The Workshed scheme for Khadi artisans supports the provision of sufficient space and congenial environment for the smooth and comfortable working of the Khadi artisans, leading to enhanced productivity and increased earnings. The scheme on strengthening infrastructure provides assistance

for enhancing existing weak Khadi institutions and marketing infrastructure. The capacity-building scheme provides for need-based training in the Khadi clusters. The science and technology scheme aims to boost innovation, quality, and productivity to make Khadi and Village Industries products globally competitive and earn a fair market share. The Khadi Reform and Development programme aims to fully realise the significant growth potential of the Khadi and Village Industries sector in terms of employment generation, enhancement of the earnings of the artisans, and improvement of technology for productivity and quality improvements.

Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Programmes support entrepreneurship development, improving the skills and knowledge of entrepreneurs, enhancing their capacity to develop, manage and organise a business venture, promoting new enterprises, and inculcating an entrepreneurial culture in the country.

The Scheme of the Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) aims to organise traditional industries and artisans into clusters to make them competitive and provide skilling, technology, and market support for their long-term sustainability and sustained employment. It focuses on innovative products, improved technologies, advanced processes, market intelligence, and new models of public-private partnerships. The provision for common facilities and improved tools and equipment for artisans complement skill enhancement efforts for making the clusters market-ready. The scheme also aims to strengthen the cluster governance systems with the active participation of the stakeholders.

The Micro and Small Enterprises Cluster Development Programme (MSE-CDP) aims to enhance the productivity, competitiveness, and capacity building of MSEs by extending financial assistance in the form of a Government of India (GoI) grant for the establishment of Common Facility Centres (CFCs).

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), set up in 1990, is the principal financial institution for promoting, financing, and developing the MSME sector. Its objective is to facilitate and strengthen credit flow to MSMEs and address both financial and developmental gaps in the MSME ecosystem.

The principal objective of the MSME Formalisation project is to provide Udyam Registration to several Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) not registered with GST authorities. To assist with Udyam registration of IMEs, SIDBI has developed the Udyam Assist Platform (UAP), which works with regulated entities like Banks, NBFCs, MFIs, and government departments acting as designated agencies. The UAP certificate has been assigned coverage under Priority Sector Lending by the government. Currently, over 145 Designated Agencies (DAs) are facilitating UAP, and they have already helped register over 1.10 crore unique IMEs. Additionally, as an implementation partner, SIDBI has developed the PM Vishwakarma Portal.

SIDBI has been actively involved in cluster development through its direct lending business and promotion and development interventions. For focused attention, SIDBI has now set up a Cluster Development Vertical and a Cluster Development Fund (supported by RBI) to provide both soft and hard infrastructure for cluster development. SIDBI Cluster Development Fund (SCDF) provides support to state governments to create infrastructure towards development of MSME clusters. SIDBI also extends thematic support to clusters, such as skilling/reskilling, technology, marketing, credit facilitation, etc. For example, SIDBI's Cluster Intervention Programme in Bargarh showcased design interventions and sustainable best practices at the National Handloom Summit. Under the Cluster Intervention Programme (CIP) at Handloom Cluster, Bargarh, SIDBI organised a specially curated Small Business Management training programme for Master weavers with the support of IIM Sambalpur. During the programme, SIDBI also supported the onboarding of the Master weavers over the ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) network. It was also announced that the Government of India, along with state governments, and SIDBI shall work towards awarding GI Tag for Sambalpuri Ikat.

C. Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

The **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship,** working towards its vision of a 'Skilled India', is responsible for coordinating all skill development efforts across the country, building the vocational and technical training framework, up-grading skills, building new skills and innovative thinking, not only for existing jobs but also future jobs, and reducing the gap between demand and supply of skills.

Skill India is complementary to Make in India. Make in India aims to promote manufacturing in 25 sectors of the economy and ensure job

creation; textiles is listed as one of these sectors. Correspondingly, Skill India aims to prepare a highly skilled workforce, completely aligned to the requirements of the industry to promote growth through improved productivity.

The Vision statement 2025 of the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2015) states, "*Unlock human capital to trigger a productivity dividend and bring aspirational employment and entrepreneurship pathways to all.*" The National Skill Development Policy was first formulated in 2009. The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship 2015 supersedes the policy of 2009. The primary objective of this policy is to meet the challenge of skilling at scale with speed, standard (quality), and sustainability. The policy links skills development to improved employability and productivity, paving the way for inclusive growth in the country. The skill strategy is complemented by specific efforts to promote entrepreneurship to create ample opportunities for the skilled workforce. The entrepreneurship policy framework has been developed to address holistic support toward an enabling ecosystem of culture, finance, expertise, infrastructure, skills, and business-friendly regulation. Many government and non-government organisations are playing enabling roles across each of these crucial supporting elements. A nine-point entrepreneurship strategy has been put forward, including educating and equipping potential and early-stage entrepreneurs across India, connecting entrepreneurs to peers, mentors, and incubators, supporting entrepreneurs through Entrepreneurship Hubs (E-Hubs), catalysing a culture shift to encourage entrepreneurship, encouraging entrepreneurship among under-represented groups, promoting entrepreneurship amongst women, improving ease of doing business, improving access to finance, and fostering social entrepreneurship and grassroots innovations.

Under the Skill India Mission, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has been fulfilling its mission through various schemes and initiatives, exclusively and in collaboration with other ministries. There are about 25 schemes under MSDE addressing skills training, infrastructure development, and upgradation for skilling, development of Skill Hubs for integrated actions, combining apprenticeship and vocational trainings with skill development programmes, entrepreneurship development with a special focus on women, loan schemes, initiatives of integrating technical and employable skills with school education, etc. Some of the major schemes include Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK), Setting up of Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), Implementation of Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP), Implementation of Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE) scheme, WEE, Jan Shikshan Santhans, and others.

The Ministry operates through various departments and functional bodies such as the Directorate General of Training (DGT), National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and 37 Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) as well as 33 National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs/NSTI(w)), about 15,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) under DGT and 187 training partners registered with NSDC.

The Ministry includes under its ambit the National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD) and the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE). Both these institutes are mandated to work on Entrepreneurship and Skill Training Programmes and undertake training, research, and consultancy activities. NIESBUD is an apex body promoting entrepreneurship and small business development offering innovative training programmes for different target groups – entrepreneurs, trainers, promoters, and development functionaries. The Institute has been accredited as a National Resource Organisation (NRO) by the Ministry of Rural Development for the Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) of MoRD and to support the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) for the effective implementation of the scheme. The Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) in Guwahati focuses on entrepreneurship development in the North East, operating with the North East Council (NEC), governments of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland and SIDBI as its other stakeholders.

The Ministry also has Startup initiatives to support selected promising start-ups and aspiring entrepreneurs with prize money. Under the initiative, 20 best business ideas will be promoted with prize money of ₹5 Lakhs each.

Out of the 37 Sector Skill Councils, there are Textile Skill Councils, Handicraft and Car pet Sector Skill Councils, Apparel Made-Ups, and Home Furnishing Sector Skill Councils.

The Ministry has undertaken pilot entrepreneurship projects across 12 states and

union territories (Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Telangana, Kerala, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Meghalaya, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra) aiming to promote entrepreneurship as an alternate career choice and enable sustained long-term mentoring support to potential and early-stage entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education is being imparted through about 300 institutes (Industrial Training Institutes, Polytechnics, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras) across project states, targeting both existing and potential entrepreneurs through specific modules.

D. NIESBD and IIE

NIESBD and IIE have interesting and pertinent collaborative initiatives with the ministries of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, MSME, and Rural Development, which demonstrate the significance of inter-departmental collaborations to bring about economic and social empowerment in the non-farm sector and potentially in the handloom sector. As per the Annual Report (2022-23) of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, some of these projects are as follows.

NIESBUD conducted entrepreneurship development training for women self-help groups (SHGs) on digital marketing and entrepreneurship development in 101 blocks of the ten aspirational districts. It facilitated linkages of 693 women SHGs to Amazon, 744 to Flipkart, and 830 to Villa Mart e-commerce platforms. NIESBUD has also developed an online e-mentoring platform 'UdyamDisha', to handhold and guide aspiring and existing entrepreneurs from diverse and remote locations. NIESBUD has intervened in various clusters under different schemes of the Government of India to capacitate and enhance the competitiveness of artisans/entrepreneurs of those clusters.

IIE has been collaborating since 2022 with the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) as a designated National Resource Organisation (NRO) to strengthen the Start Up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP). SVEP, under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana of National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) programme, supports the SHGs and their family members in setting up small enterprises in the non-farm sector. SVEP develops an ecosystem for enterprise development in rural areas through a Community Enterprise Fund (CEF) for enterprise financing, engaging community resource persons to provide business support services, including preparation of business plans, training, market linkages, etc. The project on '*Entrepreneurship promotion through capacity building and handholding support to the beneficiaries of Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) & Cluster Artisans of North Eastern Region (NER)*' was sanctioned by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in 2020. IIE has undertaken several capacity-building trainings for trainers (ToT), Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDP), Financial Literacy Programmes (FLP), and handholding and business facilitation support for the beneficiaries from Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura. IIE, Guwahati, is also supporting the Development Commissioner Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (DCMSME) in implementing various cluster development activities under the latter's Cluster Development Programme for micro and small enterprises. This is being done through the IIE's Regional Resource Centre (RRC). Common Facility Centres are also being constructed in different non-farm and handicrafts and handloom clusters of the NER, such as wood carpentry, jewellery, and carpet making. IIE, in collaboration with the Directorate of Employment, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (DESDE), Government of Nagaland, has set up an Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC) in Nagaland, which has been functional since 2022. IIE Guwahati is also working as a Nodal Agency for the SFURTI scheme of the Ministry of MSME. Sixty clusters, spread across the Northern, Eastern, and North Eastern Region of India have been approved so far, out of which seven clusters are engaged in Bamboo Craft, one in Brass Metal, three in Khadi, and 24 clusters have both Handloom and Handicraft activities. Nine clusters out of these have already received export orders along with enquiries from international buyers. IIE Guwahati also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Incubation and Enterprise Support Centre of the Indian Institute of Management Shillong (IIMS) to boost the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the NER. IIE has had a partnership with the Indian School of Business (ISB) since September 2022 to offer professional management education through entrepreneurial programmes targeting youth, job seekers, and budding entrepreneurs.[23]

E. Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is a flagship micro-finance scheme of the Government of India, launched in 2015 as a part of the initiative of Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd (MUDRA). The government of India acknowledges

the role of micro-enterprises in generating significant employment for almost 10 crore people. It constitutes a major economic segment in our country. However, this sector is also largely disaggregated and informal, constituting mostly unregistered enterprises that do not formally come under taxation areas, cannot access bank finances owing to the lack of formalisation of businesses, and largely depend on self-financing or personal associations with local money-lenders. According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) Survey (2013), most of these enterprises are owned by people belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, or Other Backward Classes. They contribute significantly to both local and international value chains, as well as operate in domestic consumer markets as suppliers, manufacturers, contractors, distributors, retailers, and service providers. Recognising the importance of this sector in the Indian economy, the government has grouped them as Non-Corporate Small Business Sector (NCSBS) with a major focus on boosting these enterprises through specially designed institutional financing so that they do not suffer from lack of funding and unemployment of workers. The Mudra Scheme provides financial assistance to the non-corporate, non-farm sector for supporting the economic activities of micro and small entities (e.g. proprietorship/partnership firms running as small manufacturing units, service sector units, shopkeepers, vendors, small industries, artisans, and others). The scheme facilitates micro credit/loans of up to ₹10 lakhs to these income-generating micro-enterprises. It also covers a range of other credit plus services, financial literacy, and social support services.

F. NABARD

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is an apex development bank of the Indian government that supports and promotes agriculture and rural development. Its initiatives aim to build an empowered and financially inclusive rural India through specific goal-oriented programmes. NABARD's mission includes the promotion of the Off-Farm Sector with the objective to reduce rural India's dependence on agricultural income by encouraging alternate livelihood options, as well as mitigating rural-urban migration.[24]

The Off-Farm Development Department (OFDD) of NABARD has been making constant efforts through various schemes to respond effectively to the needs at the field level. The focus has been on the programmes that enable the development of skills and capacities of the rural poor for improving income, easing access and flow of credit to Off-Farm activities, fostering collectives of producers of small, cottage and village industries, handloom, handicrafts and other rural crafts and service sector in rural areas, promoting avenues for promotion and marketing of the Off-Farm Producers' Organisations (through rural *haat*, rural mart, exhibitions, fairs, stall in mall, etc.) in handloom, handicraft, skill and enterprise development, upscaling of innovations, business incubation facilities (through eligible institutions for setting up Rural Business Incubation Centres or RBICs), and propagating sector-specific activities. NABARD has developed a structured and focused skill development approach and a digital platform 'NABSKILL',[25] enabling the complete digitisation of skill interventions. In addressing the development of off-farm producer collectives, NABARD focuses on promoting rural enterprises, adopting technology, developing strong forward and backward linkages, ensuring better income realisation, and profit distribution, which ultimately brings in sustainable and inclusive development. NABARD also provides end-to-end support in facilitating pre-registration and post-registration activities for GI products, including registrations of different handlooms such as Udupi Saree (Karnataka). NABARD has also supported two exclusive marketing outlets for GI products: The Banaras GI Store at Deen Dayal Hasthakala Sankul at Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, with a grant assistance of ₹14.57 lakh, and the 'Desha Shoochakam' at North Paravur, Kerala with a grant assistance of ₹10.00 lakh. Keeping in view the diversity of nature and the needs of the off-farm sector, during 2021-22, NABARD decided to support location-specific interventions on a pilot basis in the disadvantaged regions of the country. Some of the other interesting schemes include The Stand Up India Scheme (SUI) launched by the government of India to facilitate bank loans ranging from ₹10.00 lakh to ₹1.00 crore to at least one SC or ST borrower and at least one woman borrower, per bank branch for setting up an enterprise. The scheme is owned by SIDBI and NABARD.

The Ministry of MSME, Government of India has introduced the Special Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme (SCLCSS) under the National SC-ST Hub (NSSH) to promote the setting up of new enterprises and support existing enterprises in their expansion. The scheme is applicable to the eligible SC/ST Micro and Small Enterprises of Sole proprietorships, Partnerships, Co-operative Societies, and Private and Public Limited

Companies engaged in Manufacturing and Service activities. NABARD is one of the nodal agencies for implementing the scheme.

NABARD's contribution in the handloom sector in Odisha, for instance, is mentionable. NABARD till date has sanctioned an amount of ₹2.33 crore for weavers' development supporting 1,450 weavers in Odisha. NABARD has helped form Off-Farm Producer Organisations (OFPOs) and skill development of the weavers and is sponsoring exhibitions and supporting the establishment of rural *haat* for better marketing of the handloom products. Odisha is believed to have the highest number of OFPOs (10) in the country. NABARD has also taken up GI registration of Odisha's rich handloom products like Mayurbhanj saree, tribal Phuta saree and Jagatsingpur saree. They also helped market the products of the weavers in Bhubaneshwar through their "Stall in Mall" initiative.

G. NEDFI

The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi), registered as an NBFC in 2002 with RBI, was formed to catalyse economic development of commercially viable micro, small, medium, and large industries in the North Eastern Region through Micro Finance and CSR activities. NEDFI plays a multi-dimensional role in providing financial assistance to identified enterprises and businesses, and giving advisory & consultancy services, including effective mentoring, skill development, and capacity building for generating sustainable livelihoods, market linkage facilitation, and infrastructure support. NEDFi undertakes various initiatives to organise programmes on different trades, such as handloom of NE, supporting the weavers and artisans in this sector. NEDFi engages in strategy development, monitoring and evaluation, programme management and implementation support, and building institutional capacities. North East Society for Handicraft Incubation and Livelihood Promotion (NE-SHILP), a not-for-profit society for promotion of craft products, is an initiative of NEDFi to promote handlooms and handicrafts of eight North Eastern States of India. NEDFi Haat is a marketing platform for the products produced and marketed by NE-SHILP. NEDFi also provides marketing support to the weavers and artisans of NER through exhibitions and showrooms located at Guwahati & Khetri in Assam, Aizawl in Mizoram, Nagicherra in Tripura, IEML in Greater Noida and Mahabalipuram in Chennai.

NEDFI has been supporting various handloom initiatives for years through its schemes. For instance, as per its annual report of 2022-23, Northeast Handloom - a wholesale and trading unit of handloom products at Guwahati, Assam, was sanctioned ₹8.00 lakh under its Women Enterprises Development Scheme (WEDS) for its expansion. In the same year, it has also undertaken consultancy services for inputs of new design and value addition in handlooms and participation in trade fairs & buyer-seller meets under the Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART) – a scheme of the Directorate of Handloom & Textile, Govt. of Assam. Previously, it has implemented a project on value addition in handloom products in Goalpara of Assam for the weavers of Garo, Rabha, and Rajbangsi communities involved in traditional handloom products.

Since NEDFI is involved in cross-sectoral and multi-departmental activities and services for sustainable livelihood enhancement and entrepreneurship development, specific state-wise data on their handloom sector interventions will require a closer and deeper look for further information and analysis.

CONCLUSION

The above-mentioned schemes are well-designed and comprehensive, taking into account all aspects of protection and promotion of the handloom industry as a vibrant economic sector of the country. Being a heritage legacy and one of India's largest income generating industries, the handloom sector has been aptly addressed by multiple ministries and stakeholders emphasising its importance and value. The evolution of the sector is a constant process manifested through creative growth, product diversification, technological innovations, business development, market readiness, and preservation of specialised hand skills and knowledge. Hence, the policy landscape is vast and expansive, addressing a wide range of multi-disciplinary issues. However, lack of awareness, low uptake of the schemes, and unused benefits by the actual beneficiaries have been major setbacks hindering the intended economic growth and social and emotional health of the handloom sector. An overview of the on-ground conditions of the sector in terms of benefits accrued and local challenges, presented in the following chapter, will provide a better understanding of the impacts of policies on the Indian handloom economy.

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Photo Courtesy: ACCESS Development Services

Current Scenario

Dr. Madhura Dutta

3

The most recent comprehensive national document on handlooms is the Fourth All India Handloom Census Report published in 2019-20.[1] According to the Fourth All India Handloom Census report, the total number of weavers enumerated is 26,73,891. The total number of households in India engaged in handloom activities (weaving and allied) is 31.45 lakhs. Four states account for 18 lakhs of all weaver households in the country – Assam (10.9 lakhs), West Bengal (3.4 lakhs), Manipur (2.1 lakhs), and Tamil Nadu (1.7 lakhs). Most (89%) of the weaver households are rural, while 11% are urban. About 72% of handloom weavers are female and 82% of weavers in rural areas work independently, i.e., are self-employed. At an all India level, co-operative societies (70.3%) dominate in the type of units, with the dominant states being Assam (31.3%), Tamil Nadu (14.7%), Nagaland (11.7%), Uttar Pradesh (7.9%), and Kerala (5.9%).

Traditionally, handloom being a home-based rural cottage industry, the weaver households are the units of production which produce handloom products either for personal use or for local consumption and external markets. Usually, the villages producing handlooms are cohesive in nature and historically engaged in manufacturing a specific type of weave based on local traditional skills, cultural history, regional raw materials, and local needs. Since age-old times, handloom production has been a community-based activity where different groups of people specialising in different production processes have come together to produce their unique handlooms. The self-sufficient nature of the weaving communities, including the allied workers involved in pre-loom and post-loom functions, has been a remarkable part of the Indian village economy. The drivers of these industries have been local needs, availability of complementary skills, accessibility to natural inputs of the region, and the inherent creativity of the producers. Handloom production has traditionally been a business sector operating either through barter trade or currency-based transactions, mainly to fulfil the livelihood needs of the people involved.

As per the report, there is a fall in the average number of weavers per household between the third and the fourth censuses possibly because of the relatively low income from the sector. The majority (66.3%) of the weaver households earn less than ₹5,000/- per month. A little more than a quarter of the households earn between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 a month, while just 7.4% have a monthly income of more than ₹10,000. The number of weaver households earning more than ₹5,000 per month in urban areas is marginally higher than in rural areas. It may be mentioned here that 25.2% of the weaver households are Antodaya card holders (a Government of India scheme to provide highly subsidised food to millions of the poorest of the poor families).

With regard to the dwindling income of the handloom weavers and their persistent state of destitution, there is a view point shared by some of the sectoral experts which shows that those who are enrolled under the guaranteed employment for more than 100 days of MNREGA make between ₹18,000 to 20,000 a month, which is much higher than an individual handloom weaver. In the handloom sector, while a master weaver, who is an entrepreneur, may earn up to ₹28,000-40,000 a month, it will only be possible if he works with a conscious and fair manufacturer/buyer/fashion designer.[2] According to a study carried out by NABARD in 2023, a significant barrier in sustaining the handloom industry has been its inability to attract youth into it. The wage earned by an artisan's family of three working on a loom is one-fourth of that earned in other low-skill jobs like shopkeeping, office assistance, counter selling, etc. The wages associated with weaving are close to the subsistence level. Sixty four percent of the weavers who participated in this survey stated that they don't make enough income and 74.4% of weavers said that they don't save money for their future from the earnings they make from this occupation. Seventy seven percent of the 496 weavers who responded to the study said they would not continue in this line of work and 76.2% of the respondents said they would not suggest it to their children.

The latest Handloom Census data of India shows that across both urban and rural areas, only 2.4% of weavers belong to the age group 14–18 years. Nearly one in four weavers has not received any formal education while a further 14% have not completed primary-level education. Almost a fourth (23.2%) of handloom workers have never attended school. More than 30% of those who did attend have studied either below primary level or till primary level. Only 13% have completed secondary education, and only 7% have completed higher secondary level. A few (3.6%) have studied till graduation level or above. The number of handloom workers by age group as per the fourth Census is also interesting. Data shows that about 48% of the weavers belong to the age group 36-60 years, about 43% belong to 18-35 years, and about 6% are above 60 years.

The Census report also covered a total of 8,48,621 allied workers (those who undertake pre-loom and/ or post-loom activities and provide key inputs to complete a finished woven product) who play a fundamental and essential role in the handloom industry and without whom the industry would not sustain. These allied workers are found across allied households and weaver households that also influence their demographics and income generation. Across urban and rural areas, the share of allied workers aged 14–18 years from allied households is only 3.8%. The average number of person days of engagement in allied activities by allied households (194) is much lower than their weaver household (238) counterparts. Overall engagement in allied activities is of part-time nature, more so among male workers—about 54.6% male workers from allied households in rural areas are part-time workers.

Despite industrialisation and globalisation disrupting the self-sufficient nature of this industry, it managed to retain its unique offerings and exclusivity generating employment and livelihood for millions. Although there are different types of business ventures that have evolved based on urban and western industrial models, the rural community-based entrepreneurship of the actual producers have been emphasised and reiterated time and again as the most sustainable and impactful way of strengthening this vertical of the Indian economy, ensuring rural development and sustainable economic growth.

Evidently, the government has also tried to build rural community-based entrepreneurship through various enablers such as capacity building, market creation and linkages, access to credit and other inputs, and an effective business environment. However, the growth of rural entrepreneurship in the handloom industry has been limited, making the business gainful for only a few who have managed to retain control over the larger population of handloom wage workers living in poverty for generations.

In discussing the importance of rural entrepreneurship, especially based on distinct creative and technical skills, it may also be interesting

to look at India's demographic dividend, which rationalises investment in youth entrepreneurship development quite strongly. India is home to a fifth of the world's youth population, with an average age of 29 years, making it one of the youngest populations globally. India's unique demographic advantage presents a plethora of opportunities in today's technologically advanced and dynamic world, and it is hoped that the youth will leverage this advantage to contribute significantly to realising the country's economic potential.

Acknowledging this advantage and conducive condition, the government of India has invested in empowering the country's youth as a skilled and able workforce suited for different sectors. Some of the key programmes encouraging entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, as discussed earlier, are Skill India Mission, Startup India, and Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY). Investors are already considering India as an investment hub for its skilled and young working population. Several global brands, seeing the advantages of both a labour pool and a key market in the same country, have set up their factories in India.

Despite such positive initiatives, India's expanding youth population remains jobless, the problem of unemployment among the youth being significant. The Employment Rate (ER) for youth dropped from 29% to 19% (over seven years from 2016-17 to 2022-23),[3] indicating a decline in job opportunities for this age group, and a low labour force participation rate, particularly among women. India's female labour force participation rate (32.8%) is notably low globally. An analysis of employment data from the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE) reveals that India's workforce has undergone a significant ageing trend over the past seven years. There is an increase in the ageing workforce in the employed population, as the share of youth in employment has gone down. Unless youth employability is increased, the country will continue to have a less productive workforce, impacting the Indian economy. This trend raises serious concerns and warrants attention from policymakers.

It will be pertinent to draw attention here towards the abysmally low education levels in rural India, as mentioned earlier, the lack of enabling environment for youth to undertake entrepreneurship in their traditional skill-based ventures such as weaving, and dying traditional knowledge and skills, unique to India's creative industries. The delink between programmes encouraging entrepreneurship and employment and rural traditional skill-based businesses and occupations has hindered necessary investments and strategic planning for its growth and global presence. Despite India remaining attractive in terms of its human, cultural, and natural capital, it suffers from poverty, low education, and poor health conditions. It ranks 132nd out of 191 countries as per the HDI Report of 2021-22. India's rank in Human Development Index (HDI) was 131 in 2019, compared to 129 in 2018, out of a total of 189 countries according to the UNDP Human Development Report, 2020.

Despite the all-encompassing schemes for the handloom and textile sector, there are major bottlenecks in accessing those schemes. According to a NABARD study in 2023, market-oriented, design development and experimentation, a much-needed intervention in this sector, is highly under-realised. The burden of new product development is on the weavers; 11.5% of the weavers lack the facilities to modify their designs, 25.2% find it challenging to change their designs, and 42.5% do not look for a change in their designs. Additionally, 22.6% of weavers don't change their designs frequently. The return from changing designs is poor for 30.4% of the weavers. These can be attributed to several factors linked to poor infrastructure, lack of time and financial means to experiment with designs or innovate, lack of exposure to market needs, linkages with designers, etc.

Direct field experiences show that smaller weavers work on their looms or the master weavers' looms on a daily and hourly basis to make both ends meet which does not leave them with any freedom or opportunity to invest in their own designs and products. Master weavers have the means for design innovation and may sometimes invest in such production, but only if there are orders or clients for the same. Their lack of direct outreach to markets is also a major limitation as they mostly depend on the traders in the nearby towns and cities.

Another major concern of this industry is the rising input costs. According to the NABARD study about 500 respondents stated that the prices of silk yarn, cotton yarn, zari, and dyes and chemicals are always constantly rising. The rising input prices are undermining the marketability of the products and buyers are not ready to pay higher amounts. Also, the increasing input costs reduce the weavers' wages which is affecting the health of this industry as a whole.

According to the Handloom Census, on a base of 31.44 lakh weavers and allied households, cotton is used the most by handloom weavers. Among the more exclusive silk blends, Muga silk is used by

4.3% of weavers, followed by Eri silk, which is used by 2.2% of the weavers. Wool is being used by about 8% of the weavers. Other yarns like acrylic wool and zari are being used by a bit more than 2% of the weavers and allied workers. Linen and polyester blends have also become popular and are being used by this industry for both domestic and international markets.

Although the government has a yarn supply scheme to counter the increasing prices of the open markets, the census report data shows that 'open market' is the dominant source for purchase of raw materials (yarns, dyes, and chemicals) for the weavers and allied workers. 76.6% hank yarn, 58.1% dyed yarn, and 49.7% dyes and chemicals are procured from open markets. Dyeing being one of the most important allied activities of the handloom sector, it is either carried out by the yarn trader before selling the yarn or on fabric by the weaver. The report also states that at a cluster or a local level, 60% of the yarn is sold in the grey (kora) form and about 40% is dyed before selling. The local market is the dominant source of sales for 64.1% of the total weaver and allied worker households enumerated. The dyes and chemicals are sourced from specific places and then distributed to handloom sector units by the wholesalers or through dealers located near the handloom units.

Field experiences and interactions with weavers from different parts of the country show that the weavers prefer to purchase raw materials from the open markets, as yarn supply through the government schemes is often uncertain and not timely. Handloom clusters with strong societies of weavers manage procurement of yarns from the government better than the individual weavers. However, the subsidy amount under this scheme arrives after the actual purchase and is often delayed, creating cash flow problems for the societies.

Financing small businesses, especially the grassroots enterprises that remain outside the formal framework of banks, is a major focus area of the government. There are issues related to loans from banks by weavers and master weavers. They are mostly reluctant to take loans from banks owing to cumbersome paperwork, regulatory processes, delays in processing, and often a negative attitude and a lack of trust among the bank officials towards the small weavers. The age-old practice of borrowing from traditional money lenders continues to a large extent although exceptions exist. The micro financing schemes of the government are still not popular enough, and utilisation by the rural entrepreneurs is low. One of the reasons for this is the lack of awareness about the schemes and the operational requirements. Lack of information and handholding are further deterring factors. According to the NABARD study, the Primary Weaving societies fear penalties that come with default on loans taken from cooperative banks under NABARD refinance. These societies fail to repay the loans due to delayed payments by their apex society. Master weavers find it challenging to provide collateral security and manage the paperwork involved. However, the study found that repayments to banks by master weavers were satisfactory.

According to the Handloom Census Report, the majority of the weaver household members, more than 65%, are unaware of various schemes available to enable them in handloom weaving activities or entrepreneurship. Among those who are aware, only a very few have actually benefitted from them. The survey mapped specific awareness levels regarding 13 schemes that would improve financial access, provide social security, exposure to markets, skill upgradation, subsidised material supply, and access to production facilities. Awareness was below 15% in 9 out of the 13 schemes listed. It was also noted that the highest benefits were accrued for the scheme related to Skill upgradation. Schemes leading to the lowest benefits (15-16%) were those of the Common Facility Centre/ Calendaring Machine, and Housing scheme. The survey data clearly indicates that at an aggregate level, insurance penetration (life or health) is very low among weaver households (3.8%). Only 3% were aware of Weaver's Health Insurance Scheme (WHIS), only 7.6% were aware of Margin money for Working Capital, only 9% were aware of Marketing Incentive/ Rebate Schemes, only 9% were aware of Skill up gradation (training, workshop), only 9.4% were aware of Participation in fairs/ Haats/ exhibitions, only 10.5% were aware of Credit Waiver (Loan), only 10.8% were aware of yarn supply through National Handloom Development Corporation, only 12% were aware of Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana, only 14.5% were aware of Loom and parts/ workshed/ accessories, only 22.4% were aware of Common Facility Centre/ Calendaring Machine, only 22.4% were aware of Handloom mark, only 25.5% were aware of Design Training and only 33.1% were aware of Housing Scheme.

Handloom cluster development programme under the NHDP scheme, according to the NABARD study, also falters in providing the most relevant and need-based training. Irrelevant training is often organised under this scheme, which does not benefit the weavers in any way. Infrastructure developed

under this scheme was also found to remain unused owing Direct interactions with the weavers conveyed their apathy towards the uptake of government schemes because of the associated complexities and uncertainties in receiving the actual benefits. It has been found that the local socio-political systems play a major role in implementation and use of these schemes. The overarching lack of awareness, information and understanding of government programmes and schemes among the rural weaving communities and weak local governance systems and institutions discourages and compromises the weavers further.

India's handloom sector justly commands a unique branding and strong differentiation for its immense diversity of techniques, traditions, and exquisite handcrafting skills. No other country in the world can boast of such variety and distinctiveness. However, marketability, branding, and promotion face several challenges despite government schemes and programmes facilitating access to markets, branding authentic handloom products, and developing e-commerce platforms. Establishing the premiumness of the handloom industry as a whole has been a struggle owing to a lack of awareness of the diversity and expertise of varied handloom products and processes, inadequate marketing and promotional mechanisms, lack of capacities of the master weavers, primary co-operative societies, apex handloom societies in marketing their products and earning a fair return, and rampant unethical practices in the market by the sellers trading powerloom products in the name of handlooms. The sector is fraught with mistrust, ignorance, unmindfulness which are constant challenges in marketing authentic and value-added handloom products. The weavers believe that GST on handloom products and GST of a higher rate on other inputs have undermined the marketability of handloom products in terms of prices, lowering profit margins and wages. The proliferation of powerlooms and powerloom products continues to destroy the handloom industry (NABARD 2023). Owing to a lack of direct outreach and understanding of market needs by the weavers themselves, often designs and colours are used that are not suitable for changing consumer tastes, thus limiting them to local markets and traders. Depending on the traders seems preferable also because the traders clear payments and dues of the weavers immediately. However, retailers take longer to make payments. Responding to markets efficiently and effectively requires proper tools and technology, relevant training on marketing, business and design capacities, direct access to buyers, proper infrastructure and ease of availability of high-quality raw materials at reasonable prices, capital to build stock, and education to fulfill regulatory and business requirements. Since the handloom business has been considered as non-profitable, the younger generations who are educated and also tech-savvy pursue different careers in the hope for better income and living standards, thus demoting this industry further. The study also states that the primary cooperative societies are found to be mostly mis-managed and are unable to provide sufficient employment to their members. The apex societies cannot provide adequate marketing facilities to these primary cooperatives adding to the lack of market linkages. Powerlooms continue to violate the provisions of the Handloom Act unabated, disrupting the handloom sector further with unfair market competition.

A report of the Development Commissioner Handloom apprises of the key initiatives and achievements for promoting the handloom sector and enhancing and nurturing premium market linkages directly for the handloom producers from 2014-15 to 2023-24 (as of 30 November 2023).[4] According to this report, under the Handloom Marketing Assistance of National Handloom Development Programme, 2,290 marketing events were organised, 38 Urban *Haats* were functional across the country, and a sum of ₹23.21 crore was released. To integrate craft promotion with tourism, eight Craft Handloom Villages are being set up at Sharan (Himachal Pradesh), Kanihama (J&K), Mohpara (Assam), Kovlam (Kerela), Rampur, Bodh Gaya (Bihar), Pranpur (Madhya Pradesh), Moirang (Manipur), and Kunbi (Goa). Seventy-four handloom products and six product logos have been registered under GI. About 1.50 lakh weavers/handloom entities have been on-boarded on the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) for the marketing of handloom products of weavers to government departments. Under the Handloom Mark scheme, a total of 24,132 registrations have been issued. Under "India Handloom" Brand, 1,952 registrations have been issued in 184 product categories. Design innovation is integral to boosting the market and promoting handlooms as it enables keeping pace with the fast-changing markets and enjoying premium pricing. The report states that 16 Design Resource Centres have been set up in Weavers' Service Centres at Delhi, Mumbai, Varanasi, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, Guwahati, Kancheepuram, Kolkata, Indore, Nagpur, Panipat, Meerut, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai with the objective to build and create design-oriented

excellence in the Handloom Sector and to facilitate access of weavers, exporters, manufacturers and designers to design repositories for sample/product improvisation and development. During the three-year-period from 2019-20 to 2022-23 (up to 31 October 2022), 545 marketing events have been organised under NHDP.

The major handloom clusters of exports are Karur and Madurai in Tamil Nadu, Kannur in Kerala, and Panipat in Haryana. Besides this, other centres like Kekra, Varanasi, Bhagalpur, Shantipur, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Warrangal, Chirala, Poochampally, and Sampalpur also contribute significantly to the handloom exports. Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata have large numbers of merchant exporters who source their products from these centres.[5] As per the report of the Handloom Department, export of handloom products between 2014-15 and 2022-23 (up to Jan 2023) was ₹1,8754 Crores.[6] The export achievements from 2019-20 to 2022-23 (up to 31 October 2022) were about ₹ 6,550 Crores.

A critical factor contributing to the advancement and success of various government initiatives is the unabated support of the private sector to the handloom industry. India's strong cohort of patrons, civil societies, designers, and conscious 'handmade' brands and buyers, along with a committed niche market, have largely enhanced the awareness, sensitivity, and culture of purchasing authentic premium handlooms, along with accelerating the uptake of various programmes and schemes for handloom producers.

Despite such initiatives, it is a reality that handloom weavers do not get fair returns and remain as wage labourers, mostly in oblivion. Engagement in handloom weaving has reduced over time and some traditional handloom practices may get lost soon. Under such circumstances, the sector has been further alarmed by the abolition of the advisory body on handlooms, the National Handloom Development Board, and the reduction in amounts allocated in the Central Budget for the handloom industry (in crores) over the last several years

2011-12: 656.16	2012 -13: 1036.80
2013-14: 493.50	2014-15: 550.94
2015-16: 617.63	2016-17: 710.00
2017-18: 604.00	2018-19: 386.00
2019-20: 385.01	2020-21: 344.87
2021-22: 386.00	2022-23: 200.00

It is also important to note that while the allocations for the handloom sector were 27.54% of the total textile budget in 1997-98, they were reduced to 7.83% in 2019-2020.[7]

Periodical data, such as that from the National Handloom Census, based on which policies and programmes are developed, does not accurately reflect the realities of the industry, such as the diversity of the products, relationships among the players, problems unique to particular regions, interdependencies, etc. (Niranjana, S., & Vinayan, S., 2001). As a result, the development of programmes for handloom weavers must take into account geographical differences and weaving conditions. A one-size-fits-all strategy is suboptimal.

CONCLUSION

One of the most recent futuristic events was the G-20 Summit hosted by the Indian presidency. At this international summit, the Government of India showcased India's handloom traditions and heritage, highlighting its exquisite weaves and inherent age-old features of slow and eco-conscious fashion, thereby positioning it as a formidable global soft power.

At G-20, several issues were deliberated on and prioritised for international economic cooperation. The G20 Leaders committed to accelerating strong, balanced, and inclusive growth by championing a sustainable, integrated, and inclusive approach. These reaffirmations would also have definite implications for the handloom industry, as it is one of the largest employment-generating sectors of rural India.

