

Indian Handlooms: Present Scenario and Future Directions

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Abstract

Indian handloom textiles are the most exquisite, diverse, versatile sustainable products made with excellent craftsmanship. These have a history of more than 5000 years. Each state of India offers a unique handloom product produced by incorporating a weaving technique of its own. Handloom is one of the oldest and largest employment sector, after agriculture. Responsible for employing lakhs of weavers and allied workers, it has been an important contributor to India's economy. Despite its many advantages, this sector is facing huge challenges which are affecting its growth and have a direct bearing on its sustenance. This essay focuses on the vision of the Government of India towards strengthening the handloom sector for its unprecedented development through its institutional support and initiatives and its ways forward.

Keywords : Government Initiatives for Handlooms; Handloom Future Prospects; Handloom Scenario; Indian Handlooms.

Introduction

Indian handloom textiles are the treasure trove of the Indian subcontinent where each region offers one of its kind textiles. The textiles produced in each part of the country have been very well adapted to suit the climate. Influences of culture and location can be seen in the vibrant textures and the exclusive handloom weaves of each region. The history of handlooms dates back to the Indus Valley civilization. The discovery of bone needles, wooden spindles, and woven cotton fragments at the excavation sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro suggest the antiquity of the tradition of hand spinning and weaving. References to weaving have been made in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. The ancient Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata mention a variety of fabrics in vogue during those times (Rana,

2017).

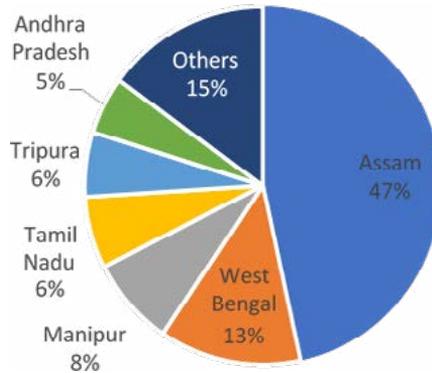
Since early times, Indian textiles have been an important and popular trade commodity. The abundance of raw materials namely cotton, silk, and wool, knowledge of colouring the fibres with colourfast natural dyes, and expertise of skilful hands made handloom textiles a sought- after trade commodity (Gupta, 2012). Inscriptions from the Middle East mention Indian textiles to be exported to many ancient civilizations through Gujarat ports as early as 2350 B.C. Indian cotton was regarded as Sind and Sindon by Greeks and Babylonians, Indian silk was famous in Rome, and fragments of Gujarati cotton textiles have been found at the Egyptian tombs of the 5th century (Yeon, 2009; Gupta, 2012). Travelers from faraway lands took with them Indian handloom textiles as gifts to their country. A French traveller has mentioned that in the seventeenth century, Tavernier, the Ambassador of the Shah of Persia took away a fine muslin turban from India. It measured thirty yards in length and was extremely fine in texture that it could be barely felt by mere touch (NCERT, 2011; Pachauri, 2018). The charm of Indian textiles attracted the Europeans to India which resulted in British Raj in 1800 (Gupta, 2012). Indian handlooms were traded by the Britishers and these soon became the symbol of pride. The works of art were appreciated all over the world, finding their place in global wardrobes. Hence, the Indian handloom industry became a major cottage industry (FICCI FLO, 2019).

Indian Handloom Sector

Handloom is defined as “any loom other than power loom” (The Reservation of Articles for Production Act, 1985). After agriculture, the handloom sector of India is the largest unorganized sector, integrated with the rural and semi-rural lives of the country. It is an asset of the cottage industry which has flourished by passing on skills through the generations. Spread all over the country, the Indian handloom sector provides a vast variety of traditional textiles. In the North is the loom woven Pashmina Kani shawls from Kashmir, a vast variety of Brocades from Varanasi, *Panja* weaving done in Punjab and Haryana, vibrant *Bandhej*, *Laharia*, and *Kota Doria* produced in Rajasthan; North East gives beautiful Eri silk weaves from Assam, Loin loom-woven textiles from Nagaland, and Manipuri weave, Mizo Puan weaving practiced in Mizoram; from East India comes fine *Jamdanis*, *Balucharis*, *Sambalpuri* weaves; South India produces *Kasav* in Kerala, Pochampallis, Venkatgiris and Mangaligiris from Andhra Pradesh and Kanjivarams from Tamil Nadu; West India produces Patan *Patolas* and *Mashrus* from Gujarat and exquisite *Paithanis* from Maharashtra and