It will be pertinent to draw attention to three significant areas of resolution by this premier global platform. They were:

Empowerment of rural and under-represented Communities, especially youth, for developing and strengthening a sustainable workforce through encouraging skills provision for employment and entrepreneurship, as well as access to technologies;

Digital skilling upskilling and reskilling for a future-ready workforce to reduce digital inequity, which has been a hindrance to building an inclusive and broad-based economic development;

Commitment to achieving gender equality and empowerment and work towards 'Women-Led Inclusive Development' through enabling safe and equal access to education, entrepreneurship, decent work, social protection, elimination of gender bias/divide, and equal participation in leadership actions.

The latest data highlights the importance of bringing actual producers and handloom

communities at par with the global markets in terms of multidimensional skills, business capacities and infrastructure/technology, access to finance and financial inclusion, direct access to markets, and the ability to effectively operate in a digital economy. Finally, women's empowerment and equal participation in economic and social spaces is fundamental not only for the healthy growth of this industry but also for achieving sustainable development goals.

END NOTES

1. The Handloom Census has been published over the years to build a national database of the handloom sector in order to understand the differential impact of policies by planners and policymakers on the sector. A total of four such reports have been prepared during 1987-88, 1995-96, 2009-10, and 2019-20, respectively. The first two rounds of the census were conducted by the government with NCAER serving as the nodal consultant. NCAER was responsible for conducting the third round in 2009 with coverage extending to the entire country. The fourth report was executed by the Office of the Development Commissioner Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, GoI.

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3. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/explainspeaking-india-young-workforce-8903202/
4. https://handlooms.nic.in/assets/img/Statistics/5766.pdf
5. https://www.texmin.nic.in/sites/default/files/English%20Final%20MOT%20Annual%20Report%202022-23%20%28English%29_0.pdf
6. https://handlooms.nic.in/assets/img/Statistics/Year%20wise%20export%20performance.pdf
7. https://www.nabard.org/auth/writereaddata/tender/0708235915nrs-39.pdf

Photo Courtesy: ACCESS Development Services

Technology, Techniques, and Processes

Bijan Behari Paul

4

The history of Indian textiles is as ancient as human civilisation itself. Evidence found in excavations indicates that Indian artisans were engaged in hand spinning, weaving, and dyeing/printing of cotton textiles during the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilisations almost 5,000 years ago. Weaving has also been mentioned in Vedic literature and other prehistoric descriptions. In the 13th century, Indian silk was used to barter spices from Western countries, and India once clothed the whole world. However, the downfall of Indian textiles started from the British period with the import of cheap machine-made cloth from Lancashire and several taxes levied on Indian textiles imported to their country.

The beauty of Indian textiles, through the centuries, was expressed in various poetic forms by many poets. Sant Kabir, basically a *Julah* or weaver, has expressed many philosophically poetic versions of human life, comparing the process of weaving cloth to the intersection of warp and weft threads on handlooms (*jhini jhini bini chadariya …*).

Poetic words like '*Shabnam*' or morning dew (for cloth so transparent that when moistened it spreads like dew over grass in the dawn; '*Abrawan*' or running water (for fabric so fine that it is invisible when held in the flow of a stream); '*Bafthawa*' or woven winds (for the lightest and airiest of all textures) are some of the expressions that exemplify the beauty and delicacy of our muslins. Another story that illustrates the fineness of ancient fabric is that of *Zeb-un-nissa*, the daughter of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Her father once chastised her for appearing in court without clothes until she pointed out that she had put no less than eight robes around her body.

India has a very wide range of products (including saree, *dhoti, lungi,* dress material, bed linen, kitchen linen, bath linen, home furnishing, shawl, stole, and scarf) that use natural fibres like

cotton, silk (Mulberry, Tussar, Muga, Eri), wool, pashmina, camel hair, rabbit hair, goat hair, jute, linen, hemp, banana, pineapple, nettle, etc. These products vary from state to state in terms of their material, weave, texture, colour, pattern, etc. Use of natural dyes in dyeing and hand-block printing is an important and unique aspect of the sector.

Pashmina (Kani, Sozni) and Tweed of Jammu & Kashmir; Phulkari of Punjab; Brocade, Kimkhab, and Silk of Banaras; Chikankari of Lucknow; Jamdani of Awadh; Baluchari, Jamdani, and Muslin of Bengal; Muga and Eri silk of Assam; Tribal textiles of the Northeast; Ikat, Kotpad, and BomkaI of Odisha; Patola, Ajrakh, Himroo, and Bandhani of Gujarat; Upada, Venkatgiri, and Kalamkari of Andhra Pradesh; Pochampalli, Gadwal, and Narayanpet of Telangana; Kanchipuram, Kumbakonam, and Sungudi of Tamil Nadu; Kasuti, Ilkal, Molkalmuru of Karnataka; Patola, Mashroo, Bandhani, Ajrakh of Gujarat; Paithani and Himrus of Maharashtra; Chanderi and Maheshwari of Madhya Pradesh; Wild silks of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Chhattisgarh; Kasab of Kerala; Home Furnishings of Haryana; Bandhej, Leheriya, Kota Doria, and hand-block prints of Rajasthan, and Kullu and Kinnauri shawls of Himachal Pradesh are only the tips of the iceberg of traditional handlooms of India.

Numerous types and techniques of handloom weaving are practised, including the Backstrap loom (Loin loom), Vertical loom, Horizontal loom, Pit loom, and Frame loom. They can use both the fly shuttle and throw shuttle methods. To weave designs, traditional technologies like *Chiur* (flat, narrow wooden plank) *Adai, Gethua, Jala* are still used alongside the most modern technologies like Dobby, Manual Jacquard, and Electronic Jacquard. Designs are created by using various weaving techniques like textures of different weaves, extra warp, extra weft, and tapestry weaving methods.

BACKSTRAP LOOM

In all eight states of the Northeast (Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, and Mizoram) and to some extent in West Bengal, Karnataka, and Gujarat, women weave textiles on backstrap looms for their own consumption. Knowing weaving is a traditional requirement for women in the Northeast; otherwise, it can be difficult for them to get married.

The backstrap loom is a very primitive one that lacks a fixed structure. It consists of a few bamboo rods (approximately 3 feet long) and a few bamboo sticks that can be bundled together and kept in a corner of the room. A short warp of 5-6 metres length is prepared between two bamboo rods in a circular form. One rod is attached to the weaver's waist with the help of a strap, and the other is fixed to a post or wall. The weaver sits on the floor, stretches her legs, and maintains the tension of the warp by swinging forward and backward with the help of her body weight. Half healds are made by coiling fine twine with warp threads while making the warp. These loops are attached with bamboo sticks forming the heald. The number of healds varies with the design or pattern to be woven. A piece of hollow bamboo serves as a shuttle, and a strong, flat wooden plank with tapered edges works as a beater. There's no reed.

The toughest fabrics are woven on this loom. Each state and community have its own unique designs and colour leading to a wide range of designs and colours. The loom is highly portable due to its collapsible nature. However, operating the loom involves a lot of strain and drudgery, resulting in very low productivity. And, due to the limited length and width of the fabric, it is generally not used for commercial purposes but instead considered a domestic loom.

VERTICAL LOOM

Two long and heavy poles are driven fairly deep into the ground in the Vertical loom. Two cross-bars or beams are fixed across them—one at the top and the other at the bottom—creating high tension in the warp. Weaving starts from the bottom and finishes at the top. Even today, this loom is widely used in India (with little change) for making carpets and *durees* in clusters of Bhadohi, Mirzapur, Sitapur, Gwalior, Jaipur, and Srinagar.

HORIZONTAL GROUND LOOM

This loom, probably a variation of the warp-weighted loom, is a primitive weaving tool that, with some modification, is commonly used in India for weaving floor coverings. To set up the loom, equally spaced pegs are driven deep into the ground in two parallel lines, a few feet apart, depending upon the length of the fabric to be woven. The half-heald is used to open the shed, and a comb-like beater called the Punja is used to beat the fabric. Hence, the product is called Punja *duree*. The weaver sits on a wooden plank above the warp and moves forward, with the seat, as the weaving progresses. This loom is widely used in clusters where *durries* are woven including Panipat, Dausa, Lavan, Mirzapur, and Sitapur.

PIT LOOM

The horizontal ground loom used for weaving was uncomfortable for the weavers because they had to lean over and sit with their legs completely bent over. Thus, the horizontal ground loom evolved into the

pit loom which enabled the weaver to stretch his/her legs by hanging them down into a pit over which was erected the structure of the loom. Today, pit looms are the most popular weaving tools in India, with many modifications and attachments for weaving highly sophisticated traditional handloom fabrics like Banarasi, Baluchari, Dhaniakhali, Mangalgiri, Kosa, Ikats, Jamdani, Jamakkalam *durries,* etc. It constitutes more than 42% of the total looms. The pit loom can be a throw shuttle or fly shuttle, fitted with jala, jacquard, dobby, etc., for weaving the widest range of textiles. It occupies less space and easily fits in a weavers' hut. However, it is not portable and not very ergonomically designed.

FRAME LOOM

As the name implies, the loom has four poles fixed firmly at right angles to cross bars, making it a rectangular frame structure. It is made of wood or iron, is portable, and can be easily dismantled and erected, making it very useful for weavers. Although it occupies more space as compared to the pit loom, longer and coarser fabrics can be woven comfortably on it. This ergonomically designed loom can be fitted with various weaving mechanisms such as the throw shuttle, fly shuttle, multi-treadle, *jala,* adai, jacquard, or dobby to weave a wide range of textiles.

About 32% of all looms are frame looms and they are mostly used in clusters like Panipat, Meerut, Karur, Erode, Chennimalai, Kannur, Bhagalpur, Champa, etc., for weaving fabrics for home furnishings and dress materials. However, this loom is also used to weave fine sarees like Kanchipuram, Chanderi, Maheshwari, Shantipuri, Paithani, Patola, etc., and shawls of Srinagar, Kullu, Kinnaur etc. Presently, efforts are being made to replace pit looms with frame looms for the reasons mentioned above.

Other innovative looms that constitute about 11% of the total looms are:-

Chittaranjan loom

It is a semi-automatic loom with a low-built, compact wooden frame that is attached to a fly wheel. It has a take-up/let-off motion, and the sley vibrates to and fro from the bottom like a powerloom. It is mostly used for weaving low to medium-reed pick fabric in West Bengal. It is very efficient and gives the best productivity.

Hi-pro loom

It is an innovative frame loom (developed by the author) made of a closed iron channel and attached to a fly wheel. It has a take-up/let-off motion; the roller temple and the sley vibrate to and fro from the side frame like a pendulum. All frictional parts are attached to ball bearings resulting in very little friction. It is very efficient and gives less fatigue to the weaver.

Bi-fab loom

The author has innovated this loom, which allows two fabrics to be woven simultaneously side by side. The two fabrics will have two clean selvedges at both ends. Both the fabrics can have different designs and colours, thus, this innovation results in almost double the production and increased earnings for the weaver. Additionally, even a normal loom can be modified into this loom at a very low cost.

Semi-automatic loom

Three basic motions (shedding, picking, beating) operate a loom. When one of these motions is derived automatically by the outcome of two other motions operated manually, the loom is considered semi-automatic. However, this class of looms is not successful and popular in the sector because of more workload to the weaver, resulting in quick fatigue and other health-related issues.

Following looms are semi-automatic in nature: -

Pedal loom/Nepali looms: These looms are operated by pedaling, and the weaver has to pedal continuously to keep the loom running. However, such a loom becomes very tiring and monotonous and generates fatigue quickly, hence it is not accepted by the weavers. In most cases, an electric motor is attached to these looms to simulate a powerloom and all the motions are synchronized mechanically with gears and other mechanical devices.

DESIGNING DEVICES

Gethua

This technique used in Varanasi is the oldest designing technique. It works on the principle of multi-heald lifting aided by multi-treadles. This technique involves using up to 16 healds and 16 treadles to weave basic textures (bindings) in the design. The weavers operate the healds and treadles using their legs.

Adai

It is a bunch of strings made into group as per lifting order of the weaves, attached in the left side of the loom is pulled by the weaver by hand to raise the warp threads for weaving designs. It is used in Kanchipuram and surrounding areas for weaving silk sarees. However, this traditional method is seldom used now and is being replaced by jacquards.

Jala

A detailed pattern is created using a vertical thread called *dori* and a horizontal thread called *khewa,*

similar to the weaving process in a wooden frame. This pattern is called a *jala* and is attached to a loom. The warp threads are pulled up by the draw boy through Naka and Pagia, following the *jala*. In the past, skilled *jala* makers could transfer a painted design onto the *jala* without graph enlargement. However, nowadays designers use graphs to create the *jala* pattern.

Dobby

It is a unit that is attached on top of a loom for weaving textural designs using healds. It is also used for lifting extra warp threads to create designs in sarees, *dhotis,* dress materials, etc. The weaver operates the dobby with his/her legs. Simple and less intricate designs are woven by the dobby, which cannot handle large and intricate patterns. It is used commonly in clusters where saree and *dhoti* are manufactured.

Jacquard

Joseph Marie Jacquard invented the Jacquard loom in France in 1804. All old techniques of designing like adai and *jala* were replaced by jacquard. The Jacquard loom allows very intricate and large designs of all types to be woven with ease. The design is transferred onto a graph, and punched cards are cut by hand or CAM. These cards are mounted on the Jacquard loom, which is operated by legs. However, now pneumatic lifting and mechanical motor lifting has made Jacquard weaving very simple and easy without any extra workload. It is used extensively in all clusters. Recently, an electronic Jacquard has been introduced in many clusters.

STRENGTH OF THE HANDLOOM SECTOR

The strength of the handloom sector may be summarised as follows:

- The most intricate and versatile designs can be created on hand-woven fabrics that range from the finest muslins and delicate silks to the coarsest rugs and *durries*.
- Handlooms have a diverse design base that allow easy switching between new designs. Different designs can be produced on the same loom, Jamdani being a case in point.
- Production ability in small lots is not possible on any machine loom.
- Highly skilled weavers are available in this sector.
- The production cost of this technology is low. It is a household activity and does not attract huge investment in plants and machinery.
- Handloom has an eco-friendly technology/ process as it neither consumes electricity nor creates air /sound /water pollution; ror does it have a large carbon footprint.
- Natural fibres like cotton, silks (Mulberry, Tussar, Eri, Muga), wool, pashmina, linen, jute, and banana, etc. are mostly used as raw materials.
- It serves as a healthcare product allowing the skin to breathe with the hygroscopic nature of fibres used and is comparatively soft to touch, feel, and wear.
- It is a rural, household activity so weavers' migration to cities can be restricted by engaging them in handloom weaving. This can reduce the pressure on cities due to migration. Staying together will increase family bonding and socialisation. Older persons and children will get better care from the family members.
- Elderly persons and women can also participate in various small activities like winding, sizing, warping etc., which will ultimately increase the earning of the family.

It is very obvious that handloom weaving is an effective way to achieve sustainability and keep the planet clean and safe so that our future generations may live a healthy and peaceful life. Additionally, it helps to maintain and continue the legacy of our country's rich culture and heritage.

Photo Courtesy: Jamdani Weaving in Banaras

Photo Courtesy: Pit Loom

Market for Handlooms: Trends and Way Forward

Suvendu Rout

5

MARKET FOR HANDLOOM PRODUCTS IN INDIA: TRENDS OVER THE YEARS

In the pre-independence era, handloom products were mostly produced and consumed locally as a circular economy. Cotton and silk were produced locally, yarn was made locally, and clothes were woven locally. While in north-east India, almost every household had a loom to weave clothes for themselves, in other parts of the country, a specific weaving community used to do it for the society. They produced clothes and exchanged them with other members of the society for food and other stuff. The village economy was quite self-reliant and self-sufficient.

However, the export of raw cotton and the import of machine-made clothes by the British in the 1920s changed everything. Mass-produced cheap clothes flooded Indian markets, and the price- conscious Indians went after it. The village weavers started losing their livelihoods, creating large-scale unemployment. In response, Gandhiji called for the Swadeshi movement that appealed to the people to boycott machine-made foreign clothes, and embrace khadi, i.e. hand-spun and hand-woven clothes. This thawed the progress of machine-made clothes temporarily for some years (Vivek Kumar et al. IIT Delhi, 2021).

However, in the post-independence period, especially during the '1960s' and '1970s', powerlooms started to proliferate in India. With more options for colours, textures, styles, and price points, the powerloom-made clothes captured every corner of the market. The weavers with the handlooms could never compete with the powerloom industry.

While the powerloom sector contributed significantly to the Indian economy by enabling India to become a major textile exporter, it,

unfortunately, dealt a serious blow to the Handloom sector. The share of the powerloom industry grew steadily to now capture 78% (EXIM Bank Report, 2017-18) of the textile market in India.

Still, everything is not lost. Handloom products capture 17% (EXIM Bank Report, 2017-18) of the Indian textile market, have a share of 13% in export earnings, contribute 4% to the GDP, and employ about 3.5 million people, of which 72% are women (EXIM Bank Report, 2017-18 | National Handloom Census, 2019-20).

HANDLOOM VALUE CHAIN/ SUPPLY CHAIN

First, it's important to understand the value chain of handloom products in order to comprehend the marketing system of handloom products properly.

Weavers are the most important stakeholders in the ecosystem; usually, they are paid wages not equivalent to the minimum standards for skilled labour in spite of devoting their expertise and time. They hardly have any direct link with the market and mostly depend on the Master Weavers for work. The Master Wavers themselves may be weavers to start with, but become smart enough to develop a business around it.

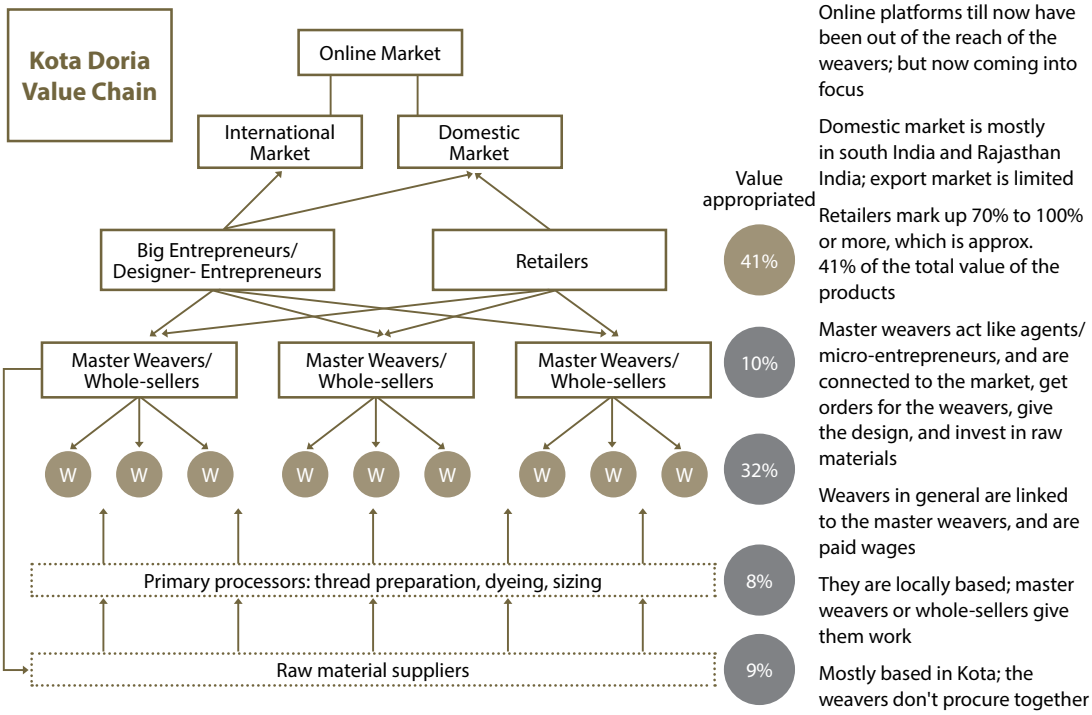
Master Weavers play the most crucial role, rather a composite role as a link between the market and the weavers. They aggregate orders from the market, purchase raw material, engage weavers, create required designs (which may include choosing from their repertoire), supervise work progress and quality control, and in the end arrange logistics to deliver the products at the doorsteps of the traders or retailers. Thus, a Master Weaver is like an agent sometimes, and at other times does business like a micro-entrepreneur/whole-seller at the village level.

A typical value chain is depicted in the figure-1 with an example from Kota handloom cluster.

Raw material suppliers are based in Kota but they source the raw material from all over the country, mainly Bangalore, Surat, Bhiwandi, Udaipur, and Ajmer. In the absence of a coordinated effort among the weavers, the Master Weavers buy at retail/ wholesale prices from these suppliers.

It has come to the notice that, like all handloom clusters, retailers benefit the most among all stakeholders. They benefit due to their ability to invest and market their products; other players in the value chain actually depend on their ability to invest/sell. It is estimated that they partake approximately 41% of the total value of the products sold; it can go much higher depending on the demand conditions and the consumers. However, the percentage benefit for other value chain players hardly changes much. Other support players in the value chain, like the pre-loom yarn processors, dyers, loom setters, etc., are based in the village and partake in a low portion of the pie.

Figure 1: Value chain of handlooms (Kota)



Market Channels

A study conducted by the MVIRDC World Trade Center revealed that the weavers sell around 64% of their goods in the local market, 17% to Master Weavers, 8.8% to cooperative society, and 1.0% in organised trade fairs. Exports account for hardly 0.4% of total sales of handloom weaver households and e-commerce accounts for only 0.2%.

Though some Weavers' Cooperatives and NGO-led platforms (viz. DAMA in Telangana) have been doing well, it seems they are few and far from most weavers' access.

CURRENT MARKET SCENARIO

Though the share of handloom products in the textile market has been shrinking over the years, it has shown a certain resilience recently. Today, instead of being everyday wear, handloom products have largely become ceremonial wear. Moreover, they hold a place of pride, representing India's rich weaving tradition.

Consumer analysis

Much like in the past, there remain two distinct sets of consumers of handloom products: those who buy low-priced handloom products for everyday use and those who buy high-priced products for special occasions.

In much of north-eastern India and eastern India, cotton yarn still holds significance. Many households in rural north-east India still weave their clothes (like mekhela-chador, sarees, and *dhotis*) for self-consumption, though they have also started selling them, because a section of the society has stopped weaving for themselves. In eastern India, weaving communities still weave clothes for both regular and special use. This includes cotton, primarily for regular wear, and silk or cotton-silk for special occasions. However, handloom products are made mostly in silk or silk-cotton for special occasions in southern, western, and northern India.

Traditionally, handloom products included sarees, dress material (for kurta/ kurti, shalwar-kameez, etc.), loin clothes (viz. *lungis, dhotis, gamchhas, etc*), and carpets. However, in recent times, modern designers have added new handloom products like bed linen, kitchen linen, drapes, fashion garments, and more.

In the wake of globalisation introduced in the early '1990s', the Indian textile market started changing, with foreign-made products flooding Indian markets, and export of Indian handloom products also increased. However, global warming and climate change awareness forced consumers to look for sustainable clothing in the last two decades, ushering in a ray of hope for the Handloom sector. As per several studies, the profile of new handloom consumers is changing. It now includes a gamut of consumers from different walks of life and age groups, as well as modern, educated, and conscious consumers. The new consumer base looks like this:

Discerning consumers with a taste for customised hand-crafted products with some degree of exclusivity and intricacy in designs

- The rising bridal and festive wear segment
- Educated, informed consumers conscious of the negative impact of synthetic, machine-made products on the natural environment and, thus, on climate change. Instead, they now choose handloom products made of natural fibres, which are mostly environment friendly, making 'sustainable fashion' the new buzzword
- Interior designers focusing on making new products to cater to the needs of consumers who are looking for home decor solutions
- Consumers mindful of preserving India's rich cultural heritage and craftsmanship
- A certain section also prefers buying handloom products for social causes, i.e. supporting the livelihoods of weaving communities, especially women (as the handloom sector employs 72% of women)

Issues with handloom products

Though handloom products are generally perceived as good quality, a study* conducted by the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) reported several issues that consumers generally face with handloom products. Some of the important ones are:

- Consumers cannot differentiate between handloom and powerloom products; they often buy cheap powerloom products, mistaking them for handloom ones. This leads to a lot of trust issues later on
- Handloom products are reported to give away colour too soon; thus, consumers do face storage and maintenance issues with handloom products
- Handlooms offer limited design/ colour options; consumers can't buy the same old designs all the time
- Male consumers generally report having very few product options

* Report on Market Research for Promotion of Indian Handloom Brand, NHDC, 2016

Major domestic market players

The major domestic players in handloom marketing are the Weavers' Cooperative Societies, local traders/ agents, NGO-led platforms, in recent times, a few online portals, and corporate enterprises. Besides, government-led marketing agencies have always played an important role. Some of the major players are listed in table-1 (to be noted: there are more state government-led initiatives outside of this list).

(Annual Report 2016-17, Ministry of Textiles, GOI), which is exported to over 125 countries. India was the world's second-largest exporter of handloom products, with exports valued at US$353.9 million in 2017-18 (Indian handloom industry: potential and prospects, EXIM Banks Working Paper 80, 2018).

However, the worrying sign is the downturn in export value over the last two decades. At the turn

Table 2: List of prominent marketing platforms

Sr. No.	Name of business	Type of business	Year of Establishment	Head Quarter
1	Nalli	Private: Online, Retail	1928	Chennai
2	Kankatala	Private: Online, Retail	1943	Visakhapatnam
3	Fabindia	Private: Online, Retail	1960	Delhi
4	Kalpana	Private: Online, Retail	1972	Delhi
5	Gocoop	Private/ Online	2012	Bengaluru
6	Jaypore	Private: Online, Retail	2013	Delhi
7	Amazon – Karigar	Private, Online	2015	Gurugram
8	Suta	Private: Online, Retail	2016	Mumbai
9	Taneira by Titan	Private: Online, Retail	2017	Bengaluru
10	Flipkart – Samarth	Private, Online	2019	Bengaluru
11	Avantra	Private: Online, Retail	2021	Mumbai
12	Aadyam Handwoven, Aditya Birla	Private: Online, Retail	2021	Mumbai
13	Co-optex	Government (Tamil Nadu)	1934	Tamil Nadu
14	Tantuja	Government (WB)	1954	Kolkata
15	Boyanika	Government (Odisha)	1956	Bhubaneswar
16	Mrignayani	Government (MP)	1965	Bhopal
17	Gurjari	Government (Gujarat)	1973	Ahmedabad
18	Dastkar	NGO-led	1981	Delhi
19	Dastkari Haat	NGO-led	1986	Delhi
20	Creyo	NGO-led	2006	Hyderabad
21	Apco Handlooms	Cooperative Society	1976	Andhra Pradesh
22	Himbunkar	Cooperative Society	1984	Himachal Pradesh

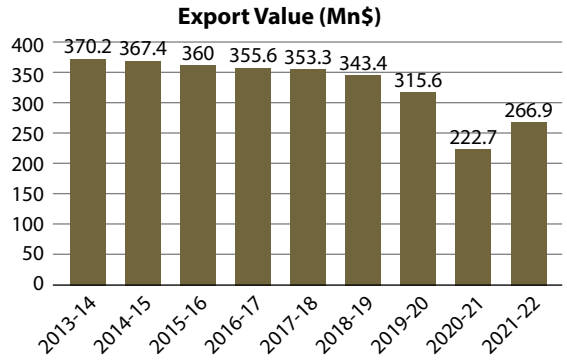
HANDLOOM EXPORT TRENDS

The globalisation era, ushered in 1991, opened up the world market to the Indian handloom sector. Designer entrepreneurs started reaching out to a global audience; their major customer base was NRIs in the apparel segment and foreign households in the home furnishing segment.

Currently, the Indian handloom sector has a 95% share in the global handloom fabric market

of the millennium (2001-02), the export figures stood at USD 465.68 million (Textile Ministry, Annual Report, 2001-02). This has come down to USD 266.9 million by 2021-22. One of the major reasons for the downturn was the COVID-19 pandemic, but the downturn has been consistent over the last two decades! The export figures from 2013-14 to 2021-22 are depicted in the figure-2.

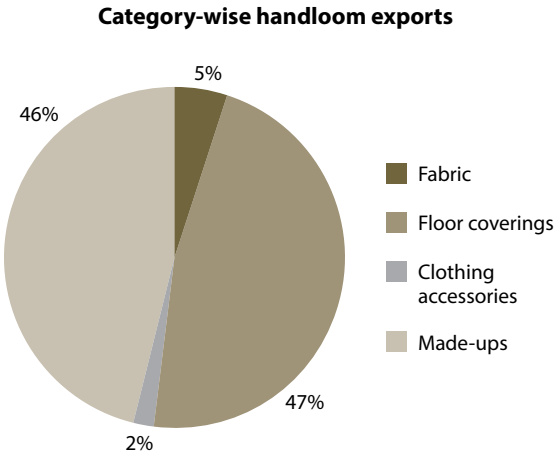
Figure 2: Value of exports of handloom products from India



An in-depth analysis of handloom exports throws up some interesting facts (EXIM Bank Report, 2018):

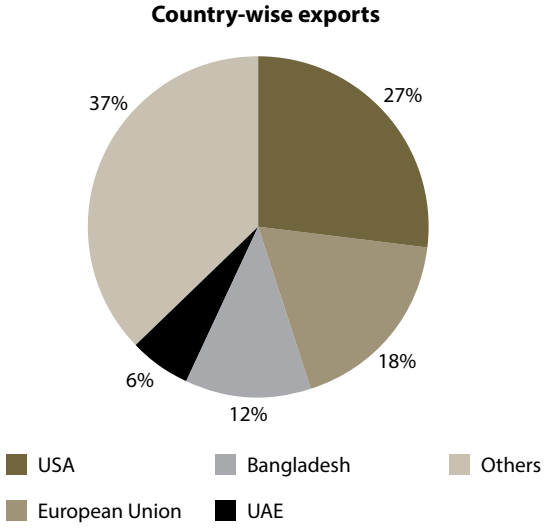
- Home furnishings (carpets, rugs, cushion covers, bed linens, toilet linens, etc.) constitute 60% of the total export value, half of which are floor furnishings. A category-wise diagram of various handloom products constituting the exports is given in figure-3.

Figure 3: Category-wise handloom exports



- Other important products constituting the export basket are scarves, embroidered textiles, and other made-ups.
- According to a study by MVIRDC World Trade Center, a basket of 13 products (toilet linen, kitchen linen, carpets, bed linen, floor cloths, and other interior furnishing articles, gloves, shawls, scarves, and terry towels) has an estimated world export market of USD 20 billion, of which India fulfils about 17%. Thus, there's still a huge potential market for the Indian handloom sector to tap into.
- Major handloom export centres are Karur, Panipat, Varanasi, and Kannur.
- Major handloom export destinations are the US (the largest importer), European Union, Bangladesh, and UAE; among other prominent destinations are the UK, Spain, Australia, Italy, Germany, France, South Africa, and the Netherlands.

Figure 4: Country-wise exports



Export prediction: According to a market projection by Fortune Business Insights (2024), the handloom product market is valued at US$8,190.1 million in 2024 and is expected to rise to US$18,179.1 million by 2034. This means a Consolidated Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 8.30% during the forecast period. This presents a huge potential for the Indian handloom sector; the question is, are we ready to reap the benefits?

KEY DRIVERS/FACTORS

The growth of the handloom market is spurred by a multitude of factors; let's discuss the key drivers or major factors responsible for this buoyancy.

Global warming and mitigation measures

The 2006 documentary, 'An Inconvenient Truth' on global warming spread much awareness about the human contribution to global warming. In the last decade or so, governments all over the world have taken serious measures to prevent and mitigate the impact of global warming. This also includes lessening the carbon footprint in the textile industry.

Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of what they wear. Educated consumers are choosing environmentally-friendly clothing options. It's no

secret that handloom products involve minimal use of energy, and are made of natural fibres like cotton and silk. Within the handloom sector, the use of natural dyes is also being promoted to make the products even more eco-friendly.

As a corollary to this movement, the fashion industry has also become environmentally friendly, with concepts like 'sustainable fashion' being in vogue.

Demand for customised clothing

Demand for customised clothing options has been rising in developed countries for quite some time. The same is catching up in most of the developing countries in the last decade as well with increasing per capita income. Handloom products are more suitable than machine-made products for customization in designs.

Modern designers, both in clothing and interior design, are collaborating with handloom clusters, and Master Weavers to create these high-end customised products. The fusion between traditional motifs and contemporary aesthetics has given rise to a new consumer base.

Culture consciousness

With a multitude of international organisations like UNESCO and national governments across the globe working towards the conservation of cultural heritage, there is also a growing consumer awareness of preserving the traditional weaving heritage.

Naturally, India's weaving clusters, being among the best weaving traditions in the world, have taken a lead in this. The young entrepreneurs in the sector highlight this aspect of handlooms, appealing to the discerning clientele.

Growth of e-commerce

It's needless to say that e-commerce has grown in geometric progression over the last decade, and is expected to reach a whopping USD 99 billion by 2024. Now, with cheap internet available to most Indians, e-commerce is at the fingertips of both sellers and buyers. Handloom entrepreneurs are now reaching out to customers all around the globe. It's just a matter of time before individual weavers sell directly through online platforms.

Proliferation of social media

A major development in India, as in the rest of the world, is that almost everyone is on social media now. Social media is playing an important role on both the demand and supply sides. On the one hand, it's educating the consumer more and more about handlooms, and on the other hand, it's enabling the weavers and microentrepreneurs to sell handloom products cost-effectively.

Government initiatives

Though the government has always taken promotional measures for the handloom sector, it has increased its efforts significantly in recent times. The Government of India declared 7 August as National Handloom Day to celebrate India's rich handloom tradition and recognise the contribution of weavers/ the sector to the Indian economy. This has enhanced consumer awareness about handlooms.

Various schemes of the government promoting handloom clusters and providing the weavers with new marketing avenues have encouraged them to do better. A number of state governments have, over the years, come up with handloom brands promoting the state's weavers, e.g. Boyanika in Odisha, Mrignayani in Madhya Pradesh, and Tantuja in West Bengal.

Boyanika, a Government of Odisha brand

In a proactive move, the Government of Odisha, in 1956, initiated a brand named 'Boyanika' under Odisha State Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd. Its primary objective was to provide marketing support and quality raw materials to the Primary Weavers Cooperative Societies of the state for production of hand-woven fabrics.

Starting with a modest turnover of ₹.0.65 lakh in FY 1956-57, it has grown steadily over the years to reach a turnover of ₹128 crore in 2021-22.

Rise in CSR and NGO-led initiatives

In the last decade, numerous handloom developmental initiatives have taken shape led by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) wings of companies and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). Programmes like Antaran, implemented by Tata Trust, and Living Looms of India, implemented by ACCESS Development Services (ACCESS), supported by HSBC India, are breaking new ground. Some of the prominent NGO-led initiatives include AIACA, Dastkar, Dastkar Haat Samiti, Khamir, and Craft Council of India, to name a few.

Dastkar

Initiated in 1981 by a group of women professionals led by Padmashree Laila Tyabji, Dastkar has been an iconic initiative in promoting the livelihoods of weavers and artisans, especially by providing them with design orientation and marketing platforms.

The 'Dastkar Mela', an annual marketing event, and the Dastkar Nature Bazaar, a permanent marketplace for handloom and handicraft products, are well-known names in the sector.

Pivotal role played by Designers

The discussion around the revival of handlooms in India is incomplete without talking about the invaluable contribution of innovative designers like Rajeev Sethi, Sanjay Garg, Gaurang Shah, Ritu Kumar, Anavila Misra, and Rahul Jain. They have infused contemporary aesthetics in handloom products and have inspired a generation of textile designers to build brands around handloom. It may be noted that Sanjay Garg's 'Raw Mango' initiated in 2008 has created quite a stir in the handloom market. This paved way the for many a designer to look up to handloom as a fashion statement rather than only ethnic wear.

Entry of corporates changing marketing landscape

In a significant new development, two corporates (Tata – Taneira and Birla – Adyam) have entered the handloom market. Along with older brands like FabIndia and Nalli, these new brands are making handloom products more visible in the market now. Along with corporate brands like Taneira and Aadyam, corporate retail chains like Amazon (Karigar), Flipkart (Samarth), and Reliance Retail (Avantra) have also started their own sub-brands for handloom/handicraft products.

Taneira, a TATA initiative

The handloom sector got a new lease of life in 2017 when the TATAs entered the market with a special handloom brand, 'Taneira', under the Titan brand. They are showcasing rich handloom products from over 100 clusters across the country.

Their online and offline selling channels are supported by their handloom development programme called 'Weavershala'. Several Weavershalas are located across the country and provide support to weavers with appropriate infrastructure, training, design inputs, and marketing support.

Encouraged by this move from the TATAs, the Aditya Birla group also started its own brand, Aadyam. This is expected to pave the way for more such corporates to enter the market.

Apart from big corporates, private enterprises in the handloom product segment are also proliferating. Initiatives like Suta, Beatitude, and GoCoop are bringing a freshness to the handloom market.

This augurs well for the handloom market as they are investing a sizable amount of money in R&D for product development and in the promotion of handloom products in general.

Growth in tourism sector feeding handloom marketing

The travel & tourism industry has also seen good growth in recent years. Most of the handloom clusters are either travel destinations themselves (e.g., Varanasi, Maheshwar, Chanderi, Kota, Bishnupur, etc.) or are close to one. Owing to their proximity to these destinations, travel agencies have started including them in travel experiences. Besides, handloom products are great options for souvenir/gift shopping. Thus, the growth of the tourism industry is directly helping the growth of the handloom industry.

KEY CHALLENGES

Despite the growth potential and new drivers emerging to take the sector ahead, the handloom sector faces a number of bottlenecks. The list is long, from the weavers' inability to invest in stock creation to the consumers' lack of awareness. Some of the key challenges are discussed below.

Competition from the powerloom industry

Mass-produced powerloom products are cheap and exact replicas of handloom products. Besides, they also provide more options in designs and colours. Thus, price-sensitive Indian consumers often choose powerloom products over handloom products for regular use. To add to the ailment, most consumers cannot differentiate between powerloom and handloom products. So, they are often found bargaining with handloom sellers for powerloom prices.

Production efficiency

By nature, handlooms restrict the use of many machines in the production process, thus limiting their efficiency. The production process is mostly manual, labour-intensive, and time-consuming. They need a long delivery period but markets are often impatient, thus, making it difficult for handloom producers to fulfil such orders.

Lack of working capital

Weavers or small enterprises dealing with handloom products (often Master Weavers) have limited working capital. So, they find it difficult to create large inventories in advance. To make things worse, they hardly have any access to formal finance due to a lack of collaterals.

New designs

The market demands new products and new designs constantly. But creating new designs/products needs market intelligence, capital, R&D and some risk-bearing ability, which the weavers lack in general. They keep producing the same old traditional designs and the consumers get bored with them over a period of time.

Skill gap and product quality issues

The weavers work in very small facilities and are used to supplying to local traders. They are generally not used to rigours of quality control. Thus, when big market opportunities knock on their doors, they often lack the wherewithal to live up to industry expectations.

Further, there's a gap between the skills desired for producing the highest quality that market demands and those available in the clusters. This is because the new generation of weavers is not joining the workforce; rather, manual labourers coming from elsewhere are trying to fill the gap.

Lack of branding and promotion

Weavers hardly have any resources for branding and promotion. Thus, they have no way of communicating to the consumer how their products are authentic or of better quality.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN MARKETING HANDLOOM PRODUCTS

As evident from the above discussions on the challenges faced by the handloom industry, marketing of handloom products requires a number of measures both on the supply and demand sides. On the one hand, the weavers' capacity to produce good quality products efficiently needs to be enhanced, and on the other, consumer awareness of handloom products needs to be increased.

Considering all this, the government has undertaken several far-reaching measures to develop the sector over the years. Here are a few current initiatives, schemes, and policies of the government that are especially aimed at marketing handloom products.

Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC)

The Handloom Export Promotion Council, constituted in 1965, is the nodal agency for export promotion efforts related to cotton handloom textiles. Among other things, its services include:

- Dissemination of trade information & intelligence;
- Publicity abroad for Indian handloom products;
- Organisation of business missions/ buyer-seller meets and participation in International trade events;
- Consultancy and guidance services for handloom exporters.

Handloom Mark

The Handloom Mark has been launched to prove the genuineness of handloom products to the buyers. The Handloom Mark is promoted and popularised through advertisement and publicity by the government.

Collaboration with private e-commerce platforms

The government has forged partnerships with Flipkart (Samarth program) and Amazon (Karigar program) to give the weavers an opportunity to sell through online platforms. These platforms, as part of the deal, provide the weavers assistance in onboarding on the platforms and also give several discounts n transaction fees, etc.

Market Access Initiative (MAI)

Launched in 2018, the Market Access Initiative aims to promote exports of handloom products. The scheme is formulated using a 'focus product-focus country' approach to evolve a specific market and product through market studies/surveys. Assistance would be provided to agencies engaged in the export of handloom products to access new markets or increase their share in existing markets.

Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India Ltd. (CCIC)

The CCIC has partnered with the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) in July 2023 to supply handicraft and handloom products to the online customer base.

North Eastern Handicrafts & Handloom Development Corporation Ltd. (NEHHDC)

The NEHHDC has entered an MoU with Tide, a UK-based business-financial platform. The collaboration will help 2 million weavers in North East India in scaling up their business by having access to finance and better markets.

WAY FORWARD

The potential in the handloom sector is enormous, and the future is bright. However, the sector needs to reinvent itself. It needs to cater to the needs of the modern consumer, and the youth in particular. However, looking at the challenges the weavers face, all the stakeholders in the sector need to contribute positively towards their cause so that they are able to upgrade themselves from subsistence levels to competitive levels.

Master Weavers should be trained in design development to cater to the new, affluent, and young consumers. The training can include aspects of design improvisation techniques, use of software/ internet for designing new products, market intelligence, costing & pricing, and entrepreneurship.

Though e-commerce is poised to transform the markets, weavers are hardly in a position to reap the benefits. Their understanding of these platforms and their trade dynamics must improve. At the same time, weavers' ability to trade on these platforms should be enhanced by providing them easy financing options, required infrastructure like warehousing and logistics, etc.

The government should proactively promote Weavers' Producer Companies through suitable schemes, much like the Farmers' Producer Companies.

The environmental benefits of handloom products are well known, but not highlighted enough. The government and private players must invest in appropriate communication mechanisms to effectively communicate this message. Engaging celebrities from different walks of life can help in this regard.

The partnerships between weavers/artisans and designers/entrepreneurs have proved successful in recent times, but have been through individual efforts only. Organisations working in the handloom ecosystem should wake up to this new way of working, i.e., forging win-win partnerships for development of the sector as a whole. Rather than working in silos, organisations must work together in a coordinated way to maximise strength of each of them.

The government on its part can help by organising large B2B events abroad highlighting India's weaving tradition as a cultural heritage. This will go a long way in sprucing up demand for Indian handlooms.

Aggressive promotion and implementation of the 'Handloom Mark' will go a long way in solving the consumers' dilemma. The mark will ensure that consumers are able to differentiate between handloom and powerloom, and also understand why handloom products cost more than powerloom products.

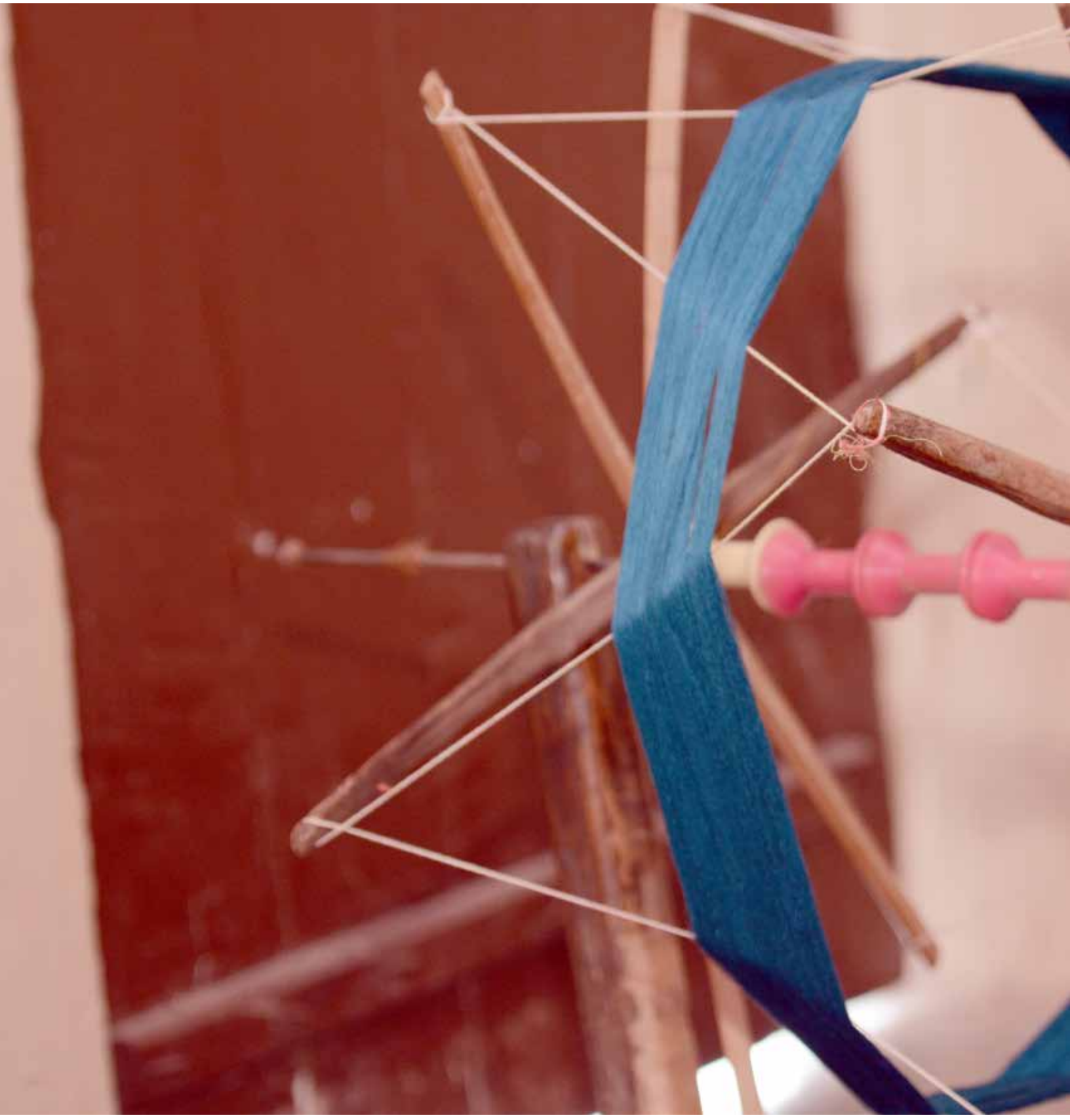


Photo Courtesy: ACCESS Development Services

Heritage Textiles and Sustainable Practices

Archana Shah

6

Heritage textiles in India are a testament to a vibrant living tradition. They intricately weave together the story of our indigenous design aesthetic, diverse cultural narratives, and time-honoured tradition of sustainability. Each region of the country offers a wealth of unique textile skills, techniques, fibres, colour palettes, patterns, and processes. It is to the credit of our artisans that these skills have survived and evolved over time.

The artisanal sector is the second-largest employment provider after agriculture and forms an important part of the Indian economy. Notably, a report published in 2017 by the Harvard University South Asia Institute highlights the key role of the artisanal sector and its substantial impact on livelihoods by making these significant observations: 'Data from unofficial sources indicate that up to 200 million craftspeople depend on the handcrafted sector for their livelihood' of which, it is believed, around 30 million are involved in handcrafted textile production. The study further mentions that 'there is no industry better positioned than crafts to contribute to development through livelihood creation.'

THE BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING THE CRAFT SECTOR

The sector has a newfound significance today as it can address the two major challenges we face – **growing unemployment** and **climate change**. Beyond its beauty and heritage value, artisanal production is eco-friendly, has a minimal carbon footprint, and largely fulfils the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Developing the handcrafted sector would also create millions of dignified livelihood opportunities in rural regions and help empower the women and marginalised communities involved in the sector. Providing them with employment would also give them a sense of

self-worth and confidence and protect them from the misery of economic migration to urban centres, where jobs are now more difficult to find, and living conditions can be brutal.

In the last 30 years, there has been a sharp decline in the utilisation of handlooms. Official surveys suggest that the number of looms have decreased from 124 lakhs in the 1970s to 64 lakhs by 1995 and further plummeted to 44 lakhs in 2010. A recent census report indicates that there are around 28 lakh handlooms currently in use. This downward trend can be reversed as, time and again, I have observed how artisans are quick to learn new skills if assured of a steady flow of regular work.

The Government Handloom Census Report focuses only on the looms in use and the weavers who operate them. In contrast, handloom production is a collective effort and generates employment for a much larger number of people. A weaver cannot function without the support of other family members for he requires their help in warp making, setting up the loom for weaving, winding bobbins for the weft, and finishing the fabric. Then, there are the hand spinners; it takes five to six spinners to feed a single loom if the hand-spun yarn is used for warp and weft.

There is a need to use the term 'handcrafted textiles' instead of 'handlooms' to include the varied contributions of all other craftspeople, such as the bandhani and ikat artisans, block makers, printers and dyers, and the multitude of people involved in embellishing these textiles. Among these are the zardozi artisans, and women skilled in applique and a variety of embroideries crucial in producing our beautiful heritage textiles, but they are omitted in the handloom census, leaving the picture incomplete.

Handcrafted production encourages artistry and sustains our rich heritage, preserving a vast diversity of textile skills. The products are unique, have a human touch, and a story to narrate. Although such mastery is rare in other parts of the world now, we are fortunate that our artisans continue to have the expertise to recreate the textiles that we admire in museums. These invaluable skills can be re-purposed to craft contemporary textiles suitable for today's fashion-conscious markets, which can certainly be tapped if the right strategies are applied. In short, the expertise is there, and the demand for this can be created; but to mesh the two requires vision and dedication.

For instance, a growing demand for the organic kala cotton fabric from Kutch has prompted a corresponding increase in the number of operational looms. This upsurge in work opportunities, combined with better wages, has encouraged many young women to take up weaving, a trend which was never seen before. Traditionally, women mostly worked with yarn, making bobbins or hanks for dyeing or preparing the warp. Having grown up observing the weaving process, they are comfortable handling the yarn, and now there are many first-time women weavers. Similarly, around Kota in Rajasthan, there are more than 3,500 looms in use and, there again, I have observed many young first-time women weavers, creating the most intricately patterned Kota doria sarees.

Recently, a prominent business family ordered a few thousand double ikat patola dupattas as gifts for guests attending their daughter's wedding. Fortunately, these patolas cannot be replicated on power looms as the weaving process needs to be manipulated by hand for clarity in the pattern. Hence, it was not possible for the few double ikat patola weavers of Patan to fulfil this substantial order. However, enterprising single ikat weavers in Rajkot and Surendranagar district took up the challenge and completed the order. This brought about increased visibility, and a growing demand for patola sarees and dupattas.

Now, there are a few hundred operational handlooms weaving patolas. It is promising to see young weavers using the social media platforms to promote their sarees. They also share information about the technique and production process, thereby creating an interesting narrative that adds value to their goods. Efforts such as this have elevated their market presence and the appeal of their creations.

PREVAILING MYTHS AND CHALLENGES

For the longest time, the persistent narrative one hears is that the handcrafted sector is languishing. This has been reinforced by numerous commonly held misconceptions and contradictory views about artisans and their work. For instance, it is widely believed that artisanal production is not viable as it is too expensive. Reinforcing this concept is the notion that unless artisans earn at least ₹500 for a day's work, their activity is untenable.

Conversely, while I was travelling around Murshidabad, during my visit to Katna—a village where women create geometric Kantha embroideries with running stitch—revealed a different reality. Traditionally, the women had recycled old sarees and dhotis by layering them together to make quilts for the winter months. Apart from the running stitches to bind the layers, the women would create elaborate pictorial representations of their lives and surroundings or intricate geometric patterns. Recognising their skills

and talent, Shabnam Ramaswamy, a social worker with roots in Katna, started an NGO to provide regular work for the women there. As a result of this, they began to showcase their craftsmanship by embroidering sarees, dupattas, wall hangings, and running yardage.

When I asked them how much they earned for their beautiful embroideries, a woman said it was anywhere between ₹80 and ₹120 a day, depending on the output. When they saw my shocked expression, one of the women explained, 'If we want to take home more money, the sarees that we embroider will not sell. At exhibitions we have understood that beyond a certain price point, our sarees will cater only to a small niche market. There are around 1,800 women in our organisation, so we produce a lot and need to sell a lot.'

They feel the NGO has been able to give them regular work over many years, and Shabnam, who started the organisation, also runs schools, where their children study. All this has changed their lives for the better. The security of regular work has helped them achieve economic stability and the confidence to improve their circumstances. It is true that the earnings from handwork are low, but with few other opportunities, most artisans are willing to continue their ancestral trade if there is sustained work. Hopefully, with better awareness of what really goes into handcrafted production and the effort invested, artisans get a larger share of the market, resulting in improved remuneration, which will enable them to earn more respect as well as better wages.

ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES

It is commonly believed that artisans' children, who are educated, do not want to continue their family's craft. By and large, there is little incentive for the next generation of artisans to keep practising their craft due to various factors. Handcrafted production is laborious, has little perceived value or dignity, and is not financially rewarding, with most craftsmen earning less than an unskilled labourer working at a construction site. Artisans belong to the lower castes, and in the absence of any possibility of local economic betterment, many young men migrate to cities, which offer some sense of secular anonymity. The educated among them aspire for white-collar jobs in urban areas, believing that they will earn more money and respectability. Unfortunately, their education is usually inadequate, and they end up working as unskilled labourers. Life in cities is expensive, and they are compelled to reside in slums, where living conditions are harsh and dehumanising. Moreover, on their meagre earnings, they are unable to sustain themselves and save enough money to send back home to their families.

In the 1990s, when I asked weavers, especially in South India, whether their children would continue to practise their ancestral craft, most said that it was not likely as they believed there was no future in the sector. So, they had advised their educated children to seek better prospects elsewhere. Many encouraged their children to pursue a career in the Information Technology sector, which had opened up numerous job opportunities. However, in today's context, marked changes are evident. Most repetitive jobs in the technology sector are slowly being phased out because of cutting-edge developments, such as the evolution of Artificial Intelligence. Such profound transformations provide enough reasons for developing the handcrafted sector which, apart from preserving our rich cultural heritage, has the potential to create much-needed work opportunities.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Over decades, policymakers have believed that the new industries in the hinterland would create jobs for people in rural regions, and the wealth generated would trickle down, but this has not happened. With industrial production moving towards automation, fewer human hands are required to operate the sophisticated machines, resulting in limited employment options. Most industries today require skills that rural people do not possess, whereas artisans have diverse hand-skills that can be re-purposed to create textiles relevant to present times.

Decision makers also believe urbanisation is the way forward, but our cities are getting clogged and can no longer offer jobs to migrants. On the other hand, rural regions offer a better quality of life: more space, cleaner air, robust community support systems, and the chance for families to stay together. Given that 60% of the population continues to live in rural areas, it would be logical to create local work opportunities for them, focusing on the utilisation of their existing skills, and upgrading them when required.

The millions of migrant labourers who returned to their villages during the Covid pandemic and the lockdown that followed, now value what rural life has to offer, such as the security of community support. If people can find a sustainable source of income in rural regions and have access to basic facilities, such as education for their children, healthcare and some entertainment, there would be little reason for most of them to leave their families, or the land of their forefathers, and migrate to cities. Creating work

opportunities in the rural regions would have many benefits and help revive the rural economy.

EXPERIENCES IN COLLABORATION

At the outset, my deep-rooted admiration for artisanal skills and techniques acted as a catalyst for my entry into the craft sector. Initially, I had envisioned the potential for collaborative ventures with artisans to create textiles for my clothing company. However, this was just the beginning of my journey. My subsequent experience in collaborating with artisans to create textiles for urban markets over the last four decades and my conversations with various craftspeople have given me a unique perception of the sector. With time, as I delved deeper, the profound value inherent in the artisanal sector became undeniably clear, and led me to research and write about its immense significance, and the diverse skills and mastery of the craftspeople working in this domain. The synergy between design practice and research constantly revitalised my work with evolving perspectives and challenges.

My learning is a culmination of the long working relationships I have had with many artisanal families in Kutch and several other textile centres around the country. One such association has been with Ismailbhai Khatri in Mandavi, a centre known for cotton bandhani production.

In the early 1980s, when I first started working with Ismailbhai, I discovered that there were very few competent bandhani craftspeople left in this region. Their production was not only limited in volume but also of poor quality as the local consumers, who were their patrons, could not afford the price of better goods, and the artisans were unable to match the affordability of the mill-produced fabrics that were flooding the market. In their attempts to make the product cheaper, the artisans compromised on quality. Working together with Ismailbhai and his sons over an uninterrupted span of 40 years, I was able to change this. We have managed to create more than 100 collections, using the same bandhani dot technique, adding new colours, rearranging traditional patterns, and, in the process, developing a new design vocabulary without ever compromising on quality.

In the mid-1990s, my foray into the mail-order business marked an important turning point. Bandhani outfits were prominently featured in our catalogues, which were distributed all around the country for over seven seasons. In many ways, this helped to build the BANDHEJ brand, and popularised bandhani nationwide. As a result, traders and retailers from various towns and cities travelled to Mandavi, carrying copies of our catalogue, to place orders. Our intervention had a rolling effect. Bandhani fabrics continue to retain their charm and the dyers of Mandavi have more work than they can handle. Today, over 25,000 people around Mandavi and over 1,00,000 artisans in Kutch earn their livelihood from tying bandhani fabrics.

I have witnessed an encouraging trend in most of the artisan families I have been working with. Their children actively choose to continue practising their ancestral craft as they have seen a financial transformation in their lives. I find that the next generation is more open to experimentation, and this helps them keep up with present-day requirements, which, in turn, enables them to make a better living. They also appreciate the comfort of working from their own homes, being their own masters, and the financial stability that they derive from regular employment.

Today, there is a lot of disruption in the market. Often, digitally printed fabrics are sold as block-printed material, and power-loom textiles masquerade as handlooms, being sold at more attractive prices. Computer-aided machines can reproduce the most intricately patterned handloom fabrics. What is lost in the process is the creativity of the artisans and their livelihood. To counter the copies or imitations, there is a need to create a unique identity for handcrafted textiles that eludes easy replication by machines and is suitable for the fashion-conscious markets of today. I believe the use of natural fibres, handspun yarn, and eco-friendly natural dyes that cannot be mass produced could be a way forward.

THE VALUE OF HANDSPINNING

The charm of khadi is in its artistry and in the irregularity of the yarn, which creates a uniquely tactile fabric. This handspun and handwoven material, made using natural fibres, is comfortable to wear, for the low-twisted yarn allows the fabric to breathe and absorb moisture, and it becomes softer with every wash. This 'fabric of freedom' continues to spin incomes for the rural poor while reminding the country of its legacy of sustainable living and self-reliance. This remarkable fabric from the past has the potential of becoming the fabric of the future.

It is often presumed that handspinning adds to the cost of handlooms, making these fabrics unviable. In some cases, this is true, but the handspun yarn can give handlooms a distinctive look and feel compared to power-loom fabrics. With greater consumer awareness, people would be willing to pay better prices.

Although there is a general perception that women have lost interest in spinning yarn, things will be different once more markets open up. This will help create a supplementary income source for millions of women, and as spinning can be learnt easily, they can make productive use of their free time. Earlier, spinning was considered a part of housework, and only the menfolk, such as the weaver, farmer, or potter, were seen as earning members. The man, as head of the family, had control over the money and, hence, the decision making. All along, women have been equal partners, but their contribution was not recognised. Women are now demanding recognition for their efforts and compensation for their work, and their earnings have given them a sense of self-worth and confidence. This marks a major shift in rural dynamics all around the country, for currently, women are receiving payment for their labour.

During my travels, I was happy to see women in the hinterlands, including young and educated ones, willing to take up spinning if paid for their work. I would often encounter clusters of cheerful women sitting and working together, and conveying the important lesson that work need not be drudgery. Their job gets done while they spend time pleasantly in the company of their family and friends, and get paid for what they produce. Moreover, their work has a certain soothing rhythm, which is pleasurable and meditative.

In Nuapatna district, a tassar-producing region in Odisha, thigh reeling (the practice of extracting silk filaments from cocoons) had practically stopped. However, with a growing demand for handspun tassar, the traders realised that if women were paid for their efforts, they could revive hand spinning. Today, in every household, women, both young and old, are willing to participate in reeling tassar yarn, when they can spare the time. The impact of money in the hands of the women has been very positive, and it is transforming lives in rural areas. Empowering women has brought about a holistic change as it has enabled them to invest more in the well-being of the entire family, particularly, in the education and healthcare of their children.

Design Collaboration and Scaling Conundrums

It is widely believed that the high-end market is the future for handcrafted textiles. An increasing number of textile and fashion designers collaborate with artisans today, giving the products a contemporary look and immense visibility. This collaborative process is motivated by mutual benefit and has transcended the stage where such initiatives were driven by philanthropy. Mostly serving a luxury segment, these commercial endeavours sustain a relatively small number of artisans. However, these meaningful partnerships have generated a new interest and created an aspirational value for handcrafted textiles, although given the size and diversity of the craft community, there is a need for market expansion.

The fashion business thrives on the concept of introducing new trends every season. This often does not directly help the artisans who invest in producing the new designs with the hope of getting regular orders, but the association lasts a season or two and the designer moves on to the next cluster of artisans. Handloom weavers are often used to create samples and on receiving a larger order, the production is transferred to power looms on the excuse of cost, consistency, quality, or time constraints.

There is a mistaken belief that craft production cannot be scaled up. It is true that the pace of production is different from that of industrial fabrication. If this is understood and production is planned with a clear understanding of the time required, orders can be distributed among a large number of artisans. Design and production managers would need to have an encouraging attitude that is realistic and conducive to handcrafted production processes, and not apply the same parameters as they do for machine-made fabrication. Handmade products are unique, and no two pieces are identical. Why should a consignment of, say, 5000 scarves or shirts be identical? If each piece is produced in a similar pattern and colour with minor differences, and is of a satisfactory quality, within the same price points, it should be acceptable as it is eventually going to be worn by different individuals. The charm of the handmade is in its inherent variation.

Young designers in India are fortunate to have access to such a remarkable variety of craft skills to experiment with and create new fabrics in limited editions each season, which is not possible anywhere else in the world. Collaborative efforts between designers and handloom weavers could lead to the production of a versatile range of textiles, spanning different price points to suit multiple markets – which would benefit the 30 million people involved in the sector.

The Charaka project in Karnataka questions the myth that handloom textiles are expensive and best suited only for elite urban markets. This is an All Women Collective, started in 1994 by Prasanna, a well-known activist and theatre personality, with the idea of providing employment to local women, and offering simple and affordable handloom sarees and fabrics for the local market. They produce over 30,000 metres of naturally dyed, cotton fabric

every month. This is sold through DESI, their own marketing outlets in nearby towns, and through a few other urban retailers.

Prasanna cleverly uses street theatre to tell stories about the transformation of the women who work at Charaka, and people living in the region can perceive these benefits and relate to them. Also, the prices are reasonable, as they have lower overheads as compared to high-end retailers or designer stores in the city, so local customers are happy to support this activity by buying their products. Clearly, authentic stories can create an appreciation and a market for handlooms.

AID AND SUPPORT

After Independence, several institutions were established to support the artisanal sector, such as the Rashtriya Shalas, the All India Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), the Weavers Service Centres, the Handloom and Handicrafts Export Corporation (HHEC), and others.

In the early 1940s, under Gandhiji's guidance, the first of the many Rashtriya Shalas was set up in Rajkot. They were vocational training centres, which conducted workshops in spinning, weaving, pottery, carpentry, sesame oil extraction, and toy- and soap-making to upgrade the skills of the local artisans. They also had a charkha manufacturing unit and ran a primary school as well as a centre where students could learn music, dance, and other art forms. Their key function was to upgrade the skill set of talented weavers, enabling them to earn better wages.

In 1953, Govindbhai Makwana, who was heading the textile division at Rashtriya Shala, had the innovative idea of teaching the patola technique to a few accomplished weavers to help them improve their earnings. Patola sarees, woven in the town of Patan, were in demand, so he invited an experienced patola weaver from Patan to train five experienced, A-grade weavers. The weavers were offered a stipend to spend a few months at the centre to master the new technique.

Today, there are more than a few thousand functional looms in Rajkot and Surendranagar area, weaving single and double-ikat patolas. Post-Independence, in 1947, the production of some textile products, such as sarees, dhotis, and *angavastrams*, was reserved exclusively for the handloom sector by the Planning Commission to protect the livelihood of artisans in rural areas, and textile mills were barred from producing these products. This is probably one of the reasons why handcrafted skills have survived over time.

KVIC was formed in 1957 to promote khadi and indigenous village produce. Its objectives included creating employment opportunities in rural India, strengthening the village economy, and developing markets for local products in urban centres so that they remained viable and artisans could sustain their various activities.

Till the 1990s, the Weavers Service Centres were vibrant bodies backed by active state support. These institutions had become the bridge connecting designers and artisans in different parts of the country, and they were able to use these resource centres for inspiration as each hub had a collection of historical samples from the region. They also had a design cell that produced new artwork, which artisans could purchase at a reasonable price, and this was complemented with technical assistance. Periodically, they conducted workshops to introduce new dyeing techniques, helped in upgrading skills, and solved the technical problems faced by the artisans.

Unfortunately, most of these institutions, devoid of any financial support or a visionary head, have become defunct, and many are being dismantled under the excuse of 'minimum government and maximum governance'. The prime minister's announcements advocating concepts such as National Handloom Day and Global to Local are wonderful initiatives, but they need to be supported by a clear vision and concrete policies that create a real impact. Rejuvenating a network of multiple institutions with dynamism and innovative direction, supported by product upgradation and customised marketing strategies for today's landscape, would help revitalise the craft segment and unlock its immense potential.

There is a need to establish a world-class centre for handcrafted Indian textiles, a permanent space to exhibit the best examples of Indian craftsmanship, all created in the 21st century. Such a centre, with exhibits produced today, would validate our artisans' skills and their continued efforts to recreate the heritage textiles that have been admired worldwide. It would also showcase contemporary interpretations created through design collaboration using diverse craft skills. It would demonstrate to the world that Indian craftsmanship continues to be a dynamic living heritage, and these remarkable skills can be re-purposed to produce fashionable textiles relevant to contemporary times.

The exhibits would evoke a sense of wonderment in the viewers and help develop new patronage crucial for the support of our craftspeople. It would help bring back a sense of pride in creation and encourage artisans to continue pursuing their craft

skills. The centre could emerge as a meeting point for artisans from across the country to exchange ideas and share their knowledge. It could also become an archive where scattered information and data about this sector are consolidated so that it emerges as a pivotal reference centre for conversations between artisans, designers, sociologists, policymakers, students, and others in the field who could help officials make meaningful decisions for this segment.

A WAY FORWARD

The key to developing the handcrafted sector is effective marketing. Additionally, appropriate high-quality, interesting textiles need to be created for different market segments, ranging from luxury to affordable fabrics. Communities could also be encouraged to use what is produced in the vicinity as this contributes to a more sustainable approach, not just environmentally by reducing the carbon footprint associated with transportation, but also by cultivating an economic ecosystem that supports the local economy.

Farsighted government policies can help the sector. For instance, the state government in Odisha encourages handloom production, curbing the growth of power looms. In 2018, when I visited western Odisha, I was told that more than 45,000 handlooms were in use, as against 500 power looms, with over 200,000 people involved in handloom production. I was delighted to see women wearing locally-produced sarees in many villages, for it helped to sustain this tradition. Almost 80% of the production is utilised within the state – a good example of Local Produce, Local Use. Women in government service and schoolteachers are expected to wear handloom sarees. Even the school uniforms are tailored from handloom textiles. I saw boys wearing ikat shirts and girls in tie-and-dye tunics in Bargarh district, which created regular work for many weavers in the area.

The Barijori *Haat* in western Odisha is also a wonderful example of locally produced handlooms sold directly to consumers in the region. Every Friday morning, weavers from the surrounding areas come to Barijori, near Bargarh in western Odisha, to sell their produce directly to traders and local customers. This is one of the largest handloom markets in the country and is open to weavers, artisans, and farmers for selling their weekly produce. A few thousand weavers from the nearby villages gather to sell their famous ikat sarees, *gamchas*, handloom fabrics, and readymade shirts. The whole system is simple. The weavers spread their mats in rows for a token fee of ten rupees. Then, they sell their products and collect on the spot earnings for their sales.

The space is managed by a weavers' collective and no commissions for sales are paid to any organisation. The bazaar begins around 5 a.m. and by mid-morning the transactions amount to over one crore rupees. On good days, the sales are known to have crossed two-and-a-half crores. After selling their products, the weavers have the money to buy the raw materials and dyes for their next round of production from the merchants selling yarn and dyestuff, and local carpenters selling loom accessories. The market has an exhilarating atmosphere with thousands of people buying and selling. By noon, they all return to their villages, and by 3 p.m. the weavers are back at their loom. Many such initiatives are needed in each state to help local producers sell directly to local consumers. Every town could have a weekly market. The direct interaction and customer feedback would encourage the artisans to innovate and help plan their next round of production.

Handcrafted production is a way of life where work and life are not separated, and one flows into the other. So, it is essential to understand the work methods, processes, and preferences of all stakeholders involved in production. However, this has not been the case. Under new initiatives, sheds are being created ostensibly to provide clean and hygienic workspaces where artisans can go and work at designated times. Although this could enhance production control, efficiency, and discipline under strict managerial supervision, it would curb creativity and the joy of working.

The common facility centres have frame looms, and many handloom weavers, especially those weaving delicate fabrics on handspun warps, prefer working on pit looms, better suited for handloom production. Traditionally, weavers have been accustomed to working at their own pace with their own tools and in the comfort of their own homes, but these common production centres would bring about radical changes in how people live. Frame-loom operations under one roof would replicate an industrial setup, alter the feel of the fabric, and also restructure the production process.

According to customary practice, which many like to follow even today, the artisan is the master of his time and decides the work hours to suit production requirements. For instance, warps are made very early in the morning when there is a good level of moisture in the air; and weaving is done in the cool hours of the morning and evening when it is more comfortable for the weaver and the delicate warp threads do not snap. The production process is a collective effort, involving

every member of the family, with women also actively participating in their free time. There is always a warm, human connection – I have often heard weavers humming while they weave, or a grandchild playing beside the loom, or women sitting in groups chatting while spinning, or making bobbins, or doing embroidery. The production process is stress free and enjoyable, because the men and women determine their own work hours.

Quite often, a woman is not able to go to a common production centre when there is a fixed (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) time schedule. She, however, has more than enough time during the day to contribute to the production process, at her convenience. Any development in this sector should accommodate the inherent requirements of the conventional production process, and its work-life harmony. Otherwise, it would disrupt the basic configuration of a family working together, and the independence of the artisans.

POLICY AND VISION

The handcrafted sector needs a dynamic new vision, supported by a strong political will and relevant policies to create a nationwide impact, which would benefit the large number of people involved in this segment. This should be supported by domain expertise backed by a dedicated team of designers and technocrats who can invigorate the artisanal segment and generate much-needed jobs.

Before proceeding further, a quick recap of the concepts highlighted earlier would be helpful. Strong marketing platforms are essential for revitalising the artisanal sector. It is imperative to also create quality textiles, each with a compelling narrative, and perfectly suited for different market segments, from luxury high-end to basic and affordable for the price-conscious middle class. Handcrafted textiles also need to have a unique identity, which cannot be easily replicated by machines if they are to remain relevant in present times. With the right initiatives, it is possible to develop such branding. For instance, using handspun yarn would be a sound option as it would differentiate the product and make it appealing, and machines would also not be able handle this delicate yarn.

Such measures should be reinforced with awareness campaigns that create value for handcrafted products. Strengthening this strategy further with suitable branding, celebrity endorsements, and massive digital and social media promotions will elevate these textiles to aspirational levels.

We now have a unique opportunity to re-purpose artisanal skills to create meaningful, eco-friendly textiles suitable for fashion-forward markets, and this in turn, would generate millions of employment opportunities without a huge investment. However, for a craft cluster to prosper, it requires long-term commitment, regular orders, decent earnings, and, of course, strong marketing support. These factors would provide artisans with the motivation to continue practising their craft.

Policies should be designed to cater to the specific requirements of the domain. This is a diverse sector with different needs in each region. One common policy for all would not work. Most importantly, for the sector's development, the views and aspirations of the craftspeople need to be incorporated, and they, too, should be involved in the decision making.

A POSITIVE EXAMPLE: THE ARTISANS OF KUTCH

At every national or global craft event, such as an exhibition or seminar, there is a larger representation of Kutchi artisans, relative to craftspeople from other regions. This raises interest in their progress, and understanding the reasons behind this phenomenon becomes crucial as there are lessons to be learnt from their success. If they have prospered to a greater degree than their counterparts in other states, it is not only because they are accomplished artisans; after all, each region in India has unique craft skills and distinctive textile traditions.

In the early 1980s, the life of the artisans in Kutch was no different from that of other craftspeople in India. So, what changed their circumstances? Their remarkable advancement stems not just from their inherent skills and enterprising spirit but also from the sustained support they have received. Over the last 40 years, consistent backing from designers and the dedicated efforts of a few NGOs working in this region have made the difference. Regular orders have given the younger craftspeople the confidence to improve their production processes, and with a steady flow of work, they have benefitted financially. Understanding what has brought about this positive transformation in Kutch could offer valuable insights for the development of the craft sector.

Since 1975, design students from the National Institute of Design have been visiting Kutch to study its many craft processes. They came back with photographs and samples from the region. At that time, many international designers, research scholars, and museum people were visiting NID, who were fascinated by the stories about the artisans in Kutch and visited the region. Dr Ismail Khatri, a block printer living in Ajrakhpur believes that when people came to their doorstep, the artisans in Kutch were more open to sharing information about

their craft and production processes as compared to those in other regions, and this attracted many research scholars and designers from around the world. They were also honest in their practices and pricing, which appealed strongly to retailers. Such interactions encouraged the artisans of Kutch to revive their old tradition as well as collaborate with designers to create fresh contemporary designs.

In its initial years, Gurjari, the retail store started by the Gujarat Handloom and Handicraft Board under the leadership of B. B. Bhasin, provided artisans in Kutch with regular orders. This transformed their fortunes and gave them the confidence to continue practising their craft. Unfortunately, with a change in the officers managing the organisation, this support did not last. Today, however, many designers and retailers are working directly with craft clusters, and most artisans in Kutch have regular orders. Also, the design schools, first Kala Raksha in 2005 and now Somaiya Kala Vidya Design, started in 2014, have encouraged young artisans to innovate and connect to new markets by offering them design and business education.