Central India gives *Maheshwaris* and *Chanderis* from Madhya Pradesh. (KPMG 2013; FICCI FLO, 2019).

According to the Fourth Handloom Census, Government of India (2018-19), there are 28.2 lakhs handlooms spread across various states of India. FICCI FLO, 2019 reports a large concentration of handlooms in Assam (47%), followed by West Bengal (13%), Tamil Nadu and Tripura (6% each), and Andhra Pradesh (5%) while others account for 15% of the total the handlooms based on the Third Handloom Census (Figure 1).



Source: FICCI FLO, 2019

Fig.1: Percentage of Handlooms in the Indian States

Khatoon (2016) states that the flexibility, versatility, experimentation, and innovations possible in this sector are incomparable to any industrialized production. This sector possesses many advantages right from using natural and sustainable raw materials, eco-friendly production techniques, minimal usage of electricity, the capability of producing the most intricate and unique weaves, the possibility of small productions, low capital investment, and prompt adaptability to new designs as per market demand. The colours, designs, textures, and fine craftsmanship of the products produced in this sector are their Unique Selling Proposition (USPs) which is still beyond the scope of power looms. However, irrespective of innumerable advantages possessed by this sector it has been seen that over the years there has been a decline in the number of weavers employed. According to the Third Handloom Census (1995-96), 65.5 lakh people were involved in weaving and activities related to it, which fell to 43 lakh people in 2009-10 (Handloom Census of India, 2009-10) and nearly 35 lakhs as per Fourth Handloom Census, 2018-19. This probably is resulting due to skilled weavers taking up industry or other sector jobs and lack of interest

in the younger generation of weavers in adopting ancestral professions. Other challenges being faced include tough competition with power loom in terms of production capacity, difficult credit availability, laid-back technological up-gradation, difficulty in marketing, etc. (Note on Handloom Sector, 2015).

Contribution of Handlooms in the Indian Economy

Being an ancient industry, the handlooms have always been a major contributor to the Indian economy. It is the second-largest employment provider after agriculture for income generation to the rural population. The Fourth Handloom Census reflects that in India 88.7% of households in rural areas and 11.3% in urban areas out of a total of 31.45 lakh households are doing handloom activities. This sector employs nearly 35.22 lakh handloom workers of which 34.14 lakh are adult handloom workers which were 38.47 lakh earlier (Third Handloom Census, GOI, 2009). 72.3 % women and 28% male weavers are engaged in handloom weaving which suggests this sector is majorly helping in women empowerment in India.

According to the Annual Report (2017-2018) of the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, almost 95% of handloom textiles produced in the world are woven in India. From 6.91 billion square meters in 2010-11, there has been a gradual increase in per annum production of Indian handloom textiles. It was reported to be nearly 8.01 billion square meters in 2016-17. This has led to a total of 17.4% of cloth production in the country (EXIM Bank of India, 2018).

The handloom sector has always shown potential for foreign exchange earnings thereby contributing to the country's economic growth. As indicated by the Handloom Export Promotion Council of India, handlooms contributed to earning 2280.19 Crore INR in 2017-18 as against 2233.11 Crore INR in 2013-14. Table 1 illustrates year-wise export earnings of the handloom products.