The exposure that Kutchi artisans have at Santa Fe Craft Market and such craft gatherings, where they meet other craft practitioners, and the respect they receive for the craft they practise, has boosted their self-esteem and confidence. Moreover, regular orders have given them financial stability. What is special about Kutch is that there are many artisan entrepreneurs today, but they have not become traders, as is often the case in other places. Instead, they maintain their production facilities, and create an environment where young artisans continue to work with their hands, and acquire a deep knowledge of their craft. This dedication has gained fresh relevance against the backdrop of a growing interest in organic cotton. The old-world 'kala' cotton from Kutch has become popular, creating jobs for a large workforce of weavers, with a corresponding increase in the number of looms.

NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

There is an urgent need for a paradigm shift incorporating alternative models of development that are better aligned with an Indian reality, where the environment and people matter. In a nation where almost 60% of the population continues to live in rural areas, the Western models based on profit and increased consumption are not sustainable, and we need to adopt a more inclusive approach. Instead of relying on the GDP growth metrics, which are based on consumption data from the organised sector as the sole indicator of economic growth, we should also factor in the contributions of the informal sector.

More than 80% of our workforce is employed in the informal sector, including agricultural labourers and artisans. In fact, they form the backbone of the country's economy. E. F. Schumacher's book, Small Is Beautiful, offers a way to develop people-centred economics that would enable environmental and human sustainability. He mentions that 'poverty and unemployment are basically a political problem more than an economic problem' and adds that we need technology with a human face as 'human happiness would not be achieved through material wealth'.

Environmental degradation and the repercussions of climate change are a reality that we are all experiencing. Temperatures and pollution levels are on the rise. Weather conditions are more severe and unpredictable: we are facing more storms, floods, droughts, and forest-fires while sea levels are rising. All this is pushing our planet towards disaster and, this time around, it will be caused by human activity. All this can be averted if we alter our lifestyle and consumer choices. The problem is not handmade versus machine made but striking a balance. There is a need for both, but most important of all are ethical practices that respect the environment and the people involved in the production process.

The younger generation once considered handcrafted products outdated, but this idea is changing rapidly. Degradation of the environment and movements such as Fashion Revolution and Slow Fashion are changing perceptions. There is growing support for fair trade practices, organic, green and sustainable food and clothing, and products that are good for the individual, the environment, and our planet.

For the smooth functioning of a circular economy of production and consumption, artisans need to sell what they produce, and for that the sector needs new patronage. Up to the 18th century, India clothed the world, Indian craftsmanship was admired, and our textiles were cherished around the globe. This built a robust economy; and we can do it again. India has the opportunity to provide an alternative model of development that focuses on building from the bottom of the economic pyramid. Promoting handcrafted production would support livelihoods, encourage the progression towards an inclusive society, and thus benefit the millions living in rural regions. This is also the most environmentally friendly means of production that can address the grave challenges of climate change. With the planet's largest repository of craft skills, our artisans can contribute significantly by producing sustainable, eco-friendly textiles, Handmade in India, for the domestic and international markets, and help to build an equitable world for future generations.

Photo Courtesy: Looms of Ladakh

Role of Specialised Networks in Nurturing Handloom and Handcrafted Textile Traditions

Purnima Rai

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The questions daunting the handloom sector of India today are not new but have been posed time and again out of profound concerns for sustaining and promoting it. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in her article 'Painting with a needle' stated as early as in 1964, '*The question posed before the country now is, who will ultimately win out: the genuine or the imitation? The outcome of this will to a large extent be determined by the choice of the people.*' Martand Singh, in one of his interviews in 1983, mentioned that, '*We face in this generation a cultural crisis of confidence. Mediocrity flourishes and becomes in itself an aspiration...I believe, however, that in another generation, once we have become comfortable with our own cultural patterns of the world around us, some balance will be achieved.*' These thought-provoking views two decades apart, reflect the complexity of questions that challenged the minds of those deeply involved in the development of the handloom and handicraft sector soon after independence. The devastating colonisation of India had decimated a once thriving industry famed for the beauty of its textiles the world over. The remarkable resilience shown by artisans during this time is a story or a multitude of stories of fortitude, perseverance, and an extraordinary journey that has

continued through to the present when we mark seventy-five years of our independence. Amongst many of her efforts to revive this sector, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay set up the Crafts Council of India and Delhi Crafts Council (DCC) more than 50 years ago. These organisations are perhaps two of the country's oldest voluntary, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for handicrafts and handlooms. This article attempts to cull some of my experiences of over three decades of working with handlooms, along with my colleagues in the Delhi Crafts Council, with particular reference to our annual exhibition of sarees, and later, *Kairi*, an exhibition of summer textiles. We have held these exhibitions annually continuously for 25 and 20 years, respectively.

Delhi, as the capital of India, has always been central to much of the activity and development that has taken place over the years in this field. Most seminal exhibitions of handlooms, seminars, workshops, and award functions have taken place here and continue to do so. We at DCC have, thus, been fortunate to address an interested and knowledgeable audience for our textile exhibitions.

In 1996, it was against a backdrop informed by a 'crisis of confidence' similar to the one expressed by Martand Singh in the quotation above that we thought of organising an exhibition devoted exclusively to sarees.

It was really somewhat of a puzzle to us that given the huge diversity of sarees still being woven all over the country, this attempt of ours was the first of its kind.

What added to our determination to hold it was also the fact that the saree, as an attire, exemplifies an unbroken tradition in handlooms and has been the mainstay of the weaving and textile industry in the country for hundreds of years. We felt that the exhibition would be a worthy endeavour to revitalise it.

Twenty-five years ago, when we held the first exhibition, the prevailing sense was that the saree as a garment was slowly but surely dying out, perhaps eventually to be worn only on ceremonial and special occasions, perhaps going the way of the kimono in Japan. Over time, and as experienced by us through our saree exhibitions, this apprehension has been laid to rest. The number of people actively buying and wearing sarees includes a large number from the younger generations. The inherent strength of the saree as an unstitched garment, open to endless innovations and adaptations to suit all possible tastes, is greatly responsible for this.

We first started the annual saree exhibition on a very modest scale, but over the years, it has become an annual event that the Delhi clientele looks forward to. But our intention and efforts have always remained the same: to bring to the sophisticated clientele of Delhi new developments in this field as well as to project the beauty and strengths of many of the traditional textiles still being woven.

Through our journey, we have realised that innumerable factors have contributed to paving the way forward for the development and revival of handlooms since independence.

The complex question of how to reinterpret tradition, and at the same time, introduce new designs and elements to it were uppermost in the minds of many of the people involved in the development of this sector. To this end, the government set up several institutions like the National Institute of Design, National Institute of Fashion Technology, and Weavers Service Centres, amongst others. Today, it is apparent that these visionary efforts have indeed paid dividends. Institutional inputs into the handloom sector have now evolved meaningfully, encouraging whole new generations of designers to work in this field. Innovations in handlooms that have enabled the current revitalisation in the sector have also come about as a result of creative inputs made by the weaver/artisan or a group of weavers/ artisans, often with the active involvement of a designer or entrepreneur. There are many instances across India of such sensitive interactions/ collaborations between the two, leading to amazing results.

The contributions of several of the older NGOs like the Crafts Councils, Dastkar, Dastkari Haat Samiti, Kala Raksha, Khamir, and several others have to be acknowledged here as they have provided the artisan/weaver a suitable platform for interacting with customers in the various bazaars and fairs, which they have continually organised all over the country for the past many decades. The artisans have, thus, acquired confidence and the astute amongst them have been able to gauge current trends and mould their production accordingly, resulting in burgeoning sales. Ecologically important traditional processes like natural dyes, natural fibres, and indigenous cotton have made a comeback, and most weavers and printers are found to be increasingly aware of the value these inputs bring to their products.

Among artisanal innovations, one of the most entrepreneurial groups we have interacted with in both of our textile exhibitions, Sarees of India and Kairi, is undoubtedly the Ajrak group of printers from Kutch, Gujarat. It is remarkable that even after going through many vicissitudes, the core group

of printers has not changed the identity of their textiles or the method of production. The beautiful traditional geometric designs and the laborious printing method with natural dyes are retained to this day. What has changed dramatically is its usage. Traditionally, Ajrak was printed on thick cotton handloom fabric and worn by the men in the Sind region. The well-known Khatri family of Kutch first came to our saree exhibition many years ago and, for the first time, brought sarees printed on thin handloom cotton *mulmul* fabric. Since then, different members of their large extended family have been present at our textile exhibitions. Ajrak printing on sarees, dupattas, and yardage has given them new product lines to experiment with. Ajrak prints are now available in a variety of fabrics, including silks, linens, tussar, chanderi, and khadi amongst others, and are hugely popular. Ajrak is one of the oldest hand block printing techniques known in India and the world, and it is a matter of great pride and joy that we can still enjoy its presence in our midst.

Next in entrepreneurship to the Ajrak printers are the weavers of Kutch. Traditionally, the textiles found here were woven in both cotton and wool on a pit loom with simple motifs and borders using the extra weft technique. The textiles were mostly woven for local use. However, the weavers were encouraged to sell their textiles in urban markets to increase sales. This led them to incorporate many innovations in their weaves as their exposure increased. Some years ago, Khamir had done intensive work in developing a local variety of organic cotton called *kala* cotton and supplying it to the weavers. Today, it has become one of the most successful raw materials of the region. Sarees and other unstitched textiles like dupattas and stoles in *kala* cotton, coupled with the use of natural dyes, have enabled an entirely new branding of Kutch weaving. Well-travelled, and often represented in our exhibitions, the weavers of Kutch exude confidence and take pride in their identity. Along with innovations, they are also careful not to dilute the basic vocabulary of patterns and motifs, which now resonate well with most urban buyers. Besides *desi* and *kala* cotton, they also weave other natural fibres like silk and tussar, which take well to natural dyes.

It may be pertinent to quote Shyamji Vishramji, a master weaver and an important member of the community, as he speaks about marketing. He says, '*We go to exhibitions, we get ideas. This raises the value of our work…years ago we did purely traditional work. Now we use the same techniques but new patterns, new look.*'

The women weavers of Assam can be credited next with both sustaining and marketing their unique and beautiful textiles in our exhibitions. They are traditionally handwoven in many of the extraordinary silk fibres found in the region, like *muga* and *eri*. The weavers are also experts in the use of natural dyes. The natural silk fibres absorb the dyes well, and the weavers are able to produce beautiful colours, particularly the bright yellows and reds. The main textile that is traditionally woven is the *mekhla chador;* and being unstitched probably made it easy for the weavers to transition into weaving sarees.

The weaving technique of Ikat, as found in the *telia rumal* originally woven in Chirala in Andhra Pradesh, has found a whole new range of products, being woven into sarees, dupattas, and stoles. Traditionally, there are many fine examples of Ikats that have been woven for sarees; Patan and Odisha are renowned for the same. However, recent designs in cotton, in single as well as double Ikat, from many weaving clusters in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are extremely popular. Their innovations include the use of natural dyes, which has resulted in a whole new palette of colours for these textiles.

Mukesh Karnati, a young weaver of *telia* textiles from Koylagudam, a small village in Andhra Pradesh, is a graduate and says, '*I was keen to popularise the new designs in telia which were created and woven by my father using natural dyes like indigo with double Ikats. I started coming to Delhi for exhibitions at Dastkar and Kairi. As a result, our clientele has now expanded, and although our textiles are more expensive, I try to explain to each and every customer the uniqueness of these textiles. I think my work is now well recognised.*'

I have overviewed just a few of the artisan-led initiatives that have shown creativity and innovation and have been successful at both of our textile exhibitions. At the same time, the contributions of designers are noteworthy, too, and cannot escape mention. Many started in a small way through participation in our saree exhibitions and, with DCC's active encouragement have evolved into well-known brands today. Raw Mango for Chanderi, Anavila for linens, Vriksh for weaves of Odisha, Pradeep Pillai for Bawan Buti weaves of Bihar and Venkatagiri, Mura Collective for Shibori, and Karomi for Jamdani and Khadi are only a few of the designers of note who have participated in the Sarees of India exhibitions of DCC at the start of their careers. Each of them, in their own ways, has reworked the vocabulary of traditional handlooms imaginatively and successfully, utilising fine

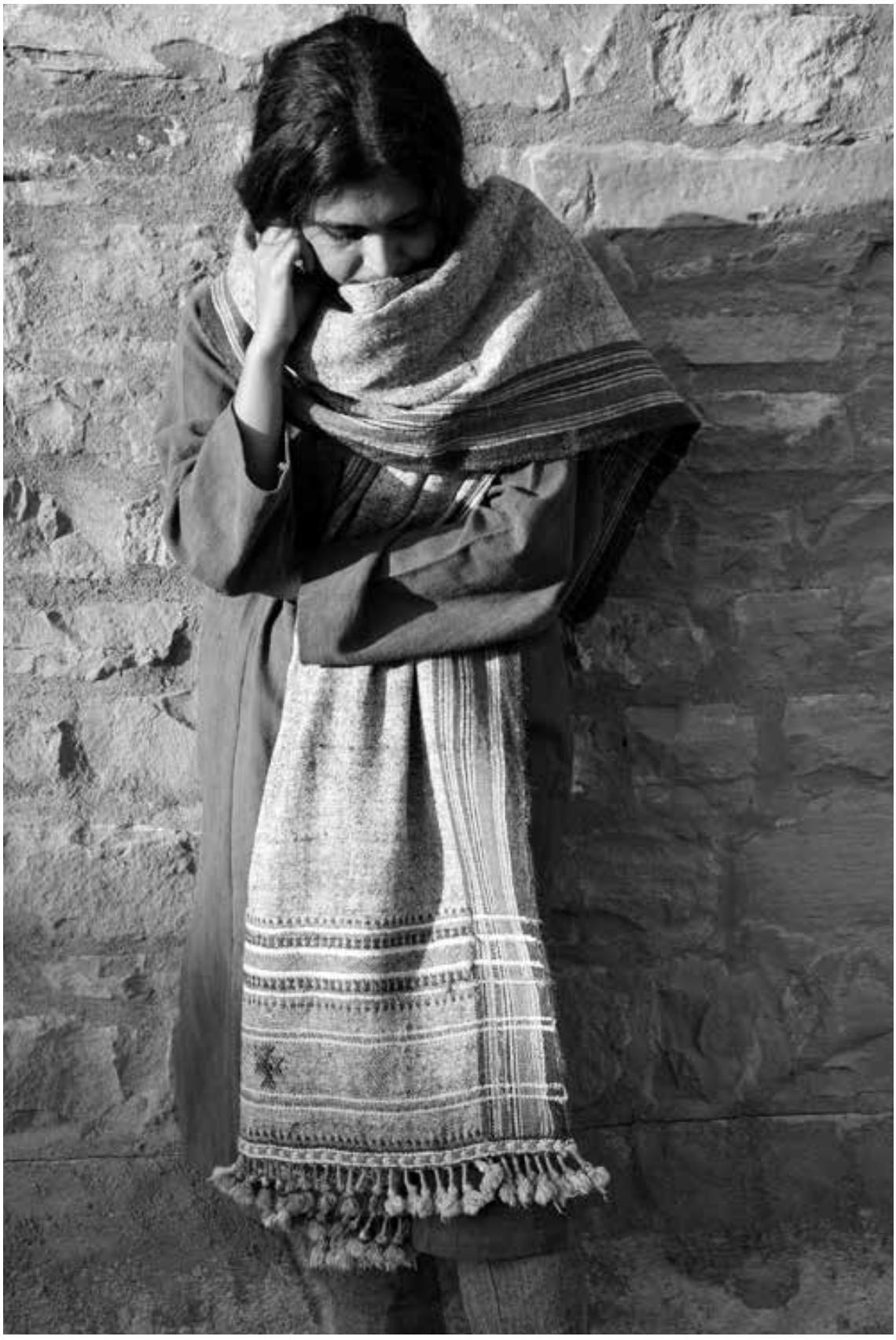
techniques, and experimenting with different raw materials and yarns.

Handlooms today are part of a very complex landscape, and although we have looked at many of the positive developments, it is important that we become aware of the numerous threats they face today. Amongst these, a critical factor would be the depletion and scarcity of raw materials. Prices of both cotton and silk yarns have been galloping in the past few years. Not only does it drive up the price of the woven textiles to an unaffordable level for a large section of people, but it also actively encourages the use of synthetics and imitations.

The current advancement of technology has been beneficial to the artisans in many significant ways, increasing connectivity and encouraging entrepreneurship. But its speed and nature of advancement have also led to several adverse consequences. We have seen that more than a century ago, the discovery of synthetic dyes in the West almost killed the unrivalled production and use of natural dyes in India. For many years, the threat to handlooms from the powerloom industry has been palpable. But these pale in comparison to the speed at which the onslaught of technology needs to be dealt with now. For example, computer-aided printing is a grave threat to the age-old hand-printed and hand-painted textiles. There are still ways in which a knowledgeable person can tell the subtle difference between a textile woven on a handloom from one woven on a powerloom. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult and sometimes impossible to do so by most people as computer printing is able to reproduce even the minor defects of hand block printing to fake authenticity. The loss of jobs and livelihoods such a scenario would entail is a sobering prospect.

Current efforts to map the number of people involved in this sector may give us a clearer picture of its scale and contribution to the economy. Indications are that the numbers could surpass the present estimates and available data by a large margin. Handlooms and handicrafts sector is understood to provide employment second only to agriculture. India is the only country in the world at present where handlooms still survive on this scale. In a world growing increasingly weary of uniformity and of ecological threats which loom large with the use of manmade textiles and dyes, it is important to recognise the particular significance and advantage our handloom industry acquires for us.

I would like to end by saying that investing in and enabling advances in the handloom sector is certainly not just a matter of aesthetics or profitability. It is something that concerns the lives and sustainable livelihoods of a vast number of our fellow countrymen and women. It would, thus, be wise to develop the sensitivity, knowledge, and aesthetics to maintain the integrity of our handloom traditions. By doing so, we will enable our artisans and weavers to remain custodians of a very long heritage and secure a sustainable future not only for themselves but for the entire world. As expressed in the beautiful poem by T.S. Eliot, '*Time present and time past Are both perhaps present in time future, And time future contained in time past.*'



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Is Tourism the Missing Piece in Taking India's Handloom Story Forward?

Shilpa Sharma and Geetika Sachdev

8

INTRODUCTION

A clarion call for 'vocal for local' has been a defining theme for India, particularly in the last few years. While several industries have embraced the new order recently the country's craft and textile sector has been a shining example of craftsmanship, representing and preserving its vibrant cultural heritage.

India's handloom sector has been of much interest for a while, with international design houses taking inspiration from the tapestry of handcrafted textiles for their haute couture collections. However, on ground—in several clusters and villages—artisans are abandoning the craft in the absence of adequate payoffs and the constant challenge associated with finding enough opportunity to sell.

The circumstances will improve if the artisans get the acknowledgment and appreciation they deserve through amplifying their traditions and legacies with adequate market linkages. To have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the art, people must meet them to witness their craftsmanship and traditions up close and personal, and to immerse themselves in their stories.

While there's undoubtedly more interest in handloom today through craft *bazaars,* buyer-seller meets, and direct-to-consumer artisanal pop-ups, the missing piece in the puzzle continues to be a lack of adequate initiatives around the promotion of textile or handloom tourism. A step in this direction

Jaya Jaitly, Delhi
Doyen of the Craft Sector

'Working with craftspeople from many disciplines for more than 40 years has given me a very wide perspective of issues like skills, techniques, community identities related to design, and the many innovative ways required to develop, promote, and market their crafts and textiles. To sustain our heritage, we have to sustain livelihoods. I have organised many events, created spaces like Dilli Haat, made craft maps of each state, and written several books, besides organising bazaars and design interactions. I have loved immersing myself in this wonderful world of the weavers and artisans.

Craft tours take travellers to the actual craft environment. They not only encourage the development of better tourism infrastructure but also offer textile making as an educational exhibit wrapped in a cultural package. Conversations with weavers, demonstration of intricate skills, and life around them are the best travel and shopping experiences one could offer. Visitors appreciate the art and the product much more as they get a bouquet of India's culture instead of a mere product online. It encourages these programmes to link textiles with local history, architecture, music, and even storytelling.'

can make a significant difference in placing the sector high on the radar of both domestic and international tourists.

In fact, in the last decade or more, there was hardly any professional and dedicated initiative in the space of craft and textile tourism. Internationally, there were a handful of women-led boutique travel companies who entered the market; however, there was a glaring gap that was waiting to be addressed here.

As someone who had already spent 15 years in the handicrafts sector—travelling for FabIndia to set up stores and for procurement—Shilpa Sharma had frequent interactions on-ground with artisans in the sector. At this point, it became evident to her that it would be a good experience for a customer who walked into their stores, to be able to have an option to know what went behind in the making of beautiful textiles they wear!

That's where the idea of Breakaway was seeded. The endeavour of the bespoke travel firm, ever since its inception in 2011, has always been to craft itineraries that cater to a thinking and discerning traveller. These are immersions in craft and textile, social enterprise interactions, based on personal networks and over two decades of professional relationships in the craft, and design space.

The underlying premise is always to create direct connections between artisans and consumers, as well as with designers and buyers, at times opening up co-creation and collaboration that translate into market linkage opportunities for them. These immersions range from day-long interactions to short trips across one or two cities and neighbouring villages, to long explorations spanning entire states.

Abdul Ghani, Jaipur
Wooden-Blocks Maker and Hand-Block Printer

'Currently, not many craft and textile tours are happening. However, I believe there could be a positive impact from the gradual changes we observe today. When I meet travellers, it's always knowledge-sharing for both parties. I continue to think of myself as a student. It's so heartening to see travellers explore the possibilities of the craft. They also realise the difference between what they see here vis-a-vis what they find in the market for those are all mass produced.

I am concerned that the craft will not sustain in the long run. The younger generation is unwilling to learn. I have three children—my daughter is a textile designer, while my elder son runs our business. However, he has an MBA and has a completely different mindset. He does not think like a craftsperson. He thinks the business has no margin. My younger son is not a part of the field but an orthopaedic surgeon.

Our artisan community is on the decline. Adequate steps need to be taken to preserve us and our craft.'

These immersive and experiential textile tours can never be a 'one-size-fits-all.' They are largely in tune with the profile of the traveller, one who is willing to dive deeper into immersive experiences, witnessing what happens on the ground in the craft and textile space. The interactions are recommended based on what they are interested in—for instance, there is no need for a general interest traveller to meet a natural dye expert. However, a scholarly or

design-focused traveller must meet artisans whose work will inspire them, and most importantly, help them build on whatever they already know.

Advocates of responsible and conscious consumption and crusaders for fair trade could be among those who want to meet the makers of craft and textiles in their homes and workshops, source products directly from them, and attend exhibitions or trade fairs. A few would want to dive deep into the craft by attending a demonstration or participating in a hands-on workshop.

For instance, a block printing workshop is a good entry point into the basic principles, tools, and dyes involved in the craft. It also offers a window into the lives of block printers, block carvers, and craftsmen in action to understand the intricacies of the process.

Brinda Gill, Pune
Postgraduate in Economics, Scholar and Writer

Brinda enjoys discovering India's wealth through its heritage of textiles, culture, arts, architecture, and natural life and writing on these subjects.

She comments, 'With India bequeathed a treasured heritage of textiles, spanning different techniques and variations within each technique, the learning never stops.'

For her, India's textile artisans—skilled, creative, humble, and hardworking—are the true heroes as they create wondrous hand-woven, embroidered, resist-dyed, block-printed, and painted natural fibre textiles that are testimony to the ancient living heritage of India's fabled fabrics.

She continues, 'The best way to know/ learn about Indian textiles is to meet the makers in their homes or workshops and, if possible, learn about the technique by attending a demonstration or a workshop. These interactions with artisans, in their context, tell us about the techniques they work with, the effort, energy, and time that goes into creating beautiful textiles, and the masterpieces or antique/vintage textiles they may have in their collections. Besides, they help understand whether the craft has evolved in response to influences or market forces and whether the artisans can collaborate with designers or brands to create special collections.

Textile tours locate artisans and facilitate meetings with them. In this context, focused textile tours help build awareness and appreciation of their crafts and skills.'

MAPPING CLUSTERS FOR HANDLOOM TOURISM

There's no dearth of representation of handcrafted textiles around the country. Everything from woven to printed textiles, embroideries to surface embellishments, applique, and patchwork fall under its ambit. However, some clusters have a better standing in certain forms.

For instance, Rajasthan's printing traditions are far more known than its weaving traditions, while Gujarat's repertoire is adequately rich in printing, embroidery, and weaving. In Andhra Pradesh, woven textiles (tie-dye Ikat and Mangalgiri being the more popular and recognisable ones) and Kalamkari (block-printed and hand-painted in equal measure) are in focus as print forms, however, it's Ikat and weaving that take centre stage.

Rajasthan and Gujarat are fairly more popular clusters, not just because of the wealth of textiles and craft in these parts but also because they are far more tourism-friendly in terms of access, infrastructure, climatic conditions, and on-ground conditions for travellers to access. These states also have a rich repertoire of cultural and architectural experiences, besides diverse regional cuisine offerings.

Clusters from Bengal (Jamdani, Baluchari, Kantha, and Begumpuri), Jammu and Kashmir (Pashmina, Sozni, and Kani), Ladakh (Pashmina and Yak wool weaving), Central India (Chanderi, Maheshwari, and Kota), Tamil Nadu (Kanchipuram silk and Chettinad cotton), Uttar Pradesh (Banarasi saree /Zardozi embroidery, and knotted carpets), and Telangana (Ikat and Venkatagiri) come a close second, not necessarily on the radar of a first-time traveller into the country. In the northeast, Assam (Mekhla, Patni, and Eri) and Nagaland (extra weft weaving on a backstrap loom) are very worthy of mention.

However, many lesser-known artisanal clusters have great tourism potential, like those in Odisha (cotton and silk Ikat weaves), Maharashtra (Paithani and Khun), Chhattisgarh (Kosa silk), Bihar (Tussar, Eri, and Mulberry silk), and the rest of the northeastern states. Despite their potential, they are currently rather challenging regarding accessibility and hospitality infrastructure geared for tourists.

At this point, it's equally important to bring back attention to the kind of traveller who sets out on these craft and textile trails. They are fairly well-heeled travellers who either endorse handcrafted clothing and home decor, or want to deepen their understanding of craft and textiles, or run a business in the same space.

Since they seek comfort on the go and aren't looking to spend an inordinate amount of time on the road, it's imperative that artisanal clusters be easily accessible in terms of roads and offer good options for places to stay around them.

Besides these travellers, some people go on mainstream holidays with friends or family but are willing to set aside a day or two to embark on something beyond the brochure. For instance, Breakaway may nudge a traveller in Coonoor soaking in the beauty of the tea plantations and its old-world charm to visit Todamund, the land of the Todas, the oldest known inhabitants of the Nilgiris. There's much to learn from their unique culture and traditions to their distinctive embroidery to their igloo-like houses, which have greatly interested anthropologists, sociologists, and linguists alike.

Such immersions are not limited to the sensitive, mindful consumer but also include creative entrepreneurs or people in business. They may want to source sensibly to better understand a region or textile form.

However, it's important to establish here that those who generally sign up for craft and textile tours have a certain level of consciousness regarding handcrafted products. Their mindset goes beyond a product 'just looking good'. Instead, they want to know and understand more about textiles and enrich their learning of the craft.

Most of these travellers are also mindful of taking these trips with like-minded people who share an interest in textiles and crafts; they avoid travelling with family or friends who don't particularly care or are not passionate about the subject. They want to travel for a cause, and that's also one of the biggest motivators for them to sign up. Broadly, women want to go on these immersions to meet other interesting women.

Srila Chatterjee, Mumbai
Curator 47A Gallery, Baro Market & Evangelist for all things Craft

'Nothing really succeeds like personal experience, and as important as reports and data are, to actually meet the makers, to touch and feel the textiles, to understand the reality makes a bigger difference than anything else. Textile tours help to hit the right spot and immediately get on board people who feel committed to making the changes required and become the evangelists needed.'

In the end, it's about different strokes for different folks. Today, an increasing number of people have a deeper interest in hands-on workshops, whether in natural dyeing, block printing, patchwork, quilting, or other areas.

More tourism-friendly clusters will always exist for those with very little time and who want their creature comforts. However, there is a huge scope for developing lesser-known and off-beat destinations for textile tourism in different states, adding to a traveller's unique immersive experience.

Within textile tourism, experiences exist to initiate the uninitiated into this world. Eventually, they graduate to another level and then evolve over time. For instance, Pashmina weaving in Ladakh is a nuanced experience fraught with challenging terrain. One has to go all the way to the Changthang Valley to meet the communities to experience it; not everyone may be prepared for such an experience, however rewarding it may be.

BENEFITING ARTISANS AND COMMUNITIES

The only way artisans and their communities will witness a positive impact is when people visit the grassroots. More initiatives must be taken to nudge people to travel around textile and craft clusters; this doesn't necessarily have to be through bespoke travel agencies. People visit on their own but the right kind of awareness and opportunity to learn must be highlighted.

Organisations in this space can also amplify the message, urging people to visit their clusters and communities to see the work that happens on the ground. A strong point must be made that those who travel on these tours can build a more nuanced view of the work that artisans do.

It doesn't end there. Design schools also have a responsibility of uplifting these artisan communities through knowledge sharing. When students head out for ethnographic studies of any cluster as part of their professional course, they must be encouraged to share what they have learned on public channels so that more and more people can awaken to the possibilities that exist. There should be a means to tap into the wealth of content that they can generate for the benefit of all.

Unfortunately, there's a lack of awareness today. Someone may go to Kolkata and be oblivious to the wealth of Jamdani and Kanth, or embossed leather printing that is intrinsic to the region's cultural heritage. That's how travel can open minds and possibilities; as prolific American writer Mark Twain rightly said, 'One must travel to learn.'

Shobha George, Pune
Founder and Director, The Extra Mile

'Our curated tour, The Pashmina Trail, is dedicated to telling the story of Pashmina in Ladakh, its place of origin. The tour has attracted not only textile enthusiasts but also anyone curious about the story of

Pashmina and the heritage of Ladakh. Travellers on this tour not only meet with the Changpas, the nomadic pastoralists who rear the pashmina goat at high altitudes in the region of Changthang, but also engage in hands-on workshops on the dyeing and weaving of Pashmina. They have the opportunity to interact with young entrepreneurs who proudly contribute to the emerging Pashmina economy in Ladakh.

The tour contextualises the deep connection between Ladakh's culture, weaving traditions, and Pashmina's historical link to the ancient Silk Road trade.

In recent times, Ladakhis have established their own Pashmina economy, processing the fibre to fabric within Ladakh. Women have been trained in hand-spinning and weaving Pashmina fibre. This has led to the development of a circular economy, providing dignified livelihood opportunities for the women in the region.

The impact of the Pashmina trail has been tremendous in creating awareness about Ladakhi Pashmina and making market connects.'

What tourist map would mark the small mofussil towns in Odisha where a Panika or a weaver weaves natural-dyed cotton yarn and decorates it with special motifs so one could identify the wearer's tribe?

Would one ever see an artisan engrossed in weaving Khesh fabric from upcycled old sarees in Shantiniketan? It's one of the most successful sustainability stories. Here, the warp has new yarn, and the weft uses thin strips from old sarees torn lengthwise. The process of tearing starts with the weaver first tearing the saree into five or six strips lengthwise. One end of each torn strip is then further torn into short strips. The tearer then picks out the alternate short strips and holds them together in one hand and the remaining in the other hand. The strips are then pulled in two opposite directions, giving multiple strips at one go.

Meera Goradia, Mumbai
Co-Chair, Creative Dignity

'I've been working with the creative handmade sector for over three decades now. I've seen it evolve, grow, reinvent, and continually find new expression, albeit we are also losing many artisans and craft forms at a very rapid rate.

People are constantly seeking meaning in how they live and consume. And at the core of it is the need for a connection with a larger community. Artisans offer that in a very genuine and authentic way; cultural engagement makes space for blurring boundaries and becoming creative in our approach to living.'

AN ATTEMPT TO CATER TO THE CONSCIOUS TRAVELLER

Isolating handloom from an overarching textile experience is not necessary because it goes hand in hand. For instance, handwoven textiles also form the basis for workmanship through block printing or embroideries on these textiles.

Experiencing a country through its craft, textile, and food heritage and the lives of its artisans is understanding it at a sensory or tactile level, which is not available to a regular traveller. These immersions also offer a window into the issues facing the local communities, while the interactions with artisans bring to the fore their selfless and relentless commitment to their work in generating livelihoods.

Shabri Wable, Kachchh
A Clothes Maker

'Every single time we show guests around, they are surprised by the level of thought and sophistication of simple techniques and processes that make a craft practice. I think textile trails can bring this awareness—a quieter, ingenious way of production that nurtures a gentler way of life and ecosystem.

My own interest lies in this way of making, in deeply understanding materials and tools and then bringing them together to craft products. This interest is not based on the romance of "what used to be" but rooted in the possibilities of human mind-hand working with materials to create beauty and meaning.'

From a traveller's perspective, they are looking for holistic experiences that take them behind the scenes. It's educational and also makes them value what goes into the making of anything 'handcrafted/ handmade' that they are buying off the rack.

The conscious traveller wants to leave with some kind of new inspiration that is grounded in reality. The experience is stimulating and humbling at the same time, almost always with practical takeaways and value connections, that ultimately create a positive impact on the community.

Through textile tours, there is a greater sense of sensitivity and empathy towards craft and communities that depend on it across geographies.

By interacting with textile and craft enthusiasts, designers, and business owners, the younger generation in the fraternity gets to see first-hand the potential opportunity to elevate their work into a relatable and contemporary outlook for a global audience. For instance, the work of Abduljabbar & Abdullah Khatri in Bhuj (SIDR Craft) is a fitting example of how a contemporary outlook on Bandhani changed how people view the craft. It is no longer just a graceful saree or *dupatta* but much more.

Many other examples can elucidate this fact. Even woven Naga textiles, traditionally used by the community for its customary clothing, have ended up being used for the most exquisite home decor products (be it cushions, runners, or even fixed upholstery). This has been demonstrated by the work of Jesmina Zeliang of Heirloom Naga and, more recently, through the artistry of Ariane Ginwala of the furniture brand This and That.

In a nutshell, it is all about bridging the gap between the end consumer and the artisan, and creating market linkages through direct introductions to foster dialogues for business.

What has changed perspectives is that people are becoming increasingly mindful and more aware of their outlook, which, in turn, is altering people's perspectives about travel. Post-COVID-19, they are ascribing more value to quality over quantity, opting for experiences that are curated more meaningfully and purposefully through their impact on the ground.

While sustainability is loosely bandied around today, many travellers want to make responsible shifts in their outlook through small steps. They want to assuage the guilt associated with increasing carbon footprint by either managing waste responsibly at home or consuming carefully to minimise fast fashion. Repurposing, upcycling, and even buying preloved clothing at thrift stores are fast gaining popularity with Gen Z and millennial consumers.

In the travel space, one of the outcomes has been a willingness for more people to seek authentic and realistic experiences. Travellers want to understand how to use their time meaningfully to learn and get a more tactile and hands-on experience. They seek a first-hand opportunity to engage and chat with the artisans, traditional weavers, and printers behind the scenes of some of India's leading fashion labels.

It is imperative to observe how any traveller who visits places renowned for weaves and crafts wants to buy sarees, stoles or shawls, fabrics, and a range of

Sunaina Suneja, Delhi
Textile Designer, Khadi Expert

'My journey into the enchanted world of India's crafts commenced with my reading of Gandhiji's autobiography, My Experiments With Truth. It was the section on KHADI that gripped my attention, perhaps because since childhood, I had been encircled by and had thus imbibed an emotion for textiles and garments, my mother's line of work.

When the time came to join hands with her, I embraced Khadi as a researcher and designer. Later, I incorporated more facets linked to it, most significantly spinning, its history, and promotion through presentations as a personal tribute to India's 50th year of Independence in 1997.

When we started our forays into villages, neither my mother nor I knew we were embarking on our very own self-curated textile trails in the mid-1980s! Not only were we discovering textile techniques but also finding new sources of joy – camel cart rides to cover the "last mile" to our final destination, new local cuisines, generosity, simplicity, patience, ancient wisdom in the old and young, deep-seated knowledge of the craft, the craftspeople's lives so closely linked to their environment and the circularity of life.

I encourage folks interested in textile crafts to journey into this world of self-nourishing discovery and experience the crafts, their making, and, above all the skill of their makers. No one comes away unmoved. Instead, it generates a first-hand comprehension of the enormity of each craft. It engenders empathy, gratitude, and a profound respect for all those who continue to perpetuate these age-old crafts.'

home decor products directly from artisans. There is often a kind of romanticism attached to such trips, as they allow the traveller to brag about something exquisite and one-off bought directly from an artisan on a trip (nothing like that will show up on the shelves of large retail brands). It also carries an exclusivity tag, especially given the higher level of awareness today, courtesy of social media and other channels.

Sonal Chitranshi, Jaipur
Textile Designer

'The hard work and labour cannot be quantified when the product is up for sale in swanky lifestyle stores, but once you interact with the artisans, you learn the nuances of the heritage and crafts, the legacy carried forward, and processes that have been preserved by upholding the values.

By witnessing the use of different materials such as cotton, silk, wool, or natural dyes, guests can develop a greater appreciation for the materials involved in textile production. Moreover, observing various techniques such as hand-spinning, dyeing, weaving, and embroidery allows participants to understand the complexity and skill required in each step of the process. This is a very laborious process and precision is the key.

Participating in textile tours often involves purchasing textiles directly from artisans or cooperatives, thereby providing direct support to local economies and preserving traditional crafts. Since middlemen are not involved, the artisans' families benefit directly.'

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

In the next three to five years, it's important to make handloom tourism more mainstream and put it on the agenda of various bodies and societies that work in the sector to further its cause. These conversations need to happen on large forums, both domestic and international. There needs to be consistent and ongoing amplification of travel around craft as business people, designers, patrons of art, students, and consumers.

Each stakeholder has a certain responsibility towards the community. They should be given an opportunity to voice their stories about what they do and how they do it, what they look for, and create opportunities for them to engage directly, which in turn can also foster meaningful business relationships.

Looms, legendary landmarks, and lingering tales of craftsmanship that have kept India's textile printing and weaving cultures alive for thousands of years must make their way into mainstream travel itineraries. This can endow travellers with an opportunity to venture into the traditions that have created the fabric of contemporary India and provided the world with some really fine threads and sought-after textiles.

Sufiyan Khatri, Bhuj
Tenth-Generation Ajrakh Craftsman

'It always benefits us when tourists come, since they are always a mixed group that includes textile designers and business owners. It's a revelation for them to see such pure and organic textiles, available here even in the 21st century. After the 1970s, if there is a market for Ajrakh, it is because of such travellers. We don't really advertise; it happens either through companies who organise craft and textile tours or through the media. Sometimes, authors who write books on textiles also benefit us.

I have observed that Indians come to us but don't value our craft as much. They try and negotiate. That's not the case with international tourists. However, I attempt to share my knowledge of the craft with whoever comes to me, irrespective of whether they purchase my product or not.

Several businessmen take advantage—they look at our product and copy the design. But for us, there is nothing more important than knowledge sharing. We need an association for craft and textiles so that our legacy is sustained and everyone works together to benefit the community. It's also important that such associations and bodies help us market our products. It's [marketing] our biggest weakness.

I also believe if all the artisans from a particular region, say Kutch, show up on Google maps, it will really help people know about as many people from the community.'

The vision must be for various craft-based networks to talk as much about craft and textile tourism as their regular work with the artisan fraternity. For example, craft councils and similar networks may create a collaborative space on their platforms, enabling experience sharing

on immersive travels around textiles and crafts. Encouraging design schools and even young craft entrepreneurs to talk more about experiential travel around textiles and craft may contribute to its integrative development. Textile tourism can also create aware and sensitive customers who would value the communities whose skill and craftsmanship make their attires beautiful. More spaces need to be created for conversations around how travel to artisanal clusters can benefit travellers as much as artisans directly. For instance, the Santa Fe Folk Art Market invites artisans and makers from around the world—perhaps it is time for India to showcase Textile Trails at this forum, too.

There needs to be a continued effort to draw attention to the legacy of these crafts, ensuring people continue to peg the value that handloom and handcrafted products deserve. Design schools and educational institutes can create diverse opportunities for 'artisan immersions' for students and faculty alike. Similarly, schools can create opportunities for young minds to experience the richness of their country's craft and textile heritage through short trips and awareness building about the value of the artisans who are the real custodians of our cultural heritage. This kind of initiation at an early age can offer students exposure and may even generate future career options. Finally, textile tourism in rural hinterlands essentially requires good infrastructure and public facilities, making the role of local governments extremely critical. Such initiatives would bring livelihoods, improve living standards, and empower the maker communities economically and socially, adding a sense of pride to their work. Hence, they may not drop or abandon these timeless traditions and continue to keep these crafts alive.

Julie Kagti, Bengaluru/Guwahati
Textile Designer & Founder, Curtain Call Adventures

'By emphasising and celebrating a particular area's unique textiles and craft traditions, it fosters a sense of pride and identity within the local community. This can lead to a greater appreciation for their heritage and cultural legacy, reinforcing the importance of preserving and continuing these traditions. It also enables the community to showcase its cultural heritage to the world and promote a sense of cultural exchange and understanding.

Focusing on local textiles and crafts can encourage artisans and craftsmen to innovate and adapt their traditional techniques to contemporary styles and market demands. This ensures the craft remains relevant and attracts a wider customer base. Infusing traditional techniques with new ideas and designs, enables the craft to evolve without losing its essence.'

Photo Courtesy: Creative Bee

Photo Courtesy: Kharghewala

Role of Handloom Industry in Strengthening Local Economy and Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

Dr. Madhura Dutta

9

India is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—the 17 internationally accepted goals designed to achieve worldwide holistic, equitable, and inclusive growth of people and communities. Although the SDGs were formulated in 2015, the concept of sustainable development itself is much older. It was defined for the first time in 1987 in the Brundtland Commission Report, 'Our Common Future' as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' Certain common principles underpinning this concept that have gained unanimous acceptability are as follows:

1. Human quality of life depends on a healthy and productive environment;
2. The needs of the poor must be met, providing at least a basic quality of life for all of the world's population;
3. Future generations should have the same opportunity to harness the world's resources as the current generation.

Therefore, if the living conditions of the majority of the population are unsatisfactory and inequitable, that will degrade the social fabric and the immediate environment, resulting in unhealthy growth. Moreover, the sustainable development

framework also emphasises that no activity should compromise the health of the planet and the living beings in it, including people, by increasing the level of toxicity in the environment. This standpoint is inextricably linked to the economic activities within the society, and so the SDGs are tied together by the three pillars of economic, social, and environmental sustainability and provide the basis for integrating social quality of life, environmental protection, and economic upliftment. Industrialisation has largely treated the economy as the sole priority, with the expectation that society and the environment exist to serve the economy rather than the other way around. However, the unprecedented Covid pandemic reinstated the importance of people-centric inclusive development vis-a-vis the philosophy of any industrialised society, which upholds profit and wealth accumulation by a few as the main drivers of growth. Fortunately, in India, civil society organisations and community-based organisations (CBOs) have been working towards various components of sustainable development for decades, even if at a micro level to create an impact on sustainable livelihoods, gender equity, community empowerment, and efficient natural resource use through local skills and knowledge-based entrepreneurship, village-based economic activities, and respect for the environment.

India has a great advantage in its vast wealth of traditional creative skills and cultural capital nurtured by people across the country for generations. These include the exquisite handicrafts and handloom industries that have been a part of the country's economy and have played a significant role in international trade since ancient times. These cottage industries have been sustained by rural communities with specialised skills and creativity, who have continued to produce handcrafted products using a great diversity of local natural raw materials and techniques. The handloom industry is one of the largest and richest of these industries, providing livelihood and creative well-being to millions of community practitioners. It is possibly the most diverse and unique creative industry of India, having gained global fame since the 4th century BC.

This chapter will illustrate how the handloom industry, which impacts so many lives and livelihoods contributes to the various SDGs, through a few case studies from the field. Such initiatives add value to the lives of the producers, their communities, and their environment on a daily basis. A few examples are mentioned here to demonstrate some of these approaches and provide a cue for further deliberations and discourses by different stakeholders of this sector.

CASE STUDIES

The Indian handloom sector not only preserves the cultural heritage of diverse local handloom weaving traditions, but also provides a significant source of livelihood and employment for the rural population, especially women. Being handwoven on mostly hand-operated looms, which are designed and installed by the producers themselves, handlooms constitute an eco-friendly, low-carbon, and energy-efficient cottage industry that supports local economies and overall community development. Thus, the handloom sector addresses a number of SDGs such as Goal 5: Gender Equality, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

In India, social enterprises, private companies, NGOs, and grassroots entrepreneurs play a key role in uplifting the livelihoods of rural weavers and artisans by enabling them with the necessary skills, capacities, exposure, and market linkages. Since the markets for textiles, fashion, and lifestyle products are constantly evolving, these organisations undertake various initiatives for making the weavers and artisans market-ready, honing their skills for adapting to changing consumer needs, and also aggregating supply from multiple producer groups and communities to address varied purchasing requirements. These organisations are found to adopt different approaches based on the craft and communities they choose to work with to position the luxury, elegance, and exclusivity of India's handmade and hand-woven products and the knowledge and expertise of their makers. This has resulted in protecting and promoting the unique skills and traditions of the country and their actual bearers. Studying these models can add to the perspectives and learning of the sectoral practitioners and may inspire new initiatives and innovations to bridge existing gaps further. The case studies have been selected based on the geographical and structural diversity of the organisations in this sector, as well as the willingness of the respondents to share their stories.

I. Private company-led handloom enterprises

This section puts forward different business models of private companies and social enterprises dealing with the handlooms and handicrafts sector. The case studies broadly demonstrate the strategies, impacts, and challenges of each organisation.

1) Kullvi Whims, Himachal Pradesh

Kullvi Whims, based in Naggar town of Kullu district, Himachal Pradesh, is a women-led enterprise

founded by Nisha Subramaniam and Brighu Acharya. Started in 2012 and registered as a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP), the venture works with local women weavers and knitters who traditionally wove and knitted handloom products. They used acrylic yarns for many years and Kullvi Whims re-introduced them to indigenous wool. Nisha is a professional working in the area of development and design. She is a visiting faculty with Srishti Manipal Institute of Design and CEPT University. Brighu is a local eco-tourism entrepreneur and also the founder of Himalayan Brothers Adventure.

Nisha has been involved in community development and working with women artisans in Himachal for over ten years. Her interest in traditional craft and how it can fit into the modern lifestyles of artisans while still maintaining its cultural context has motivated her to explore the craft, vernacular, and pastoral traditions of Himachal in depth. Having an extensive knowledge of the local crafts, landscape, communities, and heritage, Brighu partnered with Nisha to give life to -his passion for seeing his village and the region grow and become a destination not only for nature lovers but also for art and craft lovers and those who wish to engage in meaningful and creative experiences. They started with the dual objective of empowering local women while building upon their weaving skills and tradition and revitalising the link of the weavers with the pastoral community who reared sheep and supplied indigenous wool in the past.

Kullvi Whims is a brand that represents the Women of Himachal Self-help Group (SHG) from the Kullu Valley. The word 'Whims' in the brand name refers to the joy that these women experience in making each product unique by adding their own little touches to the motifs and patterns, as per their whims and fancies! These women are traditional weavers/artisans who learned their craft's practices of spinning, weaving, knitting, and crocheting from their family members. They had mostly practised their craft for themselves, weaving *pattus* and blankets or knitting sweaters, *mojiris,* and socks.

The women weave on their traditional loom (*rachchh*) as well as frame loom (*khaddi*). Traditional Kullu weaves include tweeds, twills, and extra weft weave of traditional motifs. Kullvi Whims also supports hand spinning with *takli* and *charkha* as well as knitting and crocheting. Natural dyeing, a lost tradition, was also revived through workshops and training. Earlier, the women weavers and artisans used to produce only for their own consumption and local use and did not earn a livelihood from their craft. Kullvi Whims has made these women producers capable of using their own traditional creative skills to attract modern markets and consumers, leading to their income generation. Today, Kullvi Whims works with over 25 villages in Kullu Valley, with Naggar as the central hub. They started with nine weavers and now work with 100. Currently, their annual business size is ₹80 lakh, and the average income of the women weavers is ₹6,000-8,000/month. This has empowered women to contribute to their families and spend their income on their own terms. The initiative is working on rekindling the traditional ties between the local shepherds and the weavers, which had died due to acrylic yarns flooding the markets. Restoring the age-old use of indigenous wool (*desi oon*) is slowly improving the demand and value of local wool and is expected to contribute to the improved livelihood of these shepherds as well.

Kullvi Whims now provides a year-long engagement to the women weavers and artisans owing to its improved market and clientele. About 80% of their market consists of B2B from outside the country. B2C is carried out through exhibitions in winter in Delhi, Mumbai, and Jaipur. The organisation also conducts study, research, and craft tours, revitalising weaving and knitting tradition of the local women. It is a case study of immense value that adds to Naggar as a unique experiential tourism destination.

The brand story of Kullvi Whims is beautifully woven through the stories of the women weavers and the pastoral shepherds of the Himalayas who provide the sheep wool, thus creating a local value chain of pastoralists and traditional artisans focusing on strengthening a sustainable local economy. As put forward by Nisha, *'Our USP is the unique value chain of working from fleece to fabric, with indigenous Himalayan wool, providing transparency and value to every stakeholder in the supply chain, and promoting the brand through story-telling about the local, cultural, and natural heritage.'*

Kullvi Whims promotes slow craft processes that match the seasonal rhythms of the mountain life of the weavers/artisans. The pastoral tribe of the Himalayas, known as the *Gaddis* traverse the high-altitude Himalayan ranges and walk thousands of kilometres with their sheep to find rich pastures for them. The *Gaddis* supply the indigenous wool, which is naturally dyed with local flora, making every product an inherent component of the mountain life, conveying the story of their makers and their lifestyles. Kullvi Whims has diverse product collections and categories created to match the tastes of conscious consumers interested in good designs and eco-friendly products. These products include mufflers, stoles, shawls, jackets, ponchos, *pherans,* blankets, throws, and cushion covers. They also make knitted accessories. The motifs used in

these artisanal products have a distinctive identity. The iconic shawls from Kullu and Kinnaur and knit socks from Lahaul have all obtained Geographical Indications (GI).

Kullvi Whims essentially works towards building a strong design vocabulary supported by the inherent creativity of the weavers and artisans. A collaborative approach is always ensured through conversations with the women producers, which also involves researching and reviving older pieces, traditional designs, and techniques. Kullvi Whims' inspirations come from their magnificent surroundings, old heritage pieces, and elements from traditional attire like the *pattu* or *dhordo*, resulting in contemporary weaves and knits born from a traditional identity. Techniques and designs rooted in the place and people are celebrated with stories from the stage of handspun yarns to the final fabric or product.

To uphold and celebrate the traditional motifs and weaving heritage, Kullvi Whims recently collaborated with Gunjan Jain from Vriksh, a designer, to develop a new motif bank based on the stories of the women artisans of the community and their journey through time and seasons. This innovative motif bank has created a new design sensibility that can complement traditional designs to produce high-end premium fashion products. Kullvi Whims also has a space for transmitting and showcasing this intangible cultural heritage by their original keepers.

Kullvi Whims promotes a decentralised system of production where the weavers and artisans from different villages constitute the SHGs or informal producer groups. Each group has a leader who interacts with the weaving and knitting manager, who manages the overall distribution of work, quality checking, and inventory at the village and central levels in Naggar. They also have an operations head who manages logistics, couriers, and sourcing and procurement of all the spun yarn and woven pieces and ensures they reach the studio in Naggar. Although there were challenges of working capital, funding, and the seasonal nature of the work initially, Kullvi Whims attributes their success to building capacities at the local level, developing a market, and working on the values of sustainability – economic, social, and environmental.

Kullvi Whims recently earned substantial visibility and appreciation when their hand-spun and hand-woven products from indigenous Himalayan wool caught the fancy of the visitors at the G20 Summit in New Delhi. Bhrigu Acharya, co-founder of Kullvi Whims, stated, *'I am excited and very thankful to the Himachal government for providing an international platform like G20 for the propagation and sale of our products, which are drawing people. And, the sale of the products has been very encouraging.'*

Kullvi Whims embodies the principles of sustainable livelihoods, sustainable local value chains, and women's empowerment intertwined in a beautiful story of traditional culture with the local Himalayan landscape.

2) Looms of Ladakh, Ladakh

Looms of Ladakh is a luxury brand with a strong ethical foundation led by the herders and weavers of Ladakh. Their mission is to blend contemporary design with traditional crafts, empower weavers/artisans, inculcate values of sustainability, and promote sustainable practices to protect local cultural heritage. Situated at the intersection of design and heritage, Looms of Ladakh aims to set a standard for addressing ecological and ethical challenges in the global fashion industry.

In 2016, the District Administration Leh initiated a skill development project for women when G Prasanna, the then Deputy Commissioner of Leh, encountered a self-help group of women in the remote Chumur village. Impressed by their handmade woollen products and their entrepreneurial spirit, he sought ways to support them in generating sustainable incomes.

The idea of this venture emanated from the dichotomy between Pashmina or cashmere's fineness, making it one of the most expensive natural fabrics in the world, and the harsh lives of those who produce this rare fibre. On the Changthang plateau in the Himalayas, at altitudes well above 10,000 feet, life is still largely nomadic for the Changpas, the pastoralist nomads who rear and shear the Pashmina goats, sheep, and yak during the short-lived summer. It is integral to their way of life and is a culturally unique practice. Women immerse themselves in weaving and knitting during the cold, glacial season. Traditionally, the Changpas use 'nambu', their local fabric, a plain and twill weave made from sheep's wool. Nearly every item, from clothing to shoes, blankets, rugs, and even accessories for their horses, is handwoven. It is instantly recognisable by its textural quality, strong colours, and simple shapes. The best raw materials are sourced locally from nomads and frontier livestock-rearing communities of Ladakh, the exclusive suppliers of the world-famous Changthangi Pashmina, Bactrian camel wool, yak wool, and sheep wool.

In India, Pashmina is mainly procured from the All Changthang Pashmina Growers' Association, Leh. Only a small portion is used locally. Most of this GI tagged Ladakh Pashmina is sold to processors in Kashmir, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh. The contribution of Pashmina to the local economy

through direct sale of raw cashmere is estimated to be `10–12 crores and that of wool to be `2.50 crores. The total value of the Pashmina after being woven into shawls and other finished products is ₹200 crores (Shakyawar et al., 2013). The annual income of goat-rearing families from their flocks of Pashmina is ₹18,902 on an average (Wani, Wani, & Yusuf, 2009), while it is extremely labour-intensive and tough work. However, a good quality woven Pashmina shawl can easily fetch a price of ₹50,000 in the market.

Against this backdrop, the 'Looms of Ladakh' was conceived to support the local people with sustainable livelihoods. Its inception dates back to 2013, when Abhilasha Bahuguna noticed the declining interest among Pashmina weavers in Kashmir despite the high demand for Pashmina in the global Cashmere industry. So, in May 2017, the skilling project transformed into a cooperative movement, 'Looms of Ladakh', a federation of rural women from eight villages who aspired to do more with their new-found training. The core idea of setting up this enterprise was to change the perception of people about Ladakh as only a raw material supplier to a place that could also offer high-quality finished goods. Motivated to develop a local value chain in Pashmina and other woollen textile products to contribute to the socio-economic empowerment of the local communities, especially women, Bahuguna envisioned a model where weavers/artisans would have a meaningful involvement and ownership in the industry beyond just being suppliers of raw materials or wage earners.

Spinning and weaving have been the traditional skills of most rural Ladakhi women, passed on through generations. However, these local skills have never been linked to Pashmina for income generation despite being the land of raw Pashmina, a high-value textile fibre. The apparels or fabrics traditionally woven by the women artisans had been for their own consumption or some sporadic unplanned sale to any tourist visiting that area. Hence, the women of the local communities were unemployed, marginalised, and insignificant in the household and social hierarchy. The Looms of Ladakh Women Cooperative Ltd. was, thus, formulated to empower the local women by professionalising their traditional spinning and weaving skills and creating a local enterprise producing finished Pashmina and other woollen weaves and knits that could generate dignified income for the women. They aimed to work with local wool of Ladakh including Pashmina, sheep wool, and yak wool available across Leh and Kargil districts.

To endow women with market-oriented skills, the initiative brought together 120 uneducated, unemployed women from different and distant villages to train and unite them into a cooperative society. An integrated approach was undertaken involving various steps of skill development, design development, capacity building of the women in production planning, marketing, and financial management. The initiative also established forward and backward linkages for the organisation. By March 2017, 120 women from eight villages in Leh could design and create high-end finished goods out of raw Pashmina, yak, and sheep wool. The Looms of Ladakh, with its 148 members and eight production centres got registered as a cooperative on '19 May 2017'. Four women from this cooperative are Master Weavers, capable of imparting weaving and knitting training to other community members. They can also manage and run their own business, including marketing, thus, demonstrating confidence and leadership. The major income is derived from their Pashmina products, followed by sheep wool products. The retail outlet/showroom in Leh is the main conduit for the sales operations of the cooperative. The cooperative is expected to be steered by an organised workforce of skilled women capable of producing and marketing their products directly and realising economies of scale.

Looms of Ladakh is considered to be the first of its kind in Ladakh, as previously, there was no such large livelihood-generating professional women's organisation. This venture could successfully showcase that organised production and marketing of Pashmina and woollen handicraft and handloom products can be a viable industry, providing livelihood to women in remote locations of Leh.

The enterprise echoes the journey from farm to fashion. Looms of Ladakh has evolved into an all-woman producer organisation that showcases their rich heritage and weaving skills in the form of designer products made of Pashmina, yak, sheep, and camel wools. The product base of this local value chain also incorporates traceability. During the harsh winter months of December to February each year, Looms of Ladakh ensures that the women are provided sufficient work to tide over the tough times.

The organisation started with just 120 weavers, and currently, has 600 members from 25 villages. The operations of the Cooperative are led by four elected weaver/artisan leaders, 2 local graduate professionals, 1 Design Head, and 1 Founder Director. Regular elections are held for the management positions and all compliances are fulfilled regularly. Their annual business is currently about ₹40 lakhs. According to the founders, their USP includes *'Higher value activities in a raw material economy, establishing the cooperative as a business, and traceability to the free grazing goat so*

that the effort is on building niche items instead of mass- produced products.'

Looms of Ladakh operates through a three-pronged strategy focusing on natural dyes processed from walnut peels, marigold flowers, tree bark, and mountain stones. They set up a value chain and augment income by providing resources and training and build staff capacities on operational matters like accounting, merchandising, and computer-based operations. Their product lines consist of wovens, apparels, and knits. Interventions in design and product development, along with simultaneous skill enhancement, and improving production systems have been the key factors for their growth.

Looms of Ladakh initially contributed to a seasonal business. However, with improved markets, it works for almost 10 months in a year. Out of ₹34 lakhs sales in 2022-23, ₹17 lakhs went to the members for production. It has come a long way in business sustainability from the initial pilot sales of ₹2 lakhs. One-third of the revenue generated is distributed among the women members; 40% is spent on procuring raw wool, which is again done by the women; and the rest is used to manage the enterprise. Members involved with spinning and knitting now earn ₹3,000 a month, while those in weaving, natural dyeing, and tailoring earn up to ₹ 18,000 a month. The sales have surged to ₹42 lakh in the first ten months of 2023-24. The monthly consumption of Pashmina skyrocketed from 7 kg in 2021 to 52 kg in 2022, signalling a robust business turnover. Moreover, local wool consumption tripled during the same period. All the office bearers of the cooperative are elected by the members every three years. This makes the cooperative-based fashion brand a democratic institution. The elected office bearers are supported by professionals—founder director Abhilasha Bahuguna, designer Nishant Raj and graduates Amina Bano and Padma Tashi, a young Changpa.

It would be the first venture of its kind where weavers take home 50% of the profits, while the rest is used for buying raw materials, maintaining inventories, upgrading skills, and paying salaries. This achievement is the result of more than six years of continuous hand-holding. Looms of Ladakh is also a tribute to the spirit of cooperation as it brought together stakeholders from diverse backgrounds who pooled their energies, going well beyond official mandates, to set up a brand that has made its mark in the international arena.

The Cooperative has also considered the well-being and management of the women members. To that effect, it has created a fund into which a certain percentage of the monthly sales income is transferred. This fund is supposed to provide a basic safety net for meeting members' unforeseen health expenses and their children's educational expenses. Advances are in the form of in-house soft loans, for which the entire village producer group of the individual borrower is treated as a guarantor. Thus, the repayment of loans is guaranteed by the involvement of the entire group, as this provides a disincentive to default. Women members of the Cooperative have also been linked to the Government of India's Handloom Weavers' Comprehensive Welfare Scheme.

In the initial years, there were difficulties in forming and funding cooperatives due to local resistance. However, the government provided grants to overcome these challenges. By effectively mobilising members, encouraging them to take ownership of the development process, and promoting an entrepreneurial mindset,, the venture has become a success.

The empowered and resilient women of Looms of Ladakh have made tremendous contributions towards developing and strengthening of a sustainable economy with democratic ownership of their businesses in Ladakh. It has contributed to reducing out-migration to nearby urban places, thus reducing pressure on cities and environmental degradation. The local rural economy is designed to be inclusive and sustainable. The handloom and handicrafts-based livelihoods have also fostered a sense of dignity of work, strengthening the social fabric of the communities, and enabling the local culture to thrive.

3) Karghewale, Madhya Pradesh

Karghewale, based in Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh, is a brand comprising two organisations: Loomers India Pvt. Ltd. and Karuka Foundation. Sourodip Ghosh and Nivedita Rai established Loomers India Pvt. Ltd. in 2020 and Karuka Foundation in 2022. They availed support from the government's Startup India Seed Fund Scheme for their venture.

Karghewale works with weaver-entrepreneurs from four states of India: Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, and Bihar. The weavers use a variety of materials, including organic BT cotton, indigenous Kala cotton, merino and indigenous wool, mulberry silk, linen, some hemp, and rougher silks such as matka, muga, handspun tussar, and eri to create handwoven textiles. They employ multiple techniques, such as multi-shaft textured weaves, dobby, and jacquard extra warp weaves, and a range of extra-weft techniques such as Kutchi, Jamdani, Jaala-palla, Tangaliya, etc. The textiles vary in weights, ranging from finer muslins of Bengal and fine silk and silk-cotton textiles of Madhya Pradesh to mid-weight textiles of Kutch to heavier multi-

shaft weaves from Bihar. What started as a small enterprise with ten weavers has swiftly grown today into 100+ weavers with an annual business size of about ₹40 lakhs. At present, Karghewale has 26 active artisan-incubatees onboard from four states of India who've spent about two years in the programme. From a baseline income of about ₹5,000-6,000/month as hand-weaving wage-workers, the weaver-entrepreneurs working with Karghewale now earn an average of ₹25,000/month. Each of these entrepreneurs has partnered with two peer artisans on an average in their creative enterprises, who earn about ₹8,500 per month. The enterprises founded by them have achieved an average monthly revenue rate of ₹50,000. Through their work, the weaver/artisan entrepreneurs are impacting 300+ lives in their communities. As their enterprises grow, they create opportunities for more peer artisans. This number is projected to reach 1,000 within a year. Till date, Karghewale has sold more than 25,000 units of artisan-designed fabrics, with lifetime sales of around ₹2 crores since 'April 2021'. Their current monthly revenue rate is around ₹8.5 lakhs. It has B2B clients in more than seven countries, and was operating at a break even till the end of the last fiscal year.

Their product mix includes customised handwoven yardages for apparel and home linen, apparel accessories such as stoles, wraps, throws, scarves and dupattas, and home accessories such as tableware, kitchenware, and homeware. The weavings across the four states are part of traditional practices continued through generations. The founding context of Karghewale was their concern about the poorly remunerated weavers and artisans producing handwoven textile crafts in India, despite a growing global demand for handwoven textiles and sustenance of the rich heritage associated with them. The strong weaver community of India, consisting of millions of weavers and artisans, still struggles with subsistence-level incomes, seemingly impervious to all favourable demand conditions, leading to the attrition of a million artisans every decade.

When the textile crafts of India first originated centuries ago as area-centric, sustainable vocations, their value chains were simple, and the weavers/artisans themselves constituted the centre of both design and implementation. These value chains have at present evolved into organised handmade manufacturing-based 'interventions', a model where institutions seek to manufacture craft products by 'employing' artisans in a semblance of an assembly line. Handmade manufacturing, in principle, considers 'design' and 'execution' as distinct functions to be assigned to separate stakeholders. Ironically, in the implementation of this principle, the institution, being the market-facing entity, chooses to retain control of design, while the group that gets tasked with the execution (but not the design) of the textile are the weavers and artisans. This separation of 'design' from 'execution' severely curtails the creative agency of weavers and artisans. Karghewale believes that 'design' is the intellectual means of production in traditional crafts, the ownership of which once lay solely with the actual producers, which made them artists. Curtailing this creative agency, however, implies that the weaver/artisan is now simply an individual who labours to produce textiles using these intellectual means of production that they no longer own. This class reassignment of weavers/artisans into handmade manufacturing (HMM) manifests in two ways. First, a diminishing of their status from that of an artist with full creative control to that of a hand-worker who merely trades their labour in carrying out the physical act of weaving. Second, a stunting of their incomes, since the weaver/artisan is now remunerated not for their creativity (i.e., by an artist's standard) but only for their labour. HMM-based models at present make up more than 95% of all textile craft interventions, resulting in the perceived lack of dignity among the weavers/artisans and a reticence amongst young weavers/artisans to continue practising the traditional occupation as it is not attractive anymore.

Karghewale positions itself, in this context, as an alternative to the HMM model in crafts even though they realise that they are playing the role of an intermediary or an agent by structure. However, they consider themselves as more of an 'ideal agent', to ensure that the pitfalls of HMM are avoided. In the words of the founders, *'We define the ideal creative craft agent as one that facilitates the exchange of value at two levels without seizing control of the intellectual means of production. First, they must bridge the information asymmetry between shifting global trends and traditional skills of artisans (i.e., facilitate the exchange of value in terms of market feedback). Secondly, they must assume the responsibility of bringing the products of designer-makers to the right market on their behalf, as needed, thereby facilitating exchange of value in terms of monetary returns.'*

An incubator of artisan-promoted microenterprises, Karghewale identifies promising weavers and offers them engagement in a three-year incubation programme to help them transition from hand-workers to creative entrepreneurs. The programme begins with a design based on the belief that enterprise development remains untenable without control of the intellectual means of production. Artisan-incubatees are first encouraged to reclaim their creative agency by finding their own design language and identity

and creating their own bespoke handwoven textile collection. Subsequently, Karghewale helps creative entrepreneurs bring their self-designed textiles to the right markets at both domestic and international levels. This becomes an iterative process with Karghewale relaying market feedback to its artisan-incubatees, and the latter using that feedback to continue to bring design innovations, as needed. The incubation programme is powered by a layer of six shared services, viz. linkages, raw material access, technology for business, accounts and MIS, legal services, finance, and trend and design forecast. As the incubatee spends more time in the programme, their design sensibilities get more and more market-tested, and within 9-12 months of incubation the weaver-entrepreneur is ready with a strong and stable catalogue of handwoven textiles that not only represents their design language but also finds markets of an active clientele. As these enterprises start growing, they generate a stable monthly revenue and establish their own creative identity. However, Karghewale also faced the primary challenge of balancing the creative agency of artisans with the market needs; maintaining that balance has been the key driver of success.

The organisation ensures market outreach through its B2B marketplace, Karghewale.com, enabling buyer linkages for the textiles designed by its artisan-incubatees. In fact, their primary revenue stream comes from the artisan-designed fabrics that are sourced for sale during and after active incubation, with a 32% markup on artisan prices. The primary marketing channels are email marketing, social media marketing, direct marketing through buyer-seller meets and trade shows, B2B e-marketplace, and referrals.

Karghewale offers full-stack handwoven textile sourcing solutions (from concept to cost-effective design, from sourcing and process documentation to upstream value-addition) to sustainability-conscious brands, manufacturers, and retailers worldwide. They promote their partnerships with the artisan communities, which forms the foundation of revolutionising bulk sourcing by the target markets through a more seamless, transparent, and efficient production and business process. According to the founders, Karghewale is *'a one-stop shop for all things handloom.'* With the help of its wide network of weavers across 12 major states, Karghewale also possesses the ability to offer bespoke textiles using different weaving techniques from these 12 states effectively by understanding and matching client requirements with the right weaving processes to ensure quality and cost-effective production. Karghewale operates in the global sustainable textiles and lifestyle market – a market that is growing fast and is at present valued at USD 50 billion. The customers can enjoy services of integrated design consultancy, live video sessions, and photography and videography to stay updated with the work and the weaving process, which establishes transparency and promotes the authenticity of the weave/craft. Such offerings are delivered to the clients through Karghewale's website, social media handles, and quarterly newsletters.

Karghewale contributes towards sustainable livelihoods of the weaver/artisan communities and upholds the creative identity of the weavers, which is fundamental to ensuring their dignity of work and overall community well-being.

4) Rangsutra, New Delhi

Rangsutra Crafts India Ltd (RCIL) is a community-owned, Public Limited Company started in 2006 by Sumita Ghose along with a thousand artisans from three URMUL organisations. In its formative years, a group comprising artisans, designers, socia

l workers, and angel investors came together to develop Rangsutra. Rangsutra was established with the goal of creating a community/artisan-owned social enterprise ensuring sustainable livelihoods for rural artisans, most of whom are women. Ownership/ leadership/ accountability are the key principles of this model, starting with the management team, producer groups, and the artisans. Leveraging traditional craft skills in hand embroidery, handloom, and pit loom weaving, the company has evolved to create contemporary products, expand its capabilities, and forge new alliances while maintaining a grounded approach.

The organisation works with different types of handloom traditions of India, including plain handloom weaving and extra weft Pit loom weaving using cotton and wool in Bikaner, Pokhran, Phalodi, and Barmer in Rajasthan. In J&K, Rangsutra works in Bandipora with wool and Pashmina using handloom and Kani weaving techniques. They also work with handloom weavers weaving cotton in Amroha, UP. Rangsutra started its journey with 50 weavers, while today, it works with 197 weavers, of which 194 are handlooms and 3 are solar-powered looms. Their annual business size is ₹35 crores, which includes mostly handwoven products and some amount of powerloom/solar power loom/ mill fabric with hand embroidery, tie and dye, and applique.

The average income of the weavers ranges from ₹8,000 to ₹15,000 per month or ₹1.5-2 lakhs annually. Today, Rangsutra works with 2,500 weavers and artisans across India. The weavers mostly work full-time except for the months of October, November, and December, during which they remain busy with harvesting, marriages, and festivals like Dusshera

and Diwali. Currently, 2,000 skilled artisans work full-time (5-8 hours a day and 5-6 days a week) with Rangsutra.

Rangsutra's product categories and collections include home furnishings (cushion covers, throws, runners, towels, *dhurries,* etc.), women's and men's garments (Indian and Western wear) like stoles and sarees, and accessories such as bags. The company essentially undertakes a collaborative approach where products are co-created with each weaver/ artisan cluster aligned to the producers' skills and strengths, and as per the expectations of Rangsutra's main market segments—D2C-direct retail, B2B domestic, and B2B exports.

Rangsutra has specific strategies for developing skills, designs, and products across different clusters and weaving communities. Various trainings are conducted to upgrade skills and ensure good-quality products. The type of training to be imparted is decided based on the cluster's maturity and the market demands. Skill upgradation and product development trainings are conducted for clusters new to their system. The clusters working regularly with Rangsutra receive on-the-job trainings for introducing new products, skills, and techniques as and when required.

Rangsutra invests in building a strong resilient value chain and capacities of the weavers/ artisans for product development, production management, quality control, and record keeping to ensure traceability and accountability at all stages of the value chain, responsible sourcing of raw material, and village-based handloom production centres. The centres are equipped with looms, warping machines, etc. Weavers come to these centres in the morning around 9 am and weave till 5 pm. It has been found through long years of experience that this kind of a centralised production, close to the weavers' homes, gives better results than home-based weaving, leading to timely production and quality control. Weavers can also learn from and help one another. Safety measures are in place in these centres to prevent accidents, an important requirement for larger brands and international buyers. Pattern making, raw materials purchasing, and yarn dyeing are done centrally at the clusters, whereas the fabric is woven in different villages.

Rangsutra's brand story is based on its model of a community/artisan-owned company, which works towards the economic development of the larger weaving and artisan communities, focusing on women. This philosophy has greatly increased Rangsutra's brand value and given it a unique USP. Its USP as a grassroots, community-led venture ensuring women's empowerment with ethical trade and highly aesthetic sensibilities, emphasises that the means and processes of production and the conditions of the producers are as important as the end product.

RCIL envisions becoming a globally significant community-owned handmade crafts company delivering ethically made, environmentally-friendly products and creating value for all its stakeholders. Rangsutra offers equal pay, fair wages, a safe working environment, and skills training to 2,500 artisans, impacting about 20,000 lives. Rangsutra ensures regular opportunities for these women by collaborating with big market players like Fabindia and IKEA, building their confidence and capacity to cater to a global clientele.

What sets RCIL apart is its relentless efforts to uphold the principle of *'Respect for All'* – the producer and customer, promote active participation of the artisan shareholders as both producers and decision-makers, and ensure fair trade practices in a safe and healthy working environment. Fostering inclusive growth and bridging the gap between tradition and modernity has been the central principle of Rangsutra.

Rangsutra is a phenomenal story of rural women's empowerment and well-being through the professionalisation of traditional skills and teaching of new skills required to run a 21st-century crafts enterprise. The focus is on developing the women's own traditional habitats as spaces of creative, social, and economic progress.

5) Creative Bee, Telangana

Creative Bee was founded by Bina Rao and Keshav Rao in 1995 as a for-profit social enterprise working in the handloom and handicrafts sector. The company started as a design consultancy and later expanded to production of designer textiles with a focus on empowering rural artisans. For this purpose, it also started a not-for-profit arm for building capacities of the weavers/artisans. Their business model encompasses both retail and export activities. Creative Bee focuses on a B2B business model in India and abroad, and a shop-in-shop model in a few Indian cities (Kochi and Goa). It also has a retail store in Hyderabad. Their first project was for Cooperative Societies with the Indian government in Kallur and Yemmiganur, Andhra Pradesh. They began over three decades ago by collectivising small groups of weavers, modifying their looms for high-quality weaving, training weavers in product diversification, and establishing working relations with many weaver groups across Andhra Pradesh. Since then, they have expanded their operations. To complement these unique local weaves and make their products 100% natural, Kesav Rao established a natural dye farm in Ghatkesar where families of artisans of block printers and dyers live and work

for over two decades. Additionally, women from the nearby villages come to work at the farm to earn a daily wage for non-skill work.

Creative Bee focuses on design and robust supply chain for enabling business. Hence, providing extensive training support for the producers has been fundamental to their work. All the training for skill-upgradation, design development, weaving, natural dyeing, etc. are carried out under their non-profit arm, the Creative Bee Foundation. Creative Bee works with about 39 producer groups across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. From about 8-10 looms initially, it now engages about 200 looms and ancillary workers such as dyers, spinners, pre- and post-loom workers. In addition to training the weavers/artisans, Creative Bee ensures a supply of quality yarns to the weavers. It also provides the designs and technical spec sheets. Creative Bee undertakes upgradation of looms that are owned by the weavers to improve production quality. Instead of scaling operations, it believes in offering high-quality design and product to its clientele through in-depth attention towards the crafts and the craft producers. Thus, it has not adopted an aggressive marketing policy but still manages to grow 10% year-on-year organically. Its client base has increased by 30% in the past ten years. The knowledge division of Creative Bee has grown 50% since it started taking up professional and technical projects from the United Nations, ITC, SITA, UNDP, etc.

Creative Bee analyses market trends and works with the artisans to produce different kinds of textiles adopting a hub-and-spoke model. Basic production is done by the weavers/artisans at their homes using handlooms but these are finished in the centralised dyeing facility owned by the enterprise. The company pays 15% higher wages to its weavers/artisans, as compared to village norms, based on the understanding with the artisans that they will deliver premium quality products. Creative Bee also has a constructive way of dealing with artisans who are unable to meet their set quality standards. Instead of rejecting those products outright, which would weaken the morale of the artisans, it uses the defective materials to create other products in association with different NGOs, thus avoiding wastage of the materials and the artisan's efforts.

Creative Bee's establishment of an in-house research and development facility and a dye production unit have contributed to its cutting-edge global quality and design standards. Creative Bee has developed this unit in the form of a natural dye farm where dyeing, printing, and R&D are done. The focus of the farm is on natural dyeing of yarns and cloth. Thus it has trees and plants that provide ingredients for natural dyes, which are extracted from fruits, bark, roots, flowers, leaves, and minerals. The farm is also a base for continuous research and development of colours. Artisans and their families live and work on the farm. Among them are artisans who handcraft special wooden hand-blocks for hand-block printing of fabrics using natural dyes. With this unique set-up, Creative Bee has been able to establish ten different techniques of resist-dyeing with natural dyes and batik by combining hand-block printing of wax and painting with wax. The team collaborates with clients for customised designs with natural dyes on natural-fibre fabrics. Yarns dyed on the farm are woven by traditional handloom weavers in the village clusters as required by the clients. The company provides accommodation and supports the education of the children of its dye-farm workers. As a result of their integrative approach, Creative Bee has been able to compete with exporters from Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia in the global markets.

Creative Bee's products are handwoven using hand-spun natural fibres such as cotton, linen, mulberry silk, tussar, gicha, noile, etc. Their products include premium quality fabrics, garments, accessories, home furnishings, and home décor. It designs seasonal collections for top fashion and lifestyle brands of India. It offers end-to-end white label production for various brands while customising pattern, design, colourways and texture as per brand requirements. It also exports to various countries across the globe, including the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Turkey, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Australia. Additionally, it has recently initiated online sales of its products through its own portal.

In addition to the markets and the buyers that Creative Bee caters to, they have also linked a large number of trained weavers/artisans from their projects directly with buyers, stores and e-commerce channels so that they can generate their own businesses. It has also facilitated collectivising artisan producer groups and linking them with financial institutions.

Bina Rao's recent initiative, Kabir, addresses the challenges faced by weavers. Initially drawing support from the government, she has shifted focus towards engaging with CSR initiatives and private entities supporting handloom activities. Notably, Bina Rao led the UN's Disha project, impacting 2,000 women weavers across seven remote villages in Nalgonda. This project kickstarted the cluster development model in an area where cooperative societies were non-functional.

Creative Bee tackles issues such as lack of working capital and issues with government schemes like Mudra Yojana. They have adopted a workshop based model and engage in capacity-building exercises with women weavers, covering marketing, pricing,

design, exhibitions, quality control, and more. Managers, typically 10th pass and from the weaving community, oversee operations.

The adoption of the MACS (Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies) model is pivotal to their work. Creative Bee has established two such societies, one in Puttapaka with 150 members and another in Koyalgudem with 50 members, with the latter proving to be a successful business model. Apart from the UNDP project, Creative Bee has received support from Singapore, including infrastructure assistance for women weavers. Collaborations with Tata for computer donations and a government grant of Rs 65 lakhs further bolstered their initiatives, facilitating the setup of 30 looms and other essential infrastructure.

Creative Bee's operational philosophy revolves around decentralization, empowering local communities and weaving a sustainable future for handloom artisans.

II. Community-led traditional businesses

This section delves into case studies of individual weaver entrepreneurs, weaver cooperatives and societies, presenting briefly the socio-cultural context of these weaving traditions, their on-ground situation in terms of employment/business/income, and the multifarious challenges that exist, often pushing them to the edge of survival. Yet, their resilience and grit seem commendable.

1) Puttapaka Weaving, Telangana

Puttapaka Ikat weaving is about a 200-year-old traditional handcrafted textile tradition. Puttapaka village in Nalgonda district of Telangana is a historically famous village centre for its Ikat weaving. Pochampally, Puttapaka, and Choutuppal in Nalgonda are in fact known as the home of most skilled weavers/artisans of Ikat dyeing and weaving. The weavers here specialise in the production of silk and cotton sarees, shirting material, bedding and furnishings of single warp, weft or double Ikat.

Ikat or Ikkat is a dyeing technique used to pattern textiles that employs resist dyeing on the yarns prior to weaving the fabric. Ikat techniques include single Ikat and double Ikat. In the single Ikat method, either the warp or the weft is tied and dyed with different colours so as to create patterns. In case of double Ikat, both the warp and the weft are resist-dyed prior to weaving. The warp design requires linear tying of the silk yarn strands, which focuses on symmetry without undermining aesthetics. Ikat is a highly specialised weaving process with double Ikat being the most difficult to make and also the most expensive. Double Ikat is believed to be produced only in three countries: India, Japan, and Indonesia. The labour-intensive double Ikat is Puttapaka's strength. Telia Rumal made in Puttapaka is a unique tie and dye technique that uses oil for the treatment of the yarn, which helps it retain softness and has a distinct smell of the oil. It was awarded with a GI tag.

Ikat weaving involves a tedious process. Before the weaving is done, a manual winding of yarn, called *asu,* needs to be performed. This process takes up to five hours per saree and is usually done by the womenfolk, who often suffer physical strain through constantly moving their hands back and forth thousands of times for each saree. In 1999, a young weaver, C Mallesham developed a machine that automated the *asu,* thus developing a technological solution for a decades-old unsolved problem.

Puttapaka is about 70 km from Hyderabad, with a population of 4,606 (2011 Population Census) and a literacy rate of 68.9%. Weaving is one of the most practised professions, although the tradition of double Ikat weaving is almost dying here. Currently, only a few weavers in Puttapaka village know how to make double Ikat. For those engaged in weaving, it is usually a full-time activity with most of the family members involved in the craft. Puttapaka weaves are characterised by simple geometric designs, multi-coloured patterns, stripes, and chevron patterns. The beauty of Puttapaka Ikat lies in the precision required in the alignment of the dyed thread throughout the weaving.

The community of weavers in Puttapaka belong to the Padmasali caste. The term 'Padmasali' is derived from two words *Padma* and *Sali*. *Padma* means lotus, and *Sali* means weaver. According to their mythology, when they took to weaving, the first clothes they wove were from the fibres of the lotus stem; hence, they came to be known as *Padmasalis*.

Satyam, a skilled traditional master weaver of Ikat resides in Puttapaka village. He specialises in weaving single and double Ikat products, primarily sarees and *dupattas*. He owns four looms, three in Puttapaka village and one in Hyderabad, rented out to a migrant family. The design process includes utilising old designs for inspiration and recreating them in Photoshop and other design software. Puttapaka weavers typically use pure silk or a mix of silk cotton yarns for weaving. Being a very complex process, the production timeline of Ikat weaving varies depending on the intricacies of the design. Simple designs in double Ikat take approximately 45 days, while more intricate designs may require up to two months. Single Ikat weaving involves 4 to 5 individuals and requires a minimum order of two sarees, while double Ikat involving 4-5 people requires a minimum order of at least 10 sarees. Weavers in Puttapaka village use both frame and pit looms and work typically eight to ten hours a day. According to Satyam, there are about 600 weavers in the village capable of weaving single Ikat sarees

and only 10% are proficient in weaving double Ikat. Weaver wages range from ₹2,500 to ₹3,000 per saree for single Ikat and ₹5,000 to ₹6,500 per saree for double Ikat. The threat of powerlooms is relatively lower as powerlooms can replicate single Ikat designs but not double Ikat; powerlooms cannot create designs in weft.

Ikat does not have a year-long market; the best-selling seasons are Diwali and the marriage season. The main market for these village weavers is Bhoodan Pochampally, where a single Ikat saree sells for ₹9000 each and a double Ikat saree for ₹30,000 each, fetching a margin of approximately ₹2000 per saree for the Master Weaver. The sarees are further supplied from Bhoodan Pochampally to retailers in Dilsukh Nagar in Hyderabad, a well-known hub of Ikat weaves.

Satyam stated that support in terms of capital and marketing is crucial for the sustainability of the weaving community. They have never availed of any government schemes because they are not aware of them. The woven Ikat has attracted noted Indian designers who continue to create high fashion collections targeted at national and global customers. Several smaller independent labels and initiatives have also introduced new weave designs over the last decade. Some of them design contemporary clothing out of artisanal Ikat textiles. Also, the fabric's gender-neutral appeal is a factor behind its sustained popularity across mediums. Apart from basic fabrics and designer garments, Ikat craft is also being used to produce contemporary items such as handbags and footwear. Government and non-government organisations (NGOs) along with cluster development initiatives are believed to be contributing to the continuity of this craft and the traditional makers. Even then, new generations are not joining the craft and are leaving the village for high-salaried corporate jobs.

2) Fulia Weaving, West Bengal

Fulia, about 90 km from Kolkata, in the Nadia district of West Bengal, has a 500-year-old weaving tradition. It is famous for its Tangail sarees woven in silk and cotton, and Jamdani sarees. After partition and the Bangladesh riots, many weavers from present-day Bangladesh crossed the border to settle down and set up looms in the small towns of Shantipur and Fulia along with many others in Nadia district. Gradually, both Shantipur and Fulia became the hub of handloom weaving. According to the 2011 Census of India, Fulia had a total population of 55,653 and a literacy rate of 81.9%. At its peak in the early 2000s, Fulia had nearly 75,000 looms, however, the looms are less than 20,000 now as the industry faced an economic downturn after the early 2000s. Powerlooms also pose a great threat to the handlooms of this region and control a large share of the domestic markets, thus replacing handlooms significantly.

The village of Fulia Dibyadanga in Shantipur, Nadia district, West Bengal is a cluster of Rajbonshi handloom weavers. In the past, there were about 3 lakh weavers, when the handloom industry was very vibrant, however, today only 20,000 active weavers are active due to the business not thriving like before. These numbers have reduced over the last few decades according to a young weaver, Sanjit Rajbonshi. He is a traditional weaver who has learned weaving from his father Shashadhar Rajbonshi. The entire family is engaged in weaving and sells their products to the *mahajan*/ local trader, primarily on an order basis. According to Sanjit, their sarees have the maximum demand followed by yardage/ running fabric, stoles, and *dupattas*. The Fulia weavers are so highly skilled that they usually do their own card punching at home. They also have home-based dyeing facilities, and the respective weaver families do the dyeing. Some of the weavers of this village were also found to fulfill orders of *mahajans* from Assam producing mekhela chador while others were weaving honeycomb towels.

The weavers traditionally weave Tangail, a single piece of which can be completed in two days. For mixed yarns, the wage is about ₹800 to ₹900 per piece, and for pure cotton (60/40 counts), the wage is about ₹1,200 to ₹1,500 per piece. Jamdani weaves, which are the traditional specialty of the region, take an average 15 days to a month to complete. The average wage for a silk Jamdani saree of standard design is ₹4,000 per piece. For a more complex design, the wages are ₹12,000 per piece. The final market prices of these sarees range between ₹12,000 to ₹18,000 for the former and ₹27,000 to ₹35,000 for the latter, which the *mahajans* or the retailers earn. The overall living conditions of the smaller weavers are not good, and they work very hard to make both ends meet. Ranjit's family, for example, has an income of a little more than ₹2 lakh per annum from weaving. Hence, the younger generations are engaged in other occupations and businesses, thus leading to a decline in the number of weavers and skills.

There are six societies of weavers in Fulia, each having 200-400 members. These societies are more than 40-50 years old. One of the societies carrying forward the traditional weaving industry of Fulia is Pareshnathpur Bandhab Cooperative Weavers Society Ltd. It has 213 members and was registered in 1958. The Society sources yarns in bulk through the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) scheme, which provides for subsidies on yarn prices and transport costs. The yarn is received within 15 days to 1 month. While the standard yarns are sourced from the government, other new varieties of yarns are sourced from the local markets. Khadi yarns are sourced from their neighbouring district

of Murshidabad. The Society produces its own stock and weaves specific products on order basis such as yardage, towels, table runners, and sarees. The buyers who procure on order are spread across Delhi, Pune, and South India. These clients have their own retailers or are exporters. In addition to fulfilling orders, the Society participates in exhibitions and fairs with their own stock. The annual revenue of the Society is ₹2 crores. A specific issue that the Society struggles with is the receipt of the subsidy, which is transferred to its account much later, post purchase of the yarns. Hence, the subsidy benefit is not fully realised as the Society's cash flow for regular work gets affected. Even though they require working capital and loans for risk management, the interest rates seem too high for them, especially for a smaller amount of loan such as ₹20-22 lakh (about 11% interest). There are 2 dyeing units in this village that were established with a government grant of ₹70-80 lakhs. The unit is equipped with machines and infrastructure. However, it remains defunct as the societies do not have enough markets and revenue to support and run these dyeing units themselves. They have also received work sheds and looms under government schemes, but many of those were either not properly customised to the weavers' needs, or were of poor quality, leading to wastage and almost no benefits. The government has also tried to introduce technological innovations, such as the Boota machine, designed to reduce leg pressure and the drudgery of the weavers. Two such machines were given to the Society and trainings were also done. However, it is not very clear as to how much these machines have benefitted the weavers.

They use the Handloom Mark tags for which they send requisition to the Textile Committee. however, even on a request for 6,000-10,000 pieces of tags (say), only 2,000 pieces are received. The India Handloom Brand (IHB) tag was used by the Society only twice because they stopped receiving the IHB tags. The market facilitation activities include orders from Biswa Bangla, whose order sizes have reduced at present, and buyer camps by Tantuj before Durga puja, which are quite lucrative. They are also connected to some international buyers through private channels. They avail the Swasthya Sathi scheme of the Government of West Bengal. They used to receive a marketing incentive of 5% from the central government and 5% from the state government over annual sales of the Society, which were quite beneficial, but those stopped after 2018.

3) Sualkuchi Weaving, Assam

Sualkuchi, often referred to as the 'Manchester of Assam', is renowned for its vibrant handloom industry. Located 35 km from Guwahati, on the banks of the Brahmaputra river in Assam, Sualkuchi is a hub for traditional Assamese silk weaving, particularly famous for its production of Muga silk and Eri silk. The total population of Sualkuchi is 13,898 (2011 Census), and the literacy rate is 93%. The town has numerous handloom weaving units where skilled artisans create exquisite sarees, mekhela chadors, and other traditional garments, showcasing intricate designs and patterns reflective of Assamese culture. The craftsmanship of Sualkuchi weavers historically earned global recognition, making it a significant cultural and economic centre in the region in the past, attracting visitors and buyers alike. In Sualkuchi both men and women participate in weaving, unlike other parts of Assam where weaving is considered predominantly a female engagement.

Barnali Handloom Producer Company Limited, a private entity set up in Kamrup, was incorporated on '24 August 2020', with the facilitation of the Directorate of Handloom and Textiles, Government of Assam. It consists of 5 Directors, 5 Producers, and approximately 500 weaver members. It is one of the ten handloom producer companies in Assam, with an authorised share capital of ₹15,00,000 and a paid-up capital of ₹1,00,000. It primarily manufactures mekhela chador.

Out of the 500 affiliated weavers, 70% are Master Weavers. The company procures its yarn from NHDC at subsidised rates and provides it to the weavers without any markup. It procures about 6 kg of yarn at a time, which takes about 3-6 months to be delivered. It also sources silk from Bangalore. The finished products woven by the producer company are subsequently marketed locally to the hawkers who then sell those to the buyers. These hawker-agents provide them with designs and orders. A mekhela chador set takes around 5 days to 1 month to weave depending on the designs and the types of yarns used. The weavers are paid ₹200 to ₹600 per day based on their skill level. The wages for a mekhela chador set may range from ₹1,000 for a small cotton buti design to ₹20,000 for a silk mekhela chador set with intricate motifs and designs. The final products are sold to the hawker with a profit margin of ₹500-600. The hawkers sell those at a profit of 30-40%. The producer company also weaves sarees on order where wages are around ₹1,400 for simple sarees with increasing wages for costly yarns such as mulberry silk. The profit margin is 5-10% in the case of sarees,. The weaver entrepreneurs attached to the producer company earn, on average, ₹6,000 per month (which includes raw material expenses). Deepa Kakoty is a successful entrepreneur and a member of this producer company who started with only two looms, 20 years ago. Today, she owns 17 looms, designs her own products, and sells those to the agents. With her current production capacity, she can produce 50-60 sets of mekhela chador per month, which have a

continuous market. According to Bipul Das, CEO of the Producer Company, the latter has around 15-20 weaver entrepreneurs like Deepa.

The annual business of the producer company is about ₹50-60 lakhs. Profits generated by the producer company are allocated towards operational costs, with the surplus distributed as dividends among the shareholders. Recently, the company has expanded its reach by participating in nationwide exhibitions. The producer company also conducts technical workshops on skill upgradation and dyeing, along with financial literacy camps.

III. NGO-led initiatives

The following section presents successful and exemplary initiatives of NGOs working with grassroots weavers and artisans, protecting their craft and uplifting their livelihoods. These case studies uphold the importance and contribution of a facilitating organisation in building and strengthening an enabling ecosystem for the artisan communities of rural India.

1) Weaving Entrepreneurship in Bhujodi village under Khamir's initiative, Gujarat

Bhujodi is a traditional weavers' village in the Bhuj region of Kachchh district, Gujarat. Bhujodi is one of the centres of traditional weaving of 'Kachchhi' shawls, traditional blankets, and stoles. The weavers belong to the Meghwal community, and are locally known as Vankars, who are believed to have migrated from Rajasthan about 500 years ago. They used to weave woollen veil cloths and coarse woollen blankets for the Rabari community, the nomadic shepherd community of the region. Traditionally, the weavers used the wool supplied by the Rabari shepherds and locally grown coarse cotton to make clothes and body wraps for local use. With time, the unique thread work, colour aesthetics, and designs of the Bhujodi weavers became extremely popular among general consumers, creating an identity of Bhujodi weaving. Today, every Bhujodi household has more than two looms, catering to local markets or outside markets and urban consumers.

The rapid industrialisation in Kachchh after the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat led to the decline of traditional livelihoods of the local weaving communities. There were the challenges of accessing raw materials and the inability of the rural weavers to respond to changing consumer tastes and urban markets. In response to these challenges, Khamir, a Kachchh-based NGO formed in 2005, came forward to not only capacitate the weavers to access urban markets but also develop a local supply chain of indigenous cotton by reviving weaving of such traditional coarse cotton combined with modern aesthetics.

This local species of organic cotton grown in Kachchh is called Kala cotton. Farmers and weavers worked together in traditional market systems to create handwoven textile with this cotton, having a durable texture. With the advent of other modern, genetically modified forms of cotton imported to or produced in India, the market for Kala cotton declined, leading to the disintegration of the local value chain. Khamir's intervention in Kala Cotton, in partnership with Satvik (an association of organic farmers in Kachchh), is phenomenal, as it led to the revival of sustainable cotton textile production and the preservation of agricultural and artisan livelihoods in Kachchh. The revival led to reduced use of synthetic fibres, which had earlier flooded the markets, and replacement by indigenous species of cotton. The intervention went through several stages of experimentation, expert consultations, and technical capacity building for developing a process to convert the cotton into yarn as that knowledge and skill did not exist anymore. Mobilising the local weavers to adopt Kala cotton was another challenge initially as they were reluctant, because weaving it necessitated changes in the loom set-up, and differing yields and shafts. Years of R&D led to a regeneration of the local value chain of Kala cotton farmers, ginners, spinners, dyers, and weavers. Khamir then supported the community members with capacities and skills of entrepreneurship, business development, design development, and market linkage facilitation, along with establishing the inherent value of Kala cotton weaves as environment-friendly and sustainable. This motivated different designers to come and work with Kala cotton because of its exclusivity and eco-friendliness. Eventually, unique lines of products, designs, and fashion wear were developed as market-ready collections. As many of the weaver-entrepreneurs are using Kala cotton, its demand has increased, and it is being cultivated on a larger scale, engaging more than 100 farmers. About 250 weaver families in Bhujodi are famous for their unique repertoire, many of which are produced with Kala cotton. The success of a local, sustainable value chain of weaving empowering so many community members has generated new demand and enabled premium market value creation. A group of four enterprising weavers have created the Bhujodi Weavers Cooperative, which brought together all the weavers in Bhujodi, strengthening their collective identity and negotiation power. The local weavers have also formed a Kachchh Weavers' Association to further strengthen their collective identity and brand story.

The most renowned and largest Bhujodi weaving enterprise is Vankar Vishram Valji Weaving, which is an iconic example from Bhujodi of a multi-generational weaving business started by Shri

Vishram Valji Vankar, who won India's prestigious National Award for weaving in 1974. They employ about 90 families in their village.

Overall, the weavers understand the values of sustainability, the importance of using natural raw materials, the value of traditional designs, and diversifications that need to be created keeping their traditional aesthetics and authenticity intact, for new markets. Their innovations and creativity have reached national and international platforms, making them well-known globally and attracting high-end markets and various collaborative projects by designers.

2) Weaving Entrepreneurship in Palara Village under Antaran's initiative, Assam

Kabita Kalita is a small handloom entrepreneur from Palara village of Kamrup district in Assam. She learned weaving in her childhood from her mother and continued this tradition.

Kamrup is a traditional centre of weaving that was patronised in the past by the Ahom kings. For decades, families in this region viewed their generations-old tradition of weaving as a leisure-time activity, passed down usually from mother to daughter. Weaving was rarely seen as a source of primary income for the household. The spinning and weaving activities were part of the culture of every Assamese household from the days of the Ahom regime. Assam, a state in Northeast India, has the highest concentration of weavers in the country. According to the 4th National Handloom Census (2019-20), more than 12.83 lakh weavers and 12.46 lakh handlooms are available in the state. The state had an estimated number of 1,59,577 full-time weavers and 8,90,612 part-time weavers during 2021-22. More than 80% of these weavers are women. Although Assam is known for its varieties of silk and cotton, mekhela chador is the primary product of most handloom weavers, followed by Eri products (about 40%) and Muga products (about 6.5%). While the state produces 80% and 64%, respectively of Muga and Eri Silk in the country, most of the Muga and Eri produced in the state are exported raw (Handloom Policy Assam, 2017-2018). The Directorate of Handloom and Textiles facilitates the weavers, giving training on weaving and provides finance from time to time through Primary Weavers Cooperative Societies. Despite the large spread of this sector in Assam, the small scale of production and business size of the weaver entrepreneurs may be the reason for the poor economic condition of the weavers.

Against this backdrop, Kabita gained success in her business through support from Tata Trusts' handloom programme called Antaran. Antaran is an initiative of Tata Trusts, which brings in a multidimensional approach for technical, design, enterprise, and market development interventions to strengthen craft-based livelihoods. The programme has Incubation & Design Centres in select lesser-known clusters of Assam, Nagaland, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh, managed by a professional team. These centres work as education and business development hubs for weavers/artisans, enabling them to evolve as designer-weavers and build a community of microentrepreneurs across the handloom value chain in each region.

Before Antaran's intervention, most women in this area weaved cloth only for their own use. They did not know how to procure good quality yarn or work on specific colour schemes and motifs for outside markets and customers. Through an intensive course over six months, the women weaver beneficiaries learned about new techniques, designs, quality, markets, concepts of seasonal trends and colour schemes, etc. Changes in looms such as four-shaft, jack lamb system, and drum warping were some techniques introduced in the cluster. Antaran also assisted in business and entrepreneurship development and promoted their products ensuring direct outreach of the weaver entrepreneurs with the buyers. The training towards building sustainable microenterprises is expected to improve the income of the weaver communities through community-based entrepreneurship.

Kabita Kalita, an artisan entrepreneur from Palara village and an active bearer of her family's tradition of handloom weaving, is a beneficiary of Antaran's initiative in the Kamrup region. Kabita received education till class IV, but she always dreamt of becoming a weaver–entrepreneur cum designer. She works with Tussar, Muga, and Pat. Inspired by the loom's rhythmic movements and the work's artistic nature, Kabita launched 'Ruhit Handloom' to preserve and promote the traditional textiles. She started her business in 2012 with Gamosa. During 2020, Antaran gave her the opportunity to grow. She became part of this initiative and gained valuable insights into design, communication, and business, which empowered her to revitalise her handloom-weaving tradition. The Trusts' initiative opened up new prospects for traditional weavers like Kabita, as she understands the nuances of market-oriented products and the importance of making new designs. Through Antaran's training, she could hone her skills and gain knowledge on developing her business, marketing her products, and even applying new weaving techniques.

Kabita shared that Antaran's initiative enabled her to work with a few good designers on their exclusive collections and have meaningful connections with her buyers. The new connections motivated her to work harder with the belief that her traditional weave is of value in today's market. She expanded

the range of products and learned other aspects of business, such as quality checks, importance of correct measurements, colours, design innovations, and using social media to get inputs from different buyers. Presently, she receives orders and enquiries through social media handles as well. Kabita now supports seven associate weavers with work and helps them keep their looms running and earn a living. She also feels that the craft can survive only if the next generation takes it seriously. She stated in her own words, *'Today, I can proudly say that I am capable of creating something meaningful, and nothing feels as fulfilling as that.'*

Antaran's support extends beyond skills training and fosters economic opportunities for weavers/ artisans, especially in clusters of vulnerable regions like Kamrup and Nalbari in Assam. Kabita's microenterprise not only sustains the handloom cultural heritage but also provides a source of pride and income to women in her community. Her Gamosa collection of Kaziranga and wildlife-themed wall art has received excellent reviews and attracted many buyers. The Kaziranga-themed Gamosa, a design idea provided to her by a renowned designer, gained substantial attention, resulting in huge sales, wherein cotton Gamosas were priced at ₹1,400 and Tussar Gamosas at ₹2,200. Besides Gamosas, she weaves sarees, which are sold at an average price of ₹15,000. Interestingly, Kabita and her husband also have the infrastructure for making bobbins of yarn, and bear the knowledge of loom setting. These are additional technical services that Kabita's husband provides to other smaller weavers of their community in addition to running their own business.

Furthermore, Kabita leverages social media platforms to showcase her handwoven products and connect with buyers globally, expanding her business reach beyond her village. This digital presence enables her to explore various aspects of running a modern enterprise, from product photography to coordinating with buyers via WhatsApp and understanding digital payment systems.

Through her entrepreneurial journey, Kabita demonstrates her transformative process towards preserving traditional handloom crafts and fostering community empowerment. Her story highlights the importance of holistic interventions for strengthening handloom and handicraft ecosystems led by community-based microenterprises driving positive change.

3) Desi Oon, New Delhi

Desi Oon, a unique initiative of Centre for Pastoralism, is working with the aim of supporting indigenous wool textiles, protecting the local sheep breeds, revitalising the pastoral-artisan economy, and conserving its native ecosystems. The Centre for Pastoralism (CfP) works across India on collaborative programmes to enhance pastoralist livelihood security, gain mainstream recognition of livestock breeds developed by pastoralists, explore ways of securing their access to grazing resources, promote research to enhance understanding of pastoral systems and undertake outreach to educate society on pastoralism and its many contributions. In advancing these goals, CfP works in close partnership with civil society, academia, government agencies, and the private sector.

The Desi Oon initiative, which started in 2017 has been working with sheep wool for over 5 years to enhance the procurement and consumption of indigenous wool, as a means of diversifying and enhancing revenues for sheep herding communities and the artisans involved. Research shows that craftspeople who have traditionally engaged in weaving woollen textiles are losing their livelihoods owing to the lack of use of indigenous wool, and are entering unskilled labour markets. The declining demand for local woollen textiles is forcing them to look for alternative sources of employment. A continuation of this trend would limit the use of traditional woollen craft and textile weaving skills that India possesses.

Indigenous wool in India is also rarely used for textiles in the present times as the fibre is inherently coarse, but because of its beauty and utility, it has the potential to provide a special identity to textiles, thus attracting consumer attention towards indigenous wool itself. The Desi Oon initiative works with researchers, craft-based organisations, and government agencies to rebuild markets for indigenous wool. The Plasma Research Institute, for example, has pioneered technologies for softening coarse Indian wool, and low-cost carding machines have been developed for primary processing in rural pastoral regions.

To enhance the visibility of Desi Oon, the team started working with organisations that engage with wool textile crafts across the semi-arid West, the Deccan Plateau, and the Himalayan regions. This led to the creation of a network of organisations working across the pastoral landscapes of the country and, eventually the formation of a loose collaborative called the Desi Oon Hub (anchored by CfP). The Hub works closely with artisanal (spinners, weavers, felters, knitters, etc.) and pastoralist communities to revive and revitalise India's traditional wool crafting skills. The idea has been to combine heritage and innovation to reactivate the pastoral and indigenous wool economy. The Hub is collaborating with designers and innovating with indigenous wool, creating blends with cotton, silk and other natural fibres for apparel and furnishings to bring this wonderful fibre into modern homes and lives. The

different Hub partners include Rangsutra, Urmul, Avani, Peoli, and Dakhni Diaries. The 'Desi Oon' initiative has been successfully selling indigenous wool products developed by its partner organisations and individuals through their exhibitions and in online marketplaces under the branding of 'Desi Oon'. Marketing through an annual showcase of indigenous wool narratives helps create consumer awareness and build future markets and networks. Marketing activities include pop- ups, trade shows, showcasing within embassy networks, and promotions through social media platforms and online partner websites. Through the collectivisation of different brands, NGOs, and designers working with indigenous wools in various regions of the country, it has successfully made a strong mark together in the markets. The branding of 'Desi Oon' is building a system of traceability, where the end consumer is assured of the wool's origin (the specific region in India) through information about the communities involved in the rearing and extracting the material used in their product. To promote the inherent circular economy and sustainability of this industry in terms of minimal ecological footprint, the Desi Oon initiative also undertakes outreach through its newsletter 'Pastoral Times', research publications, PR through radio, media coverage, etc. Today, a steady stream of customers ensures that the weavers, artisans and pastoralists, mostly living in remote and difficult environments, have steady livelihoods and better living conditions.

Currently, the Desi Oon Hub works with 20 partner organisations, each working with a minimum of 10 people, and overall about 2,000 producers. Their annual business size is ₹ two crores. The average income of the weavers from this initiative is around ₹5,000 per month. The various products made with indigenous wool under this initiative include woollen knits and weaves, apparel, accessories, home furnishings, yarns, wool fibre, and other lifestyle products.

The Hub is growing into an autonomous body with an Advisory Committee to steer and guide it and is expanding as a space for collaborative action, research, experimentation, learning and marketing. The richness and unique qualities of indigenous wool are communicated and celebrated through a range of promotional campaigns and events. Desi Oon Initiative is now actively seeking international networks to take the brand to a global level by upscaling these diverse textile traditions through strategic investments and techno-entrepreneurial support to become a significant part of India's 124-billion-rupee wool economy.

Desi Oon successfully demonstrates the importance and advantages of building a network to promote and revitalize local wool-based weaving and handicrafts —a shared cultural heritage and legacy of several indigenous communities in India. It showcases grassroots success stories of establishing local sustainable value chains that are contributing to community empowerment in a significant way.

CONCLUSION

The case studies bespeak the importance of India's handloom and hand-crafted textile traditions in the modern economy and their contributions to achieving sustainable, broad-based, people-centric development. Whatever the model or the nature of the organisation or enterprise, the underlying values and principles are the same:

- Capitalising on the traditional creative and cultural skills of communities for their holistic growth and contribution to the national economy,
- Developing and strengthening local value chains and village-based economies through community-led entrepreneurships for alleviating poverty and overcoming marginalisation,
- Reviving and revitalising the country's intangible cultural heritage to contribute to the overall regional well-being of practitioner communities,
- Establishing gender equity by empowering women who play a major role in handloom production, and incorporating ethical business practices to compete in a global market.

The case studies of the community-led businesses show that despite their existing challenges in terms of markets, raw materials, competition from fake/ powerloom products, etc. they are extremely resilient and can contribute to local economic development at scale if provided with strategic need-based support by external and experienced organisations. The diversity of the sector is an asset to the country in terms of human, social, and cultural capital that can successfully enhance the position of the nation in a global creative economy, not only impacting GDP but also ensuring dignity of work and decent income for the larger population. Finally, India being so rich in natural heritage with a distinct tradition of optimal utilisation of natural resources, has the potential to become a forerunner in efficient use of locally grown and produced natural inputs for production exemplifying slow, sustainable fashion. India has one of the largest knowledge-based economies in the world, which includes a very large proportion of its population, thus making it a perfect condition for inclusive growth.

Photo Courtesy: Creative Bee

Handloom Sector at the Crossroads:
Way Forward

10

It's imperative to work towards revitalising the handloom clusters across the country considering the sector's employment potential and sustainability. Though recent trends are encouraging, a lot needs to be done to regain its past levels. The government's efforts, consumer awareness, and a spurt in e-commerce have given the sector an impetus to grow faster in the coming years. However, the supply chain and value chain need strengthening.

Despite efforts by various stakeholders, it is a reality that the number of handloom weavers and artisans has substantially reduced over time. Younger generations are not interested in pursuing and continuing these artisanal traditions; they seek more lucrative employment opportunities elsewhere. Rural weavers and artisans remain delinked from changing designs, market trends, and information on buyers, markets, and consumer choices. Moreover, they cannot optimally harness the emerging e-commerce potential and lack negotiation power for fair business terms.

The challenge, therefore, is to pull these various threads together with an integrated and cohesive approach to effectively address the gaps in policy and find new directions in pursuit of the sustainable livelihoods and welfare of millions of weavers and artisans, boosting their contribution to the national economy.

GEARING UP THE ECOSYSTEM

The handloom sector is already crowded with policy and programme directions that have been developed over almost 80 years of independent India's history and spread across several ministries and departments of central and state governments. Besides government-driven initiatives, India has a vibrant environment for handlooms and handicrafts-based organisations in the private sector space. Both for-profit and non-profit models

carry out innovative and sustainable solutions to the problems faced by the industry.

Many development organisations are working across India to promote sustainable livelihoods using traditional handloom and handicraft skills, revival and promotion of endangered forms, and continuity in the practice of the unique skills by the weavers and artisans. Social enterprises are directly working with handloom and craft practitioners/ organisations/clusters through established and effective marketing mechanisms nationally and internationally focusing on socially responsible initiatives and market sustainability. Individual weavers and artisan entrepreneurs are doing business and striving to scale up and grow.

NEED OF THE HOUR

It is recognised that the handloom and handicraft sector, as a whole, needs to have increased professional and entrepreneurial capacity to be competitive in the market. Current interventions for the sector are fragmented, and spread across a plethora of government agencies with complicated procedures that effectively render them inaccessible to the majority of weavers and craftspersons as is evident from the scheme uptake data in Chapter 3.

The production process of handcrafted textiles needs to be treated as a complete consolidated process with backward and forward linkages, thus strengthening the entire value chain. The capacities of weavers and artisans need to be developed holistically through skills training in areas required to establish successful enterprises: entrepreneurship, management, communication, access to finance, and capacities in design development suited to modern tastes.

All training programmes need to be linked to local requirements, feasibility, and meaningful outcomes. They should be designed and implemented in collaboration with Master Weavers and artisans who are experts in guiding the development of skill-building modules and interventions.

Business support and services need to be provided through a mix of government and private bodies, encouraging institutional linkages facilitated by the government to ensure the right usage of private services and finances.

Adopting a more collaborative approach by mainstream design institutes to ensure the integration of the traditional knowledge aspects of handlooms is vital for an effortless blending of the traditional with the modern. Apart from co-designing and collaborating with the weavers and artisans, design education should also involve high-quality documentation of the handloom processes, technology, socio-cultural context of the producers, and analysis of current situations so that these form the basis for making local interventions relevant. These knowledge bases should also be easily accessible to all, including weavers and artisans, to create a common knowledge pool that can serve as a national resource for the industry.

Efficiency and quality in input supply is a major bottleneck that needs to be addressed. Although there are government schemes and programmes to support such needs at the grassroots level, their management and effectiveness need to be improved. Common facility centres and local raw material depots can be established with a plan to manage those professionally and sustainably, possibly through a PPP model with the participation of the weaver and artisan community members.

In the age of unprecedented technological advancement, relevant and meaningful technological applications should be brought in without compromising the intrinsic handcrafted value of weaves and textiles.

Easing access to finance through the effective implementation of government schemes and programmes is a necessity. Weavers and artisan communities need to be capacitated and encouraged to access finance. Handholding support needs to be provided to rural entrepreneurs trying to access finance for the first time.

MAKING MARKETS WORK FOR THE WEAVERS

Although different types of initiatives have been undertaken to enhance marketing opportunities and channels, actual market intelligence is inadequate among the weaver and artisan entrepreneurs owing to various reasons, such as the lack of outreach to modern urban market spaces and direct linkages with customers, poor infrastructure and access to the rural clusters and villages where the weaver and artisan communities reside, and digital marginalisation of the rural masses withholding them from actively connecting with the world from their village houses. Low education adds to the hindrance of managing business, branding, and promotion. Continuous skill upgradation is critical to bring the weavers and artisans at par with the modern, globalised, digitally savvy world.

In a world fraught with environmental degradation and climate change impacts, it is imperative to strongly promote the aspects of sustainability inherent in the traditional handloom sector of India.

Most intricate and versatile designs are woven by rural communities using simple hand-operated tools and technology that are adaptable to different market requirements. With the knowledge of handlooms,

weavers can do wonders with their traditional designs, diversifications, and innovations. The science of hand weaving, rooted in the tradition of weavers, allows them to innovate easily and efficiently. Since the industry is embedded in a household and community setup, it ensures the practitioners' strong social capital and emotional well-being. Investing in and enabling development in the handloom sector is not just a matter of aesthetics or profitability. It contributes to poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, healthy village industries and regional development, decent work and economic growth, and social and cultural sustainability. The availability and sustained use of natural raw materials, including natural dyes, the diversity and expertise in hand skills, the aesthetics and design elements signifying the unique cultural identities of the maker communities, and the generational skill transmission processes add to an enduring foundation for a resilient cultural and creative industry based on handlooms and handcrafted textiles.

The multi-dimensional aspect of this industry also makes it interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral, having prospects of banding together with tourism, education, heritage management and conservation, environment, culture, etc., which require multi-stakeholder engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the dialogue towards local development and community well-being, which are the fundamental pillars of sustainable development. The handloom sector, embodying an immense social and cultural capital of India, needs to be recognised by the economy, society, and polity alike to encourage cooperation and collaboration among them to ensure the long-term vitality and growth of the sector. The potential of the handloom and handicraft sector in building and accelerating a robust, balanced, and inclusive growth of a large section of the country's population is an unmatched advantage globally and, hence, could anchor holistic and equitable rural development.

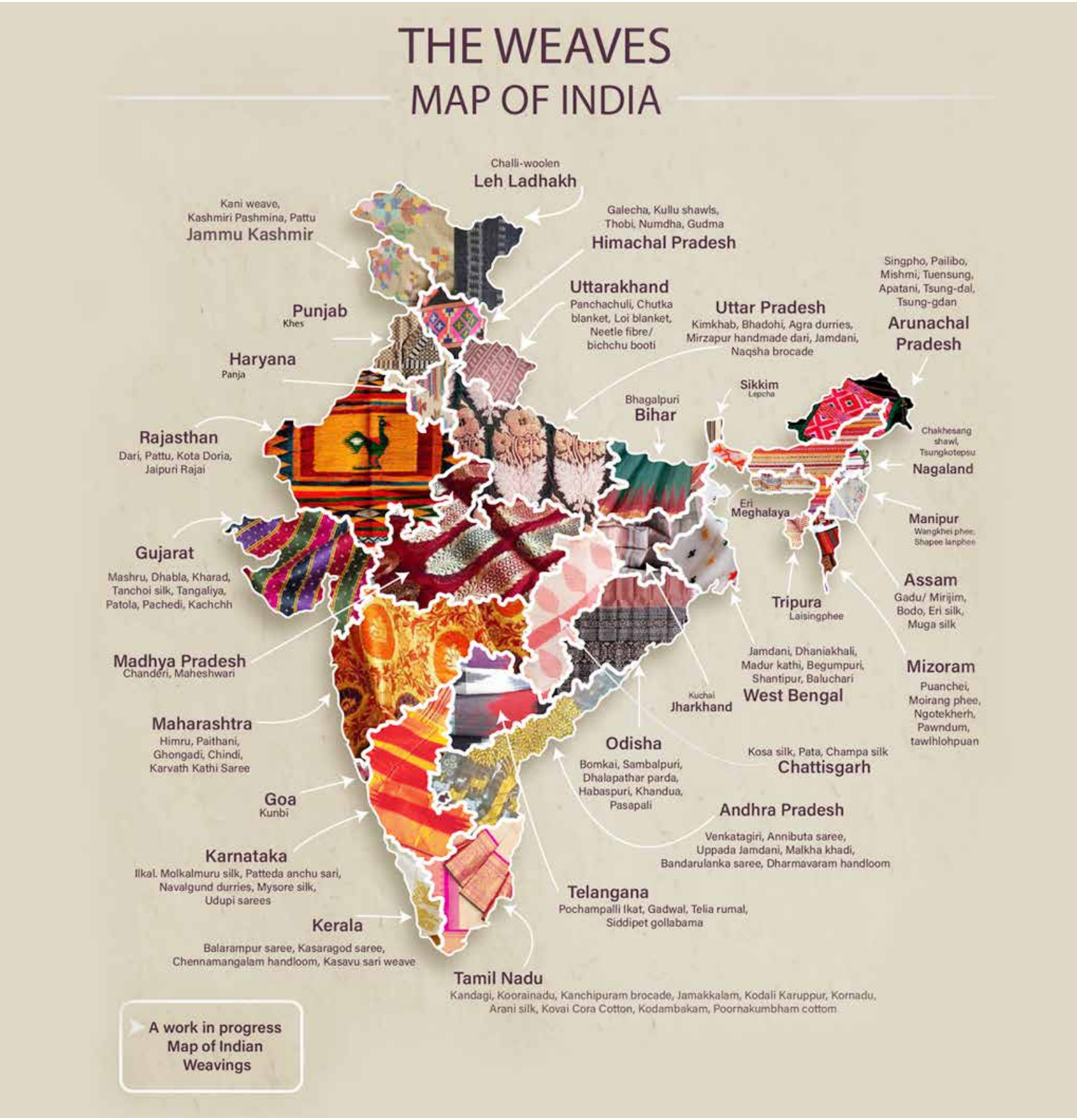

Photo Courtesy: Memeraki

Annexure:
Major Handloom Clusters of India

The handloom clusters of India, spread across the length and breadth of the nation, are a testament to its rich cultural heritage and the skillful craftsmanship honed over centuries. These clusters, each with their unique identity and specialization, serve as significant contributors to the socio-economic fabric of the country.

Some of the major handloom clusters of India representing various regions of the country are presented below;

1. Aizawl, Mizoram

Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram, renowned as the heartland of the Mizo people, is distinguished as the birthplace of one of the most vibrant and culturally significant handlooms known as the '*Puanchei*'. Embraced by both men and women, '*puan*' translates to cloth in the local dialect. Historically, Mizo women were expected to provide for their own fabric requirement and hence, a loin loom for crafting the fabric was a common feature in each household. Even in contemporary times, women continue to practice this age-old craft on the loin loom; the earnings from the craft empower them financially.

While the exact origin of *Puanchei* is not known, its legacy spans across centuries of Mizo heritage. According to the 4th All India Handloom Census 2019, Mizoram boasts a significant presence of 24,500 weavers and allied workers in the state. Recognising the cultural and economic importance of traditional handlooms, the Government of Mizoram has registered five indigenous *puans* under Geographical Indication Registration, namely Puanchei, Pawndum, Tawlhlohpuan, Ngotekherh, and Hmaram. Mizo handlooms, embellished with intricate designs, continue to be cherished and proudly worn by members of the community, including the younger generation, as a symbol of their rich cultural heritage.

Puanchei shawls/Puan: The Mizo 'Puanchei' is a colourful shawl that stands out as a vibrant and

essential garment amongst Mizo textiles. Renowned for its cultural importance and identity, it holds a cherished place in the wardrobe of every Mizo woman. It serves as a significant attire for auspicious events such as weddings in Mizoram. It is the predominant costume worn during Mizo festive dances and official ceremonies, symbolising cultural pride and tradition.

Crafted in three distinct pieces, with the middle portion being the narrowest, the Mizo Puanchei embodies meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail. While historically, the Puanchei were woven from cotton fibres primarily, the advent of European missionaries in the 19th century introduced silk and acrylic threads into Mizo weaving practices, enriching the diversity of materials used. This infusion of new elements further enhanced the visual appeal and allure of the Puanchei. Each variant of the Puanchei holds its own significance, with colours, motifs, and designs deeply rooted in Mizo tradition and culture. These elements not only add aesthetic beauty to the garment but also serve as powerful symbols of the community's heritage and identity. The standard length of a puan typically ranges from 60 to 65 inches. Crafting a plain puan requires about a week or more, while one adorned with intricate patterns may take a month or longer, all painstakingly woven on a loin loom. Motifs adorning the puan encompass a diverse range, including depictions of animals, plants, human figures, and geometric shapes. Among the most prevalent patterns are the *Hmunchhawlam* (peacock feather), *Hnahthial* (star), and *Hmangte* (bamboo), each carrying deep-rooted traditional and cultural significance within the community.

There are various versions of puans woven by the artisans, each holding a symbolic meaning as follows:

The Puan Laisen serves as a quintessential wedding, festival, and dance attire, featuring a prominent red horizontal section in the middle.

Puan Hruih is characterised by a white backdrop adorned with black stripes, worn by both men and women.

Puandum boasts a black base with striking red edges, adding a touch of elegance to its design.

Tawlhlopuan stands out with its black foundation complemented by bold red, yellow, and white stripes, symbolising courage and velour.

2. Balaramapuram, Kerala

Balaramapuram, which is located in Kerala's Thiruvanathapuram district, has a notable past as a hub for production of the most popular traditional Kasavu sarees and *mundu*. The uniqueness of Balaramapuram saree can be attributed to its raw material, zari, and technology, including the techniques of laced weaving that is exclusively practiced in Balaramapuram and its surrounding areas. They were brought down by Maharaja Balarama Varma from what is now Valiyur in Tamil Nadu to weave fabrics for the royal family. From the use of high-quality raw materials and exquisite designs to the unique lace weaving technique, Balaramapuram handloom has a rich history spanning over 300 years. As per the historical evidence, the artisans belonging to the Saliya community crafted the exquisite 'Mundum Neriyathum' fabric for the Travancore Royal Family, which are fine-textured cloths used to cover the body. The hallmark of Balaramapuram's handloom lies in its meticulous craftsmanship, which is deeply rooted in a history that spans over three centuries, and is renowned for the distinctive techniques and high-quality materials employed in its creation. The inception of this textile tradition in Balaramapuram can be traced back to the reign of Maharaja Balarama Varma, who, in a bid to adorn the Royal Family of Travancore with the finest of fabrics, brought skilled weavers from what is now known as Valiyur in Tamil Nadu. These weavers, belonging to the Saliya community were instrumental in crafting the exquisite 'Mundum Neriyathum', a garment that epitomises the elegance and simplicity of Kerala's traditional attire. The Mundum Neriyathum is essentially a two-piece cloth, where the '*Mundu*' is the lower garment and '*Neriyathum*' is the upper garment, traditionally worn by women in Kerala. In 2004, this group worked together with the governments of India and China to produce a special limited-edition textile named 'Ayurvedic'. This textile is treated with a unique dye that imparts therapeutic qualities, making it perfect for creating 'Ayur-Vastra' or medicinal home textiles. Currently, Balaramapuram has more than 22,000 handlooms, along with several powerlooms that are used for making various clothing items including shirts and fabrics for dresses.

Balaramapuram Sarees and Mundus: Balaramapuram sarees and *mundus*, renowned for their softness and recognised for their gold-plated silver zari borders, feature a base of unbleached, off-white cotton yarn with a medium to high-thread count. These textiles are crafted in a small village close to Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The cotton selected for weaving these garments is exceptionally fine, with a thread count ranging between 80s and 100s, indicating the use of super combed cotton

yarns. The process incorporates natural grey thread for the warp without the use of any dyes, ensuring the fabric's natural colour. A hallmark of this weaving tradition is the symmetrical design visible on both sides of the fabric. Artisans in Balaramapuram are adept at weaving intricate 'Temple borders' or 'Puliyilakara' patterns, featuring a unique 'Kuri' motif integrated into the saree and the settu-Mundu. The handloom sector in Balaramapuram produces traditional garments such as the *veshti* or *dhoti*, typically paired with a shirt for adult men, and the Set Mundu (Mundum Neriyathum or Pudava and Kavani) for women. The Mundu or Pudava covers the lower body, while the Neriyathu or Kavani is draped over the blouse, covering the upper body. The designs, primarily floral, are presented in a palette of red, dark green, and gold, among the most favoured colours. The kasavu zari is typically procured from Gujarat, whereas the cotton is sourced from markets near Tamil Nadu. The term 'Kasavu' refers to the zari used in the saree borders, denoting the material employed along the edges of these sarees

3. Bhadohi and Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh

Bhadohi district of Uttar Pradesh, known as the 'Carpet City of India', stands as South Asia's largest handmade carpet weaving cluster. Renowned for their exquisite craftsmanship, carpets from this region are among the most expensive in the market, surpassing others available in India. Primarily export-centric, these carpets boast Persian designs as their main attraction. The roots of carpet weaving in this region can be traced back to the 16th century, to the reign of Akbar. Legend has it that a caravan of Persian carpet weavers en route to the Mughal court was ambushed by dacoits along the Grand Trunk Road when local villagers of the area rescued these weavers. In gratitude, the weavers eventually settled in the region, sharing their expertise with the community. Even today, the weavers of the carpet industry come primarily from the Muslim communities, who have shifted to weaving from agriculture as their primary source of sustenance.

Today, the Mirzapur-Bhadohi weaving industry employs nearly 2.2 lakh rural artisans. Recognising the unique heritage and quality of carpets produced in this region, they were granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag. This designation ensures that carpets manufactured in nine districts—Bhadohi, Mirzapur, Varanasi, Ghazipur, Sonbhadra, Kaushambi, Allahabad, Jaunpur, and Chandauli—are officially recognised as handmade carpets of Bhadohi.

Bhadohi Carpets: Bhadohi carpets are often composed of 25% cotton and 75% wool. These carpets encompass a variety of well-known types, including cotton dhurries, Chhapra Mir carpets, Loribaft, and Indo Gabbeh wool carpets. The Nepali carpets and, more recently, the shaggy type carpets are also emerging from the region. The primary raw material used in carpet making is wool yarn, sourced either from local spinning mills or traders from Bikaner and Panipat. This yarn forms the foundation for crafting the intricate designs and patterns that characterise Bhadohi carpets, renowned for their quality and craftsmanship.

Carpet weaving in Bhadohi employs several major techniques, including Panja, Soumak, and hand-knotted designs. Hand-knotted rugs are particularly renowned for their exquisite craftsmanship, durability, and beauty. The quality and value of hand-knotted rugs are often identified through the measurement of knots per square inch.

The Panja technique is used to create reversible dhurries on horizontal looms, utilising a unique wide-tooth comb. This method intricately weaves designs by wrapping the weft around the warp and tightly beating it down. These dhurries often feature captivating geometric styles and depict tribal elements such as animals, birds, trees, and stars.

On the other hand, Soumak is a tapestry technique used to craft decorative carpets and rugs. This method creates a distinctive braided appearance by repeatedly wrapping weft threads around the warp threads. The resulting carpets and rugs are reversible, displaying designs on both sides and offering versatility. The Soumak way of weaving ensures exceptional durability, making it suitable for high-decor areas or decorative walls.

4. Bhagalpur, Bihar

Bhagalpur, situated in Bihar, famed for its exquisite Bhagalpuri silk sarees crafted from Tussar is often referred to as the 'Silk City' of India. Historically known as Champa, Bhagalpur has been a significant hub for silk trade for over two centuries, with its products reaching countries along the Mediterranean Sea as early as the 19th Century. The city's silk industry is not only famed for its exquisite finished silk goods but also for its longstanding tradition of sericulture and silk manufacturing.

The handloom sector in Bhagalpur annually produces approximately 2 million metres of silk, with the handloom cluster spread across seven villages: Champa Nagar, Purani, Hussainabad, Aliganj, Kharik Bazaar, Nathnagar, and Ambabaug.

In 1974, the Weavers Service Centre was established in Bhagalpur with the aim of enhancing the silk handloom industry. Following Karnataka, Bhagalpur's silk cluster stands as the second-largest producer and exporter of silk fabric in India. Today, the city is home to over 35,000 handloom weavers and around 25,000 looms, demonstrating the vibrant and enduring legacy of silk weaving in Bhagalpur.

Tussar Sarees: Bhagalpur Tussar sarees distinguish themselves with their organic texture and natural, earthy appeal, which is made with eco-friendly and natural textiles. The unique characteristic of Tussar silk, as opposed to the smoother mulberry silk, is its richly textured appearance. The naturally occurring dull gold sheen of Tussar silk enhances the aesthetic of the textile. An interesting aspect of Bhagalpuri silk weaving is the creative use of leftover silk. These remnants from the weaving process are ingeniously incorporated into the main fabric as design elements, showcasing the weavers' commitment to innovation and sustainability. This practice not only minimises waste but also adds a unique dimension to the sarees, making each piece a testament to the artistry and environmental consciousness of the weavers. As global consciousness shifts towards sustainable and eco-friendly fashion choices, Bhagalpur Tussar sarees emerge as a preferred choice for those who value both beauty and the environment.

5. Bhujodi, Gujarat

'Bhujodi' is a small village located in Kutch district of Gujarat from where the Bhujodi weaving takes its name. This village is famous for its exquisitely woven traditional textiles of 'Kutchi' shawls, traditional blankets, and stoles. This craft of weaving is practiced by almost 200 weavers of the village currently. Historically, weaving in Bhujodi was a communal activity. Weavers relied on hand-spun yarn provided by the Rabaris—a nomadic community of sheep and goat herders—while the Meghwals and Marwadas developed a distinctive weaving style. The handloom evolved as a response to meet the necessity of the Kutchi community for blankets, cloth, and traditional dress fabrics, earning the weavers the name 'Vankars,' or the weaver community. Over the years, the Vankars adapted their designs to match the aesthetic preferences of the Rabari community, making these patterns synonymous with the clan's identity. According to local legend, this tradition dates back 500 years when a prosperous Rabari family's daughter relocated to Kutch after her marriage, bringing a weaver as part of her dowry. This weaver's descendants grew into a thriving community, eventually becoming known as the skilled artisans of Kutch. Beyond Bhujodi, weaving flourishes in various other villages across the Kutch region, including Vannora, Kota, Jamthara, Sarli, Bhuj, and Kadarthi, each adding to the vibrant tapestry of Kutch's weaving heritage.

Kutch Shawls: In Bhujodi, weavers mainly create shawls and stoles, though carpets and placemats are also being made lately. Traditionally, these products were created to bear the harsh winters, but now cotton is also used to weave summer garments. Crafting a single shawl typically takes around 10 to 12 days, with weavers often producing five to six shawls of the same design during each weaving session. Embracing a fusion of tradition and innovation, contemporary Bhujodi weavers source wool from locally raised sheep. To meet the growing demand, they also acquire silk from Bangalore, acrylic from Ludhiana, wool from Barmer, and cotton from various regions. This diverse range of materials enables them to create intricate and vibrant designs, with fine cotton allowing for increased intricacy and vibrancy. These shawls are crafted in natural wool colours or dyed to match specific preferences, with popular hues including indigo blue, red, green, off-white, and black. The traditional shawls typically feature multiple borders along the shorter length. The border sizes vary from shawl to shawl, with common dimensions being 3, 9, or 18 inches. The wider 18-inch borders are typically reserved for shawls intended for male wearers. Adding to their distinctive charm, the shawls and stoles are finished with colourful tassels, a hallmark feature of Kutchi weaving. Kutch shawls are renowned for their distinctive embellishment styles, such as, Bandhani (Tie Dye) patterns, Ahir, Rabari, Mutwa, Abla embroideries (mirror work), Aari or Mochi embroideries (chain stitch), and Sindhi embroideries (Kutch work).

6. Bishnupur, West Bengal

The Baluchari Handloom Cluster in Bishnupur, located in the Bankura district of West Bengal, India, is renowned for its traditional handloom weaving of Baluchari sarees. Bishnupur, a town steeped in history and culture, has been a significant center for producing Baluchari sarees, showcasing the artistry and skill of locals. There are about 1,500 families directly related to this profession.

The Baluchari handloom weaving process involves skilled artisans who meticulously create these sarees using traditional techniques. Silk yarn

is used as the primary material, and the designs are handwoven on Jacquard looms.

Baluchari Sarees: The Baluchari saree traces its origin to West Bengal. The name Baluchari came into existence because the weaving of these sarees started in a small village called Baluchar in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal around 500 years ago. Due to some natural calamities, the weaving setup was moved from Baluchar to Bishnupur, and the industry grew tremendously thereafter during the British rule.

The distinctive feature of Baluchari sarees lies in their elaborate *pallus*, depicting scenes from the epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata or historical events. The motifs include intricate detailing of characters, landscapes, and architecture, showcasing the weavers' attention to detail and artistic flair. The vibrant colours and bold patterns contribute to the allure of Baluchari sarees.

7. Chanderi , Madhya Pradesh

Chanderi is a traditional handloom cluster located in Ashok Nagar district of Madhya Pradesh. Presently, it comprises 3,500 weaver families, and about an equal number of handlooms. The peak of Chanderi weaving is believed to have occurred during the medieval era, under the patronage of various ruling dynasties, including the Bundela Rajputs and then the Mughals.

Chanderi Sarees: The uniqueness of Chanderi weave lies in its delicate blend of silk and cotton, resulting in a fabric that is both luxurious and lightweight. A distinguishing feature of Chanderi weaving is the 'booti', a small motif intricately woven into the fabric, repeated across the length of the saree to create a cohesive design. A Chanderi can be well identified by these small motifs intricately woven into the fabric. These motifs, drawing inspiration from nature, geometry, or traditional symbols, are crafted using a blend of silk, cotton, and occasionally metallic threads, lending richness to the overall aesthetic. The 'booti' is a fundamental element of Chanderi sarees, contributing to their ornate and elegant appearance. Traditionally, Chanderi sarees have a thread count ranging from around 60 to 100s, indicating the number of threads per square inch of fabric. This fine thread count contributes to the softness, sheerness, and drape of Chanderi sarees, thus making them highly sought-after for their superior quality and comfort. Furthermore, the introduction of metallic threads, or zari, has elevated the opulence of Chanderi sarees, infusing shimmering accents into the intricate motifs and patterns.

8. Dharmavaram, Andhra Pradesh

Dharmavaram, renowned for its flourishing handloom industry, lies within Anantapur district of Rayalaseema region in Andhra Pradesh. Legend has it that the town derives its name from 'Dharmamba', the mother of Kriyashakthi Vodavaru Swamy, who got a village constructed during 1153-54 AD along the banks of the Chitravathi River to commemorate his mother. According to government data, there are 255 weavers' cooperatives comprising over 4,000 artisans actively involved in the weaving sector of this handloom. It is said that the art of weaving Dharmavaram Silks was brought to Andhra Pradesh from some weavers of Tamil Nadu during the 19th Century.

Dharmavaram Sarees: Dharmavaram sarees, revered for their unparalleled grandeur and opulence, are celebrated for their impeccable weaving craftsmanship and distinctive features such as broad borders and intricately embroidered *pallus* with gold brocade. Notable among their striking attributes are the subdued yet captivating colours, along with a shimmering or dual-tone effect that adds to the allure of the fabric.

Dharmavaram handloom *pattu* sarees are traditionally woven using fine mulberry silk and embellished with intricate zari work. They exude a rich lustre and grandeur, and are at times confused for Kanjivaram. They are firmly rooted in Hindu culture and traditionally woven in colours like red and yellow to symbolise prosperity and joy. The motifs adorning Dharmavaram sarees draw inspiration from the rich flora and fauna like peacocks, deer, and flowers, as well as the captivating temple murals and paintings found in the renowned Lepakshi temple of Hindupur, Anantapur district. Incorporating gold, silver, green, and red zari threads enhances the grandeur of these sarees, making them ideal for grand occasions and celebrations. A popular contemporary variation is the Dharmavaram Pattu Silk Saree, featuring captivating designs such as peacock feathers and Brahmakamalam. It is intricately woven with multi-coloured threads to create a mesmerising effect with changing colours like the shimmer of stars.

In recent years, Dharmavaram weavers have also ventured into experimenting with different fabrics such as Assam silk, tussar, cotton, and cotton silk, thereby diversifying the range of Dharmavaram sarees and catering to a broader spectrum of preferences and tastes.

9. Gadwal, Telangana

Located approximately 200 km from Hyderabad City in the Mehboobnagar district of Telangana,

Gadwal is renowned for its distinctive handwoven sarees known as Gadwali sarees. These sarees have a rich history dating back about 200 years and hold significant cultural importance, often referred to as 'Puja' sarees by local women who wear them for religious and festive occasions. These sarees are considered so auspicious that the Brahmostsavas of Tirupati begin with the deity adorned in a Gadwal saree. Characteristic of Gadwal sarees is their unique construction, featuring cotton fabric with an attached silk border and silk *pallu*. One of the most remarkable aspects celebrated by Gadwal weavers is the saree's exceptional foldability, capable of fitting into the smallest of spaces. This quality is evident in the special crease marks found in authentic handloom weaves. In fact, the finest Gadwal sarees are said to be able to fit inside a match box. The weaving techniques and skills of many Gadwal weavers are believed to have originated from Varanasi, where their ancestors were sent by a local Maharaja to learn brocade weaving. Today, over 1,200 looms are operational, which are dedicated to crafting these exquisite seven-yard sarees.

Gadwal Sarees: The raw material used in the production of Gadwal sarees is silk and cotton along with zari. The Gadwal weavers source the silk and cotton from Bangalore, while they depend on Surat for pure zari. The borders are crafted from either Tussar or Mulberry silk, while the body often consists of unbleached cotton, occasionally incorporating coloured cotton or silk checks. A distinct characteristic of Gadwal saree irrespective of the material used is the gold zari work. Crafting each saree requires the collaborative effort of two weavers over a span of 4-8 days. Traditional colour palettes for Gadwal sarees include earth tones such as tan, brown, grey, and off-white. The *pallu*, although typically small, may feature heavy brocade work. The borders are adorned with intricate brocaded designs and motifs, including mango, peacock, murugan, and rudraksha. Other popular motifs include the mythical swan (*hansa*), lion, and the double-headed eagle. Gadwal Sarees are woven using traditional techniques such as the interlocked-weft technique (Kuppadam or Tippadam) or Kotakomma (also known as Kumbam), depending on the design of the borders. As a result, they are also referred to as Kotakomma or Kumbam sarees.

10. Ilkal, Karnataka

Ilkal village, situated in the Bagalkot district of North Karnataka, holds the origin of the craft of weaving Ilkal sarees. Historically, Ilkal was an ancient weaving centre with weaving practices dating back to the 8th century AD. Currently, approximately 626 handlooms are engaged in the production of traditional Ilkal sarees. Though there is no clear mention of the number of weavers involved in the industry, it is well known that families work together with looms to realise the process of each finished Ilkal.

Ilkal Sarees: Traditionally Ilkal sarees are predominantly crafted on pit looms, utilising a combination of three distinct types of yarn which are silk with silk, silk with cotton, and art silk with cotton. It takes a weaver between 4 to 5 days to weave the fabric and stitch the pattern together to create a saree. Ilkal sarees are available in three varying lengths: 6 yards, 8 yards, and 9 yards. One of the distinguishing features of these sarees is the attached temple-type *pallav*, known as '*Tope-Teni*', a technique exclusively employed in Ilkal. Typically, the father and daughter or the husband and wife, weave the *pallav* together. The elegance of *Tope-teni* is often accentuated by incorporating another design called '*Kyadgi*' in its middle portion. A distinctive feature of Ilkal sarees is the interlocking of the *pallav* with the rest of the saree using a special technique known as '*kondi*'. The hallmark visual characteristic of an Ilkal saree typically consists of its overall checked body, complemented by a contrasting border. While the main border include *Chikki Paras (Paraspet)*, *Gomi (Ilkal Dadi)*, *Jari (Zari)*, and the recently updated traditional design *Gayathri*, the body of the saree remains true to tradition, featuring stripes and checks of varying sizes.

11. Imphal East, Manipur

Wangkhei Phee fabric, originating from Imphal East district in Manipur, stands out as an exquisite handloom creation, crafted from fine white cotton yarn that results in a tightly woven, transparent texture. Named after its birthplace, the Wangkhei area, this fabric was initially developed by adept weavers exclusively for the royal family of Manipur. Characterised by its delicate cotton material, Wangkhei Phee is distinguished by the intricate designs embellishing its body, making it a favoured choice among Manipuri women for weddings and festive celebrations. Initially crafted from muslin for the royal household, the production of Wangkhei Phee has since expanded beyond the confines of the Wangkhei Colony, which is situated near the palace, to various locations across Manipur.

Artisans across Manipur continue to weave Wangkhei Phee on a large scale, preserving its unique tradition and craftsmanship. This special fabric not only holds a significant place in the cultural tapestry

of Manipur but has also garnered acclaim beyond its borders, extending into neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar owing to its 'luxurious' fame.

12. Jalandar, Punjab

It is believed that the creation of Panja durries in Jalandhar, Punjab, has deep roots in the traditional Punjabi custom of dowry. Legend has it that when a bride entered her new home, she brought along a set of eleven auspicious beddings, which she herself embroidered and wove. Among these bedding items, the Panja durries historically formed a crucial part and that is where they evolved from.

Panja durries are renowned for their exceptional quality, durability, and longevity. These rugs are handwoven, with the design meticulously crafted using a tool called the Panja, after which the durries are named. The 'panja' is a metallic claw-like instrument used to beat and adjust the threads in the warp. What distinguishes a 'durrie' from other types of carpets is its lightweight construction and often reversible design. Panja durries, embracing these characteristics of durries, are meticulously crafted to be lightweight and reversible, thus offering exceptional versatility in their use. Both cotton and wool are utilised in the crafting of panja durries making them exceptionally easy to maintain. While the art of durrie weaving was prevalent in many rural areas of Punjab, it transitioned into a commercial industry after weavers from Sialkot, Pakistan, migrated to Nakodar, Noormahal, and nearby villages of Jalandhar. The tradition of weaving Panja durries extends to select regions of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, where the 'Panja' tool is utilised in their production. However, the primary centres for durrie production remain in Amritsar, Nakodar, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, and Anandpur Sahib. Even today, bridal durries continue to be woven, particularly in the cotton-growing Malwa region and in villages around Jalandhar.

Panja Durries: In Jalandhar, there are two main types of cotton durries woven: bed durries crafted on a pit loom featuring multicoloured stripes, and floor durries predominantly woven on an adda or floor loom using two contrasting colours. These durries are renowned for their elaborate embroidery work and lively patterns, rendering them highly esteemed as significant cultural artefacts in Punjab. The process of crafting a 5ft x 3ft. Panja durrie typically spans about 15 days. These intricate designs are mirrored on both sides due to the use of the Panja tool. While chemical colours are commonly used today, natural dyes extracted from henna, madar, walnut bark, and turmeric were traditionally employed. The motifs in both styles are inspired by the folk vocabulary of birds, animals, plants, and embroidered phulkari textiles. Primarily, women artisans produce Panja durries in their homes and at khadi centers across various areas. Apart from being used in weddings, durries were also woven for gurdwaras, often by groups of women.

The process of crafting Panja durries in Punjab involves several intricate steps that highlight the rich tradition and cultural significance of this art form. It commences with the gathering of locally sourced yarn, which is then handed over to the village weaver, known as the 'julaha'. The 'julaha', proficient in the craft, is responsible for dyeing and weaving the yarn into durries and khes (coverlets). The motifs woven onto bridal durries often symbolise the bride's family's status, her skill, and include auspicious symbols like the mother goddess, Sanjhi Devi.

13. Kanjivaram, Tamil Nadu

Situated 70 km from Chennai in Tamil Nadu, Kanchipuram is renowned as the 'City of Silk' and the 'City of Thousand Temples'. It is celebrated for its exquisite handwoven silk sarees adorned with delicate zari work, famously known as 'Kanjivaram'. Kanjivaram takes its name from the word '*kanji*' (the excess water after boiling rice), which plays a pivotal role in finishing these royal sarees.

According to legend, the lineage of Kanchi weavers can be traced back to Sage Marakanda, revered as the Master Weaver for the gods themselves. The early artisans of Kanjivaram hailed from two prominent communities of Andhra Pradesh, namely the Devangas and Saligars, who migrated to Kanchipuram. Utilising their exceptional craftsmanship, these weavers continue to generationally craft sarees adorned with intricate designs inspired by the sculptures and motifs of temples around the village.

More than 5,000 families and around 20,000 weavers are associated with the silk saree industry in Kanchipuram. Most of these weavers are now associated with co-operatives, which serve as a social asset to generate employment, ensure a fixed wage, and implement government schemes aimed at the welfare and upliftment of the artisans and their families.

Kanjivaram Sarees: A typical Kanchipuram silk saree is known for its distinguished characteristics of heavy weight coupled with beautiful, classy colours, a rich zari border, and a bold *pallu*. The basic raw materials required to weave a saree are mulberry silk, zari, dye colour, and rice. The pure raw mulberry silk is procured from Bangalore, Karnataka.

While the portion of the saree covering the body is dyed using multiple colours to give a contrasting look, the *pallu* or *aanchal* is a single bold colour. The excess water after boiling rice, locally known as '*kanji*', is used to add stiffness to the yarn before weaving it into a saree. The *kanji* is also used on the saree after weaving, before folding it to give it a desirable crispness.

Traditionally handwoven, Kanchipuram sarees are renowned for their luxurious yet soft texture, crafted with fine counts of silk. The weight of these sarees typically ranges from 750 grams to a kilogram, depending upon the quality of silk and zari utilised in their creation. The *pallu* and the borders are embellished with beautiful motifs and intricate designs. Most of the designs on the sarees are inspired by the temples in the city, which include the peacock's eye, swans, parrots, flowers, statues, and more. Korvai and Petni are techniques peculiar to designing a Kanjivaram. A popular pattern found in the Kanjivaram sarees is known as the 'Ganga-Yamuna' design, referring to the usage of two different colours in the border of one saree.

For saree enthusiasts, the authenticity of a Kanchipuram saree is often confirmed during its resale. The value and significance of these sarees are determined by their resale price, reflecting their quality, craftsmanship, and timeless appeal.

14. Kota, Rajasthan

Kaithun, a small village situated 15 kms from Kota in Rajasthan, is the heart of the Kota Doria weaving cluster. There are over 2,500 households associated with Kota Doria weaving. The majority of the weavers belong to the Ansari Muslim community and are predominantly the women of the household.

'Kota Doria', as the name suggests, is a textile craft that originated in Kota, which has been weaving delicate muslin saris, called Kota Doria or Kota Masuria. However, the craft has heritage links with Mysore from where it was brought to Kota by the Mughals in the 18th century. The word 'Doria' comes from the Hindi word 'Dori' that means 'thread'.

Kota Doria Saree: Kota Doria is a unique square-checked pattern woven with fine silk, cotton or a blend of the two. Various fancy and colourful yarns can be used to produce numerous designs. A square comprising 14 yarns – eight of cotton and six of silk – makes the most common Kota Doria, referred to as '*khat*'. Alternative looks can be created by varying this *khat* size according to the requirements. The uniqueness of the Kota Doria products can be attributed to the gold zari that makes the weave more exquisite and therefore desirable.

15. Kotpad, Odisha

Kotpad, situated in the Koraput district of Odisha, is a small weaving community known for crafting the renowned Kotpad handloom fabric. The weavers of Kotpad belong to the 'Mirgan' tribal community and are celebrated for their production of entirely organic textiles. Utilising natural dyes derived from the roots of the Indian Madder tree, Kotpad fabrics boast a distinctive reddish hue and a rough texture. These textiles are eco-friendly, devoid of chemicals, and are believed to possess healing properties. They serve as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between the tribal weavers and their natural environment, which provides everything from sustenance to clothing. Kotpad textiles, characterised by their tribal origins, maintain a strong connection to traditional construction and design. The weavers of Kotpad, locally known as 'Panika', have diligently preserved their indigenous techniques and cultural heritage through generations of craftsmanship in the form of this handloom.

Kotpad Sarees: The dyers of Kotpad do not have access to the synthetic alizarin, so they continue to rely on locally available natural resources for the dye. These fabrics are entirely free of chemicals, bearing a rugged texture and a reddish tint derived from the roots of the Indian Madar tree. The process of dyeing involves meticulously processing the Aal (Madar) root dye and treating cotton yarn with dung, wood ash, and castor oil, a labour-intensive procedure that can span nearly a month. Women within the community are primarily responsible for carrying out the dyeing work. The dimensions of Kotpad sarees vary, ranging from eight *haath* (one *haath* being the length from fingertips to elbow) at the knee length to 16 *haath* at the ankle-length. The most prevalent designs in Kotpad sarees include crabs, conchs, boats, axes, fans, bows, temples, pots, snakes, palanquin bearers, and huts. Depending on the occasion, such as weddings, the sarees may become more elaborate, featuring intricate designs on borders and *muhs* (*pallavs*), often dominated by the kumbha motif. Additionally, Kotpad weavers, also produce a variety of garments including sarees, *gamchas*, and *tuvals*. The *tuval*, adorned with typical Kotpad borders and motifs, is worn by men as a lower garment.

16. Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

The quaint valley of Kullu, nestled between the mighty lower and greater Himalayan ranges in Himachal Pradesh, is celebrated not only for its breathtaking landscapes but also as the birthplace

of the world-famous Kullu shawls. These shawls are distinguished by their exceptional woollen craftsmanship and unique designs, with a heritage tracing back to the pre-independence era.

Until 1936, the inhabitants of Kullu primarily crafted *pattis* on pit looms, which were rectangular pieces of cloth utilised by men to make coats and *suthans* (traditional pyjamas), and by women to create *pattu*s for their attire. The introduction of handlooms to Kullu in the '1940s' marked a significant evolution in the region's weaving practices, a change influenced by the British and further enhanced by techniques brought in by the Bushehras from Rampur Bushehr (Shimla).

The transformation of Kullu's weaving tradition is credited to the visit of Indian cinema icon Devika Rani in '1942', who became enamoured with the local textiles and ordered the weaving of a full-sized shawl (measuring 72 inches by 36 inches) for the first time. This pivotal moment led to the recognition of the shawl as a commercial product, showcasing the exquisite craftsmanship of Kullu weavers to the world. At present there are 28,500 weavers and 22,000 looms in Kullu and the adjoining area, with weaving playing a vital role in the economic sustenance of the region.

Kullu Shawls: A Kullu shawl has a plain central body with vibrant, intricate borders characterised by geometric motifs. The body of the fabric is meticulously woven using techniques like plain weave, twill weave, fine zigzags, or stripes with geometrical designs on both ends. The shawls were traditionally woven in bright and vivid colours such as red, yellow, magenta pink, green, orange, blue, and black. However, present trends are witnessing the gradual replacement of these shades with more muted pastels, such as ochres, rusts, browns, olives, and many more, catering to market preferences. Each piece of textile may have one to eight colours. Kullu shawls are woven in various materials, including sheep wool, wool from local herds, Pashmina, Yak wool, Angora, and handspun fibres. These yarns are skillfully dyed with either vegetable or chemical dyes. Each shawl takes about four days to complete on a handloom. The most common patterns on the shawl include geometric designs and those significant to the life of Himachalis such as *chabi* (keys), *dabbidar kirk* (spotted snake*), diwar-e-Chine* (Great Wall of China), *guddi* (doll), *gulab* (rose), *kangha* (comb), *leheriya* (waves), *tara* (star), and *mandir* (temple) etc.

17. Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh

Maheshwar is a town near Khargone city in Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh in central India. It is on State Highway 38, 13.5 km east of National Highway 3 and 91 km from Indore, the state's commercial capital. The town lies on the northern bank of the Narmada River. Maheshwar is famous for its exquisite handwoven sarees, known as Maheshwari sarees.

Maheshwari Sarees: Maheshwari sarees are made from fine silk and cotton yarn, and gold and silver zari. The designs of the Maheshwari sarees are influenced by the Narmada's flow and the temples in the city. The sarees are uniquely bordered with a traditional design of five stripes running parallel across their length and the *pallav* (the edge across the shoulder); these sarees also and have a reversible quality.

More than 5,000 weavers (men and women) are actively engaged in Maheshwari saree weaving. It is said that Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar brought skilled artisans and weavers from Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, and the Sindh region to train the local weavers of Maheshwar.

18. Mangalgiri, Andhra Pradesh

Mangalgiri, situated in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, is celebrated for its rich tradition of handloom weaving. The Mangalgiri handloom industry currently boasts 14,310 weavers, each contributing to the town's renowned weaving heritage. The skilled artisans of Mangalgiri predominantly hail from the Devanga community, a group deeply entrenched in the region's weaving legacy. With a longstanding tradition of handloom craftsmanship, the Devanga community is revered for its mastery in crafting premium cotton and silk fabrics of exceptional quality.

Mangalgiri Handloom: Mangalagiri handlooms are renowned for their distinctive craftsmanship, featuring pure cotton fabric adorned with vibrant colours, intricate designs, and traditional weaving techniques. Mangalagiri fabrics often incorporate motifs and patterns influenced by neighbouring traditions, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the region. The hallmark of Mangalagiri handlooms is the Nizam border, characterised by tiny gopurams along the borders, symbolising the religious significance of the area's three Narayan Swamy temples. Features such as the striped *pallus* and checked body patterns add to the allure of these sarees. The success of Mangalagiri handlooms can be attributed to their affordability and uncompromising quality, which has earned them a substantial market share. The diverse range of products crafted by Mangalagiri weavers includes cotton sarees and dress materials, Mangalagiri sarees, zari sarees, Sico sarees, bed

sheets, *lungis*, towels, shirting cloth, and *dhotis*. Each item reflects the meticulous craftsmanship and dedication of Mangalagiri artisans, contributing to the region's esteemed reputation in the handloom industry. Mangalgiri handloom has been acknowledged under the ODOP ('One District One Product') initiative, aimed at bolstering the handloom industry in Mangalgiri. This involves offering diverse forms of aid, such as financial support, infrastructure development, skill training, and marketing assistance. The vision is to elevate the presence and appeal of Mangalgiri handloom products at the national and international levels, to invite investment, and augment the earnings and livelihoods of local artisans involved in the industry generationally.

19. Nuapatna, Odisha

Nuapatna is a small village situated in the Cuttack district of Odisha. The region is known for its historical significance in handloom weaving, with a community of skilled artisans who have preserved and evolved their craft over the years. The handloom cluster of Nuapatna specialises in the creation of traditional Odia sarees, specifically the Nuapatna sarees. These sarees are characterised by their intricate ikat designs, vibrant colour combinations, and the extensive use of motifs inspired by nature, mythology, and local traditions. The artisans employ traditional techniques such as tie-and-dye (ikat), which involves tying and dyeing yarns before weaving to create patterns.

The artisans in Nuapatna are predominantly from the Devanga community, who have been practicing handloom weaving for centuries. The skills are often passed down from one generation to the next, ensuring the continuity of this traditional craft. The community's commitment to preserving their cultural heritage is reflected in the high quality and authenticity of the handwoven products. The handloom cluster plays a crucial role in the local economy by providing employment to a significant number of artisans. The handwoven sarees produced in Nuapatna are in demand not only in the domestic market but also attract international attention, contributing to the economic development of the region.

20. Patan, Gujarat

Patola is an exquisite and wonderfully intricate silk textile of India, believed to have originated in the 7th century AD. Located in the city of Patan, Gujarat, this traditional art form is now carried out by only four families, struggling to keep the art alive due to its cost and labour-intensiveness. Inspired by the ancient Ikat weave technique, 'patola' weaving is renowned for its complexity and precision. The craft of 'double Ikat' originated in the Patolas of Patan and can be traced back to the rule of King Kumarpal of the Solanki dynasty in the 12th century AD. The Patola textile, revered as a symbol of auspiciousness, has been acclaimed for bringing good luck and travelled as far as Indonesia and Malaysia.

Patola Handloom: Before Patola textiles became popular, they were exclusively worn by royalty. Over time, they evolved into iconic sarees, typically measuring 5 to 9 yards in length and 45" to 54" in width. The intricate process of creating Patola fabric contributes to its exquisite nature. The yarn threads are pre-dyed using a 'double Ikat' weave technique to achieve the desired pattern. It takes approximately a year to complete one piece of Patola. The patterns found in Patola fabric draw inspiration from nature and the local architecture of the region. For instance, designs from the 11th century *Rani ki Vav* (Queen's stepped well) in Patan have been incorporated into the elaborate fabric. Patola patterns are characterised by geometric shapes and a unique pixelated appearance. The most common motifs in the patola saree are *kunjar* (elephant), *phool* (flower), *nari* (girl), *popat* (parrot), and *Pan Bhaat* (pan leaves), all of which hold significant cultural and religious importance in India.

One of the most distinctive features of Patola sarees is that they have no reverse side. Both sides are woven to have equal intensity of colour and design, a characteristic of the intricate 'Bandhani' technique. Other patterns used in Patola weaving include the Narikunjar, Ratanchawk, Navaratna, Voragaji, Chhabdi Bhat, Chokhta Bhat, Chanda Bhat, Pan Bhat, Phul Bhat, Laheriya Bhat, Tarliya Bhat, Zumar Bhat, Sankal Bhat, Diamond Bhat, Star Bhat, Butta Bhat, Sarvariya Bhat, and more.

22. Paithan, Maharashtra

The Paithani handloom boasts a remarkable legacy spanning over 2,000 years, flourishing under the Satavahana dynasty in the capital city of Pratishthan Nagar, now known as Paithan, located in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra. As the capital of the Satavahanas dynasty around 200 B.C., Paithan gained renown for its exports of cotton and silk textiles to the Roman Empire, giving the Paithani textile historical importance. Today, the Paithani textile industry is sustained by approximately 3,000 weavers, primarily clustered in the neighbouring cities of Paithan and Yeola, nestled within

Aurangabad and Nasik districts, respectively. Being carried down through generations, the legacy of crafting a Paithani is a collaborative family business where men traditionally engage in preparatory processes such as yarn spinning and dyeing, and women often assume the primary weaving roles, skillfully crafting Paithani sarees on handlooms.

Paithani Sarees: The signature feature of Paithani sarees is their intricate *pallus*, which often showcase elaborate peacock motifs against a backdrop of golden zari borders. Characterised by their rich jewel tones, luxurious silk fabric, and adorned with exquisite floral and bird motifs these sarees are crafted using silk yarn threads and zari. A special feature of Paithani weaving is the absence of mechanical means like the Jacquard or Jala to produce designs in the weave. Paithani sarees typically weigh between 700 to 900 grams and require a minimum of 500 grams of silk and 200 grams of Zari for their production. The intricate weaving process for one Paithani saree takes at least two months, with some pieces taking up to one and a half years to complete. Influenced by the nearby Ajanta caves, Paithani motifs often reflect elements of Buddhist paintings. These motifs include *tota-maina* (parrot), *bangdi-mor* (peacock with round design), *asavali* (flower and vine), and *narli* (coconut). While traditional Paithanis were crafted with zari made from pure gold, modern variations feature motifs such as stars, circles, peacocks, flowers, and paisleys. One notable variety of Paithani saree is the Kali-Chandra-Kala, renowned for its lamp-black coloured brocade. Other popular varieties include Katha-Padarachi, Paithani Chandra-Kala, and more, each showcasing unique designs and weaving techniques that contribute to the timeless allure of Paithani sarees.

22. Panipat, Haryana

Panipat, located in the state of Haryana, is renowned both nationally and internationally as a leading hub for home textiles, specialising in bed linens, carpets, kitchen linens, bathmats, cushions, and various other textile products. This reputation is rooted in a weaving tradition that dates back to 1947 and has only grown stronger over time. The partition of 1947 saw a significant influx of skilled weavers from Sindh, Jhang, and Multan (now in Pakistan) to India, who established their looms in Panipat and continued their ancestral craft of durrie weaving. Currently, the district boasts over 25,000 handlooms, providing employment to approximately 60,000 individuals. A large portion of the weavers hail from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal. The textile cluster in Panipat is primarily focused around the city itself and its suburban villages. Panipat is notable for manufacturing two main types of carpets: Hand-tufted and Handloom carpets. Among these, the hand-tufted carpets from the district occupy the top position in India's overall carpet production. The region is also celebrated for its woollen tufted carpets, which are in high demand in international markets. The raw materials for these textiles are sourced from Bikaner, Jodhpur, and Jammu & Kashmir. In the early days, these artisans worked on frame looms with two treadles to produce 'Khes' (coverlets) and 'Durries' (rugs) from coarse hand-spun cotton yarn. Their products were primarily marketed in Assam, Bihar, and Bengal. Today, Panipat is responsible for 50% of India's total handloom product exports. The city is distinguished globally for having the highest concentration of shoddy spinning units in one location, further cementing its status as a textile powerhouse.

Panipat Rugs: The Panipat-Ambala corridor is especially noted for its diverse range of cotton to woollen durries, gaining recognition across the country and securing markets both domestically and internationally. Traditionally, women engaged in weaving durries (rugs) and khes (thick coverlets) as a secondary activity to agricultural and household responsibilities. Today, these handmade items, particularly the durries — due to their specific weaving technique — are sought after worldwide. The region is known for its production of thick fabrics, a specialty driven by the local climate which doesn't favour the use of fine threads in traditional looms. The weavers, adept in handling thick threads, excel in crafting intricate and beautiful designs. The majority of weavers in the region use a thick cotton thread locally referred to as 'sooth'. An interesting variation in the local textile tradition is the 'bagh' (garden), which represents a departure from the 'phulkari' embroidery. In the bagh style, the fabric is so densely embroidered that the base cloth is almost entirely obscured, creating a lush, decorative effect reminiscent of a garden. This detailed work further showcases the region's rich textile heritage and the versatility of its artisans.

23. Pochampally, Telangana

Pochampally, a small town in Yadadri Bhuvanagri district of Telangana, is a handloom cluster known since centuries for its unique Ikat design. Also referred to as the 'Bhoodan Pochampally', the weave gained prominence due to its association with the *'Bhoodaan'* movement initiated by Sri Vinoba Bhave from Pochampally in the '1950s'. Spanning across the Deccan plateau, Pochampally comprises a cluster of 60 villages and stands as the largest

handloom tie-and-dye centre in the region. With approximately 1,000 pit looms and a workforce of around 5,000 artisans, Pochampally epitomises the rich tradition of Ikat weaving. It has also been given the award of one of the best tourism villages by UNESCO.

Historically, Pochampally was renowned for its cotton textiles known as 'Sooselu' (20s cotton fabric) until the advent of silk weaving techniques. By the mid-1960s, the introduction of silk tie-dyed sarees marked a significant shift in the local textile industry, catapulting Pochampally's Ikat style to global recognition.

Pochampally/Bhoodan Ikat Sarees: The weavers of Pochampally are popular for their traditional and geometric patterns in Ikat style of dyeing. The intricate process, locally known as '*Paagadu Bandhu'*, involves an 18-step sequence of tying and dyeing sections of bundled yarn to achieve predetermined colour patterns before weaving. In Pochampally Ikat weaving, three distinct types of Ikats are determined by the yarns dyed for a particular design. Firstly, in warp-Ikat, only the warp yarns are dyed, resulting in a fabric with dyed warp threads and plain weft threads. Conversely, weft-Ikat involves dyeing only the weft yarns, leaving the warp threads undyed. Finally, double-Ikat is created when both the warp and weft yarns are dyed, resulting in intricate patterns on both axes of the fabric. Pochampally's distinctive textile tradition incorporates vibrant hues of red, white, and black, achieved through natural dyes sourced from leaves and flowers. Rooted in local folklore and religious symbolism, the traditional patterns of Pochampally textiles have evolved over centuries, now using a diverse range of motifs, including floral, zoomorphic, and geometric designs. The fabric typically used in Pochampally textiles comprises cotton, silk, and the newly introduced sico yarn— a blend of silk and cotton.

Dating back over 400 years, the earliest textiles woven in Pochampally were cotton *'rumals'*. Fishermen in the region introduced their own innovative technique by soaking the yarns in linseed oil before weaving, imparting a unique colour and cooling abilities to the fabric. 'Rumals' prepared by this method came to be known as '*telia rumals'*. Seasoning '*rumals'* by this method enhanced the durability of the textiles, particularly favourable to the fishermen who spent extended periods in water.

24. Ri Bhoi, Meghalaya

Assam and Meghalaya, two northeastern states of India, stand out for their robust silk industry, producing all four types of silk: mulberry, eri, tussar, and muga. Among these, eri silk, known locally as 'ryndia', holds a particularly special place in Meghalaya due to its cultural and economic value. The term 'ryndia' originates from the castor plants that are the primary food source for eri silkworms. The Umden-Diwon cluster of villages in the Ri Bhoi district is a hub for eri silk production, playing a pivotal role in the silk manufacturing landscape of the region. Notably, the entire process is organic, earning ryndia the famous tag of 'ahimsa' silk, as it involves extracting the silk from cocoons without harming the larvae inside.

Textiles crafted from eri silk hold significant cultural importance, particularly during festive occasions in Meghalaya. Women skillfully weave the distinctive checked thohriaw stem wraparounds, while men proudly don ryndia shawls and turbans at festivals. In Meghalaya, women predominantly spin and weave ryndia silk, making it a vital source of income, especially for elderly women with limited mobility to agricultural fields.

In the Garo Hills, famous for high-quality eri cocoons, the expertise and infrastructure for processing yarn and weaving ryndia cloth are readily available. The weaving styles feature unique motifs and captivating designs, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Ryndia Weaves: Weaving ryndia silk is not just a craft but a cherished tradition passed down through generations, serving as a vital livelihood for families in Meghalaya. This hand-spun, hand-woven fabric holds deep cultural significance for both men and women in the region, whether worn in its natural off-white hue or adorned with the iconic maroon and mustard plaid design, symbolising the identity of the Khasi people. To achieve vibrant colours, artisans utilise natural dyes extracted from plants or minerals. Traditionally, these dyes comprised lac red, turmeric yellow, and black from iron ore, creating a distinct palette for ryndia silk. Another hallmark of this weaving tradition is the intricate motifs, notably the '*Khneng'* embroidery, an art form practiced for over two centuries. Inspired by a local insect resembling a centipede, this embroidery is meticulously stitched by hand, with artisans relying on precise thread counts to create uniform motifs. Unlike traditional Indian embroidery motifs focused on flora and fauna, the Khneng embroidery features graphic, contemporary designs adding a unique aesthetic to ryndia silk. Today, embroiderers are exploring new techniques with natural threads like cotton and other silk varieties, enhancing the versatility and appeal of ryndia silk. These weaving

techniques not only celebrate the local cultural identity but also showcase the rich artistic heritage of Meghalaya.

25. Sambhalpur, Odisha

The district of Sambalpur derives its name from the Goddess Samaleswari, the revered deity of the area and is occasionally referred to as Sambalaka. Renowned for its exquisite Sambalpuri sarees, Sambalpur stands out as one of the foremost handloom hubs in Odisha. This famed textile tradition is predominantly centered in the villages of Sambalpur, Bargarh, and Sonepur. At present, approximately 52 weaver cooperatives, comprising 1,200 looms, are actively engaged in the production of Sambalpuri textiles within the district. This indigenous industry is predominantly operated by weavers from Kostha and Bhulia tribes. According to historical accounts, this craft journeyed to Western Odisha when the Bhulia community migrated from northern India and settled in Odisha following the fall of the Chouhan Empire at the hands of the Mughals in 1192 AD. Since then, Odisha's weavers have continued to weave their expertise, producing captivating textiles that are now esteemed worldwide. The Sambalpuri Ikat, in particular, stands as a revered textile craft celebrated across the world.

Sambalpuri Sarees: Cotton and silk are the primary fabrics employed in the creation of Sambalpuri sarees. These sarees are distinguished by their vivid colours, intricate designs, and geometric motifs. The intricate process of handloom weaving involves a meticulous three-step method – *bandha* (tie), *ranga* (dye), and *bunakari* (weaving).

The tie and dye technique, known as 'Ika' or 'Bandha' in the local handloom weaving tradition, is predominantly used in the district for crafting traditional Sambalpuri designs, including sarees, dress materials, towels, napkins, curtains, and handkerchiefs. The unique motifs and designs featured in Sambalpuri fabrics draw inspiration from the natural surroundings of the region, including its diverse flora and fauna.

On average, a weaver household produces around eight sarees per month, while the production of *lungis*, *gamchhas*, and handkerchiefs varies between 20 to 40 pieces per month.

26. Shantipur, West Bengal

During partition in 1947 and the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, skilled muslin weavers, primarily from the Basak community, migrated from the Tangail district (now in Bangladesh) and resettled in Kalna of Purba Bardhaman district and Santipur in Nadia district, establishing Purba Bardhaman in present-day West Bengal as a significant centre for the iconic Bengal Jamdani handloom. Jamdani is a traditional sheer cotton handloom fabric adorned with vibrant patterns. It is believed that among the 36 varieties of muslin products in the South Asian region, jamdani was considered one of the finest. Dating back to the Mughal era, particularly during the reigns of Jahangir and Aurangzeb, high-quality jamdani was a commodity monopolised by the royal court, making it a rare luxury. Following the Mughal period, the Nawabs of Dhaka (in present-day Bangladesh) and Wajid Ali Shah of Tanda continued to promote jamdani weaving under their patronage. The jamdani weaving industry in Purba Bardhhaman is significant, with approximately 36,000 weavers relying on it for their livelihood.

Jamdani Sarees: Jamdani weaving is known for its labour-intensive nature, requiring significant time and effort due to its intricate motifs. The hallmark of jamdani sarees lies in their exquisite designs, rendered in a palette ranging from muted to vibrant colours, intricately woven into the fabric on the traditional loom. Historically, the base fabric was typically white, grey, or beige, with natural dyes used to create the supplementary weft motifs. While traditional jamdani sarees featured motifs in colours derived from natural dyes, contemporary variations may incorporate lightly dyed grounds with designs in hues such as white, maroon, black, green, gold, and silver. The motifs in jamdani are woven directly into the fabric, resulting in garments that are highly breathable and visually stunning. These traditional motifs often feature geometric patterns inspired by elements from nature, including birds, leaves, local flowers, and zigzag lines. The evolved repertoire of designs, known as Dacca gharana, includes motifs such as *hazar-buti, rose-leaf, dora-kata, chand, tara-buti,* and *dabutar-khop.* In Dacca jamdanis, the intricate motifs are crafted using additional weft threads, which may consist of bleached cotton, black or indigo-dyed cotton yarn, gold or silver zari, as well as silk muga filaments. Similarly, in Tanda, bleached cotton yarn and gold zari are commonly used for the extra weft.

27. Sigori, Bihar

Sigori, situated in Patna district, stands as a focal point for weaver communities in the region. With approximately 3,000 looms in operation, the village is bustling with activity, primarily centered around the production of various cotton dress materials

such as shirting, dhoti, and gamcha. Sigori's loom industry is characterised by the use of vat colours, plain weaves, and a diverse array of checks and stripe patterns. These patterns are woven using 32s to 60s cotton yarns, showcasing the village's expertise in textile weaving.

28. Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

The tradition of Pashmina weaving in Kashmir valley is deeply entrenched in the region's history, tracing its origins back to around 3000 BC. Pashmina, known globally for its exquisite craftsmanship, involves the transformation of ultra-soft and warm Pashmina wool into luxurious textiles. The Pashmina goats, from which Pashmina wool is harvested, thrive at altitudes above 15,000 feet in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, adding to the rarity and value of Pashmina.

Once a symbol of royalty and nobility, Pashmina shawls were esteemed for their delicate texture and warmth, making them sought-after gifts that symbolised honour and prestige. As these shawls travelled across continents, their demand soared, further cementing their status as a luxury item. In stark contrast to the much thicker human hair, which is about 75 microns thick, Pashmina fibres, measuring 13-15 microns in diameter, are known for their fineness. This fine quality gives Pashmina its distinctive softness and warmth.

Among the various styles of Pashmina shawls, the 'Kani' shawl stands out for its intricate weaving technique and artistic detail. Originating in the 18th century, making a Kani shawl could engage two weavers for over three years, reflecting the dedication and skill invested in each piece. The most exquisite of these shawls feature patterns and embroidery that are visible on both sides, known as 'do-rukha', and were traditionally worn by members of royal families. Today, while these double-sided shawls are rare, they remain a testament to the rich heritage and unmatched skill of Kashmir's Pashmina artisans. The Vijaypur cluster in the state currently has 233 plus artisans who engage in the Pashmina art form.

Pashmina Shawls: There are 12-15 stages between collecting the pashm fibre and then weaving it to get the pashmina shawl. After the delicate process of weaving Cashmere fabric to create Pashmina shawls and wraps, the shawls are first hand-dyed, laying a vibrant canvas for the next phase of their embellishment. This is where the artistry of skilled embroiderers comes into play as they meticulously adorn the plain shawls with various traditional and intricate embroidery styles, transforming them into masterpieces of wearable art. Among the notable embroidery styles that grace Pashmina shawls are Tilla, Paper Mache, and Kantha, alongside other distinguished types such as Soodi, Kani, Amlakar, Saadi, Bussoo, Zooti, Alwom, and Tilituso.

Either silk yarns or their synthetic alternative known as 'staple' are used to embroider these shawls. Silk yarns, known for their fineness, add a delicate and sophisticated touch to the shawl and also impart a subtle lustre, enhancing its appearance. On the other hand, staple yarn, being thicker and less shiny, offers durability and superior colour retention. The choice of yarn and the mastery of the craftsmen in applying these stitches are what set hand-woven Pashmina shawls apart in quality and elegance. The Sozni embroidery, in particular, stands out as the essence of both Kashmiri craftsmanship and the Pashmina tradition. This and other forms of embroidery add layers of texture, colour, and storytelling to the shawls, further increasing their allure and value.

Creating a Pashmina shawl is a time-consuming process, with two weavers often spending between three to six months to complete a single piece. This duration varies based on the complexity and density of the chosen design. The diverse range of designs and patterns woven into Pashmina shawls reflects the rich cultural heritage and unparalleled skill of Kashmiri artisans, making each shawl a unique piece of heritage and luxury.

The initial designs of shawls were relatively simple, often featuring stripes in several colours without specific motifs. As the craft evolved, several distinctive and popular motifs began to adorn these textiles, each with its unique symbolism and aesthetic appeal. Among the most celebrated motifs are *buti* (small singular flower design), *buta* (multi floral), *Khat-rast* (striped one & runs throughout the length of the shawl), *badam/ ambi/ kairi* (paisley), cypress (cluster of flowers and leaves emerging from a single stem). These motifs not only enhance the beauty of the shawls but also carry cultural and symbolic meanings, making them more than just articles of clothing.

29. Sualkuchi, Assam

'Assamese women weave dreams into their looms', was stated by Mahatma Gandhi for the silk weaving centre of Assam – Sualkuchi. Situated along the northern banks of the majestic Brahmaputra River, Sualkuchi in Kamrup district is renowned for its rich weaving heritage. Affectionately referred to as the 'Manchester of Assam,' Sualkuchi has been

intricately woven into the fabric of Assamese culture for centuries.

The weaving legacy of Sualkuchi can be traced back to the 10th-11th centuries when King Dharma Pal of the Pal dynasty empowered the Tanti community of weavers in the village, laying the foundation for its enduring tradition of silk craftsmanship. The weaving industry of Sualkuchi experienced a significant upsurge during the Second World War, with cloth production witnessing a remarkable increase.

The Golden Muga, Ivory White Pat, and Light Beige Eri being produced here stand out as emblematic representations of Assam's unique silk heritage. Today, with a total of 9,738 pat looms, 2,645 muga looms, and 1,384 eri looms in operation, this weaving activity is supported by 2,968 households who are actively engaged in the industry.

Sualkuchi Textile: Muga silk, often called 'golden silk', earns its name from its innate lustrous quality, which is said to enhance after every wash. Renowned for its exceptional durability and natural sheen, Muga silk stands out as one of the sturdiest natural fibres available. This unique silk variety holds a special place in Assam, as it is predominantly used in crafting 'mekhela-chador', the customary dress for Assamese women. The motifs in these garments draw inspiration from the rich flora and fauna indigenous to Assam, featuring intricate depictions of flowers, peacocks, deer, rhinos, and the 'Jaapi'—the traditional Assamese hat.

Weaving a single piece of mekhela-chador can take up to six days. Historically, motifs were exclusively crafted using golden zari during the era of royalty; however, contemporary techniques incorporate silk and even cotton threads for motif creation. In addition to traditional attire, modern innovations have led to the production of new Muga silk products such as sarees and *gamchhas*.

Endi or Eri silk, also known as 'Ahimsa silk', distinguishes itself with its non-violent approach to silk production. Unlike other silk production methods, where silkworms are harvested before they emerge from their cocoons, the process for Eri silk allows the silkworms to complete their life cycle naturally. This ethical practice has earned Eri silk its reputation as a cruelty-free silk variety. Shawls crafted from Eri silk are celebrated for their exceptional thermal properties, often likened to luxurious materials like cashmere or wool. Moreover, Eri silk is renowned for its diverse range of colours, from pristine whites to subtle creams, beiges, earthy browns, and greys resulting naturally due to the silkworms' diet.

30. Surendranagar, Gujarat

Surendranagar district, situated in Saurashtra region of Gujarat, is renowned as the birthplace of the 700-year-old indigenous weaving craft known as 'Tangaliya'. Once on the verge of extinction and mainly produced by the Dangasia community for their own use, this art form experienced a revival after receiving a GI tag for the Tangaliya shawl — distinguished by its unique weaving method. The term 'Tangaliya' is derived from the Gujarati word '*tangalio*', which translates to 'lower body', reflecting the traditional use of the woven cloth as a lower garment worn by women of the Bharwaad shepherd community. The community comprises both weavers and shepherds, with weavers crafting blankets from sheep and goat wool for the shepherds' use. Approximately 300 artisans are associated with the Tangaliya weaving craft, preserving and perpetuating this ancient tradition.

Tangaliya Shawls: Initially, Dangasias worked only on sheep wool crafting garments primarily for Bharwad women who adorned themselves with *chaniyas* (wraparound skirts) embellished with Tangaliya weaving. However, modern adaptations have seen the incorporation of materials like merino wool, silk, acrylic, viscose, and cotton, offering a broader range of options. Despite these variations, the Tangaliya shawl remains the most renowned product of this weaving tradition. Crafting a Tangaliya shawl typically takes about a week to complete, with the finished product measuring approximately 38 inches in length. A distinctive characteristic of Tangaliya weaving is its reversible patterns, where the designs appear identical on both sides of the fabric. This effect is achieved through the intricate arrangement of threads, creating a raised dot pattern known as '*danas*'. These *danas*, or beads, are a defining feature of Tangaliya shawls, giving them their unique texture and visual appeal. Alongside *danas*, the weaving technique incorporates various geometric motifs such as circles, straight lines, and hyperbolic or parabolic designs. Together, these elements form a rich tapestry of patterns, showcasing the skill and artistry of Tangaliya artisans. Tangaliya designs draw inspiration from nature, featuring motifs of trees, animals, and birds, notably peacocks. Among the prominent Tangaliya patterns are Ramraj, Dhunslu, Lobdi, Gadia, and Charmalia. In Ramraj, vibrant *danas* in maroon, pink, orange, green, and yellow hues adorn a white base, sometimes accented with zari borders. The Lobdi shawl is characterised by maroon tones with white *danas*, while the Charmalia exhibits alternating maroon

and black warp with black weft, creating a striking contrast against white *danas*. Dhunslu tangaliyas exhibit a lighter density of beadwork compared to other designs. These designs, upon completion, boast a geometric and graphic aesthetic. The craft of Tangaliya weaving relies solely on traditional methods dating back to the 14th century, with no use of mechanical tools or devices. Today, these textiles find application in various products such as dupattas, dress materials, bedsheets, and pillow covers, showcasing the versatility and enduring appeal of Tangaliya craftsmanship.

31. Uppada, Andhra Pradesh

Located in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, Uppada has gained recognition for its exquisite lightweight silk Jamdani sarees. The term 'Jamdani' is believed to derive from Persian, with '*jam*' meaning flower and '*dani*' referring to a vase, suggesting the artful depiction of floral arrangements in the saree designs. This weaving technique, with its Bengali origins, is renowned for its intricate 'Jamdani' style patterns, characterised by floral motifs such as the densely flowered '*butidar*' and the '*tercha*' print featuring diagonally striped flowers and a lattice of floral designs.

The art of Jamdani weaving, a tradition that spans roughly 300 years, is known to have originated in what is now Bangladesh. It was from the erstwhile Bengal that a few weavers migrated to Andhra Pradesh ultimately establishing themselves in Uppada. Known locally as '*Ani Butta*' weaving—'*Ani*' meaning 'shed' and '*buta*' meaning small tree—Jamdani is a meticulous handwoven technique, producing fabrics once known as muslin. Despite facing a decline in popularity, the Jamdani style experienced a resurgence in the late '1980s', leading to the emergence of the now-famed 'Uppada Sarees'.

Today, the Uppada weaving cluster boasts around 1,300 artisans and 3,000 looms. For many of these weavers, fishing serves as the sole income beyond crafting these sarees.

Uppada Jamdani Sarees: The main highlight of Uppada Jamdani sarees is that they are lightweight, which makes them a most sought-after handloom especially in hot and humid terrain. Crafting each saree is a process that spans between 10 to 60 days, necessitating the dedicated efforts of 2 to 3 weavers who devote approximately ten hours daily to their work. These artisans employ pure lace and silver zari in the weaving process, with the silver zari often being immersed in melted gold for an added touch of opulence. A notable characteristic of these sarees is their elaborate designs, which appear identical on both sides of the fabric, making it challenging to distinguish the front from the back. This symmetry is a hallmark of authenticity in Uppada weaves, where the reverse side of the motifs showcases the same level of detailed finish as the front.

Uppada's weaving is renowned for its complexity and the labour-intensive nature of its craftsmanship, featuring tapestry-like motifs of paisleys, flowers, leaves, creepers, and geometric shapes. Originally crafted in fine cotton, there has been a gradual transition towards weaving in silk in recent years to suit the evolving preferences of the market. Uppada silk sarees are celebrated for their softness, durability, and lightweight feel. The spectrum of colours and patterns in these sarees includes the understated elegance of whites and beiges in Khadi or cotton, the sleek appeal of raw-silk temple borders, and the boldness of gold-patterned silk in vivid shades like neon green, vermilion red, and vibrant purple.

32. Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

Varanasi, popularly known as Banaras, has great importance in Indian history owing to its sacred ghats and the Kashi Vishwanath temple. However, alongside its religious significance, the city is well known for its age-old tradition of weaving Banarasi, which is as old as the 16th century. The art of weaving Banarasi is said to have been introduced to Varanasi when weavers and merchants migrated from the country's western region of Gujarat and settled here. Practiced primarily by the members of the Ansari community, today, about 40,000 weavers and 25,000 handlooms are actively engaged in the weaving business.

Banarasi is an art tested in time, with its renown going beyond the domestic boundaries of India. Most of the motifs and patterns in the Banarasi saree, such as jhaalar, kalga, and bel, originate from the Mughal era. The pricing of each unique product reflects the craftsmanship and dedication invested in each piece. Banarasi sarees remain the predominant product of the cluster, constituting over 90% of the cluster's output. Other products manufactured, including scarves, stoles, and fabrics, also offer experimentation with new markets.

Banarasi Sarees: Silk and Zari are the most distinguishing features of the banarasi sarees, woven with gold or silver Zari threads. Inspired by the Mughal designs, some prominent motifs of these sarees are Butidar, Meenakari, and Shikargah. While earlier the weavers used cotton for weaving, these sarees became much more popular with the usage of silk after the 16th century. They also specialised in brocade weaving, making it a distinctive

characteristic of Banarasi sarees. It is a textile in which patterns are created by thrusting the pattern threads (Zari) between the warp. Banarasi brocade sarees have several varieties and are important for Indian brides. Banarasi silk sarees are known for their exquisite craftsmanship and timeless elegance. It takes about 10-15 days to finish one saree. Silk and zari, the primary fibres used in the production of this handloom, are woven together to form techniques like Rangkat, Jangla, Tanchoi, and Vaskat specific to the Banarasi handloom. Traditional Banarasi sarees are woven on Jacquard pit looms, where the threads are meticulously set up and weavers weave following the patterns on jacquard cards affixed to the machine.

33. Venkatgiri, Andhra Pradesh

Venkatagiri, nestled in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, holds a prestigious status as a historic weaving centre tracing its roots back to the Vijayanagar empire. Renowned for its exquisite craftsmanship, the Venkatgiri sarees woven here, fondly referred to as Rajmatha sarees, once were exclusively made for royalty. The tradition of weaving these sarees has been passed over 14 generations by the skilled artisans of the Padmashali community. But with the commercialisation and scaling up of the handloom market, craftspeople from other communities have also begun to engage in this art.

Presently, the weaving clusters of Venkatagiri are dedicated to creating an array of sarees in fine cotton, luxurious silks, and delicate silk-cotton blends. With around 70,000 weavers involved in the saree-making process, Venkatagiri continues to make a significant contribution to India's textile industry.

Venkatgiri saree: Venkatgiri sarees were traditionally made with cotton, but nowadays, silk is being used and experimented with to meet the market demand. Along with silk and cotton, zari is an important raw material in the manufacturing of these sarees. The zari in the weaving process is intertwined with silk and cotton threads to create the sarees' distinctive golden borders, typically one to two inches wide. These borders are adorned with designs locally referred to as Patti, characterised by dotted lines running alongside the golden bands.

Despite their transparency and the use of deeply saturated yarn with colours like purple, orange, olive green, bright green, and bright red, Venkatagiri sarees are woven to produce delicate checks and stripes. This weaving technique ensures the sarees are soft, durable, and comfortable, making them suitable for various climates. The sarees are adorned with various motifs, including peacocks, rudraksha beads, betel leaves, gold coins, flowers, buds, parrots, fish, and geometric patterns. A standard Venkatagiri saree measures approximately 5.18 meters in length and 1.17 meters in width. A simple Venkatgiri saree can take at least two days to complete, showcasing the meticulous efforts and craftsmanship involved.

Venkatagiri sarees come in several varieties, such as Venkatagiri Pattu, Venkatagiri Silk, and Venkatagiri 100, with the latter known for its lightweight feel and popularity. The sarees range from light to dark shades, with either light or heavy Jamdani work, catering to diverse tastes and occasions.

The diverse geographical and cultural contexts within which these handloom clusters operate lend a distinctive character to their products. This diversity in traditional weaving techniques and designs is integral to the social, cultural, and economic narratives of these regions. The handloom sector, as a whole, plays a crucial role in defining India's national identity and upholding its vibrant artistic traditions.

Photo Courtesy: Looms of Ladakh

Photo Courtesy: Desi Oon

Photo Courtesy: Indigo Dyeing

Photo Courtesy: Kullvi Whims

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The "State of India's Handloom Sector Report" aims at providing a comprehensive understanding of India's handloom industry. Initiated by ACCESS, supported by HSBC India, and edited by Dr. Madhura Dutta, the report endeavors to compile insights into the diverse traditions, entrepreneurial endeavors, challenges, and opportunities within the sector. Through in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including grassroots organizations, government agencies, and academicians, as well as contributions from thought leaders and professionals in the field, the report aims to mainstream and demystify the understanding of the handloom sector. It focuses on various aspects such as policy ecosystems, public-private partnerships, design, education, sectoral innovation, heritage promotion, marketing scenarios, and contributions to Sustainable Development Goals. By identifying challenges, highlighting best practices, and providing policy recommendations, the report seeks to support the growth and development of the handloom sector while promoting sustainable practices and economic empowerment. Overall, it serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and academics interested in understanding and supporting India's vibrant handloom industry.

The report is authored by multiple experts in the sector and researchers engaged in the handloom landscape.

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