Table 1: Year-wise Export Earnings of Handloom Products

Year	Handloom Exports (Rs. In Crore)
2013-14	2233.11
2014-15	2246.48
2015-16	2353.33

2016-17	2392.21
2017-18	2280.19

Source: <https://www.hepcindia.com/export-scenario/>

Government Initiatives for Sustenance of Handloom Heritage

Looking into the promising future and great contribution of the handloom sector in the country’s growth and development, the Government of India has always envisioned and implemented various schemes and programs for the benefit and upliftment of this sector. A multi-pronged approach taken by the government includes launching the Handlooms Reservation of Articles for Production Act in 1985, conducting time to time Handloom Census, initiating easy availability of raw materials, ease in availability of credit, cluster development, capacity building, providing social welfare schemes for weavers, export promotions, infrastructure development, the revival of handlooms and Khadi Gramodyog industries, supporting environmental compliances, providing Geographical Indication, brand building, marketing, and R&D, launching social media campaigns such as #iwearhandloom, etc. These are a few to be named among many steps taken in this direction (FICCI FLO, 2019). Figure 2 shows the various government initiatives to sustain handlooms.



Fig. 2: Government Initiatives for Sustenance of Indian Handlooms

Institutional Support Framework for Handlooms:

- **Indian Institute of Handloom Technology (IIHT):** This institute was established under the aegis of Development Commissioner for Handlooms, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India in 1960 to develop the handloom industry. For the youth of handloom weavers' families, under its new initiative, a certificate course has been launched. This course seeks to develop technical knowledge for fabric production, entrepreneurship skills, and sensitization of young weavers towards new designs and a 'zero effect and zero defect' initiative (<http://www.iihsalem.edu.in>).
- **Handloom Export Promotion Council (HEPC):** Established in 1965 with mere 96 members, the council's members increased to 1300 by 2015. This agency was set up by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. It aims to promote the export of various handloom products meant for apparel and home furnishings. It provides support and gives guidance to the Indian handloom exporters as well as international buyers (<https://www.hepcindia.com>).
- **Office of Development Commissioner for Handlooms:** It was established in 1975 with a mission to develop the handloom clusters and empower the weavers with a provision of new looms, credit facilities at low-interest rates, establishing yarn depot CFC, marketing, and organizing buyer-seller meet. The Enforcement Wing ensures the implementation of the Handlooms Reservation of Articles for Production Act, 1985. DC Handlooms is supported by 28 Weaver Service Centres spread across India. These Weaver Service Centres play multiple roles centred on improving the earnings of the weavers. Few of the activities include skill up-gradation, distribution of technological interventions, capacity building to improve productivity. From time-to-time design interventions are also done along with the designers and various training programs are organized for the weavers to train them in different activities related to weaving. To provide a direct interface with the buyers, WSCs sponsor weavers in various trade fairs, Expos, and from time to time arrange seminars and workshops for their benefit (<http://handlooms.nic.in/>).
- **National Handloom Development Corporation:** The Government

of India established National Handloom Development Corporation in 1983. Being a national level agency, the main aim of this corporation is to look into the progress of the handloom sector and manage the procurement and supply of raw materials at reasonable prices, technological advancements, increasing productivity, and marketing (Note on Handlooms, 2015).

- Association of Corporations & Apex Societies of Handlooms (ACASH): Registered in June 1984 under the Societies Registration Act, ACASH plays its role in supplying handloom goods required Central Government Departments/Agencies /PSUs. ACASH works as the national-level apex organization for handloom development corporations operating at national, state, and inter-state levels and apex handloom cooperative societies. It also organizes handloom exhibitions for direct marketing of handloom products in various states (Note on Handlooms, 2015).
- National Centre for Textile Designs (NCTD): To bring the handloom sector in pace with rapidly changing market demand, NCTD came into operation in 2001. It aims to foster traditional and contemporary designs by providing designs, trends, and colour forecasts through its website. NCTD also plays an important role in promoting handloom heritage by organizing theme-based exhibitions throughout India.

Figure 3 illustrates the Government’s institutional support framework for handlooms and their years of inception.

Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology (1960)	Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology (1960)	Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology (1960)
National Handloom Development Corporation (1983)	National Handloom Development Corporation (1983)	National Handloom Development Corporation (1983)

Fig. 3: Government’s Institutional Support Framework for Handlooms

and their years of Inception

National Handloom Development Program (NHDP): Enforced as a centrally sponsored program, the main components of NHDP are Concessional Credit, Handloom Marketing Assistance, and Block Level Clusters. It has helped the stakeholders by waiving off unsettled loans, provision of concessional rate loans, provision of the market interface through craft-oriented exhibitions and fairs, and conducting weaver training programs (<https://www.nhdc.org.in>).

Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme:

Mahatma Gandhi Bunkar Bima Yojana for Life Insurance: The government of India introduced this scheme in 2003. It aims to provide life insurance cover to the handloom weavers in case of natural/accidental death, total/partial disability due to accident (Khatoun, 2016).

Health Insurance Scheme for access to health care facilities: To provide medical insurance to weaver and his family who are earning at least 50% of the income from handloom weaving, this health insurance scheme was launched in November 2005 (ILO South Asia, 2015).

Concessional Credit Scheme: Under Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, PNB WEAVER MUDRA SCHEME" (PNB WMS) has been initiated. It aims to provide concessional credit to weavers and weavers' entrepreneurs engaged in handloom weaving. Working along with Punjab National Bank, this scheme gives benefits to weavers under "Concessional Credit Component" like subsidy in interest, margin money, and credit guarantee.

Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme (Mega Cluster Scheme): To provide national and international competitive levels to the handloom weavers' products concerning sustainability and reliability, this scheme has been launched. Through this scheme, weavers receive core and technical infrastructure support, guidance for product diversification, design improvement, linkages to raw material banks, help in marketing & promotion of their products, and many other components that are important for the sustenance of handloom weavers.

Common Facility Centres under Block Level Cluster Approach: Setting up of Common Facility Centres (CFC) is a promising initiative to support handloom weavers.

This approach has been started in nine blocks of Varanasi that have a yarn depot, internet facility, pre weaving facilities, training facility for weavers, and design support facility.

Legal Protection Initiatives: To provide legal protection and prevent illegal usage of registered products and for promoting exports, the government in 2003 launched the Geographical Indication of Goods Act (1999). 57 handloom products throughout India have been registered under this act.

Easy Raw Material Availability: In the year 2016, to assist easy and fast availability of raw materials to the handloom weavers, the National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) introduced Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system and e-Dhaga mobile app. While the ERP system ensures quicker delivery of materials to the weavers, the e-Dhaga mobile app allows the handloom weavers to place orders and make online payments directly on the app. The government of India has implemented Yarn Supply Scheme to make the most of the employment potential of the handloom sector. It ensures the availability of yarns at Mill Gate Price to the handloom weavers (Khatoon, 2016).

Government E-Market Place (GeM): Government e-Market Place was launched by the Commerce & Industry Minister on 9th August 2016. This online marketplace empowers handloom weavers and handicraft artisans to sell their articles directly to government departments and organizations. On the GeM portal, there are 1.5 lakh weavers are registered, there are portal 150 product categories in which more than 7400 products are available on this portal (PIB Delhi 2021).

Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan: The Government of India launched *Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan* for financial support of the Indian artisans, businesses, and enterprises including MSMEs, to help them recover from business losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under this scheme Rs. 20 lakh crore economic package was announced by the Indian Prime Minister for making India self-independent. *Aatma Nirbhar Bharat* scheme also tried to provide virtual platforms to connect the textile artisans with the retailers and exporters from all the regions of the country as well as to bring their product and skill at the global level.

E-commerce Ventures: E-commerce has always proved to be a successful direct marketing platform. With this view, Indian handlooms are now being marketed through 21 leading e-commerce companies for their promo-

tion. Such an initiative has resulted in widening the outreach of handloom weavers by connecting them to customers on a larger platform. Amazon India and Flipkart are the major e-commerce sites that have initiated this task (Dutta, 2018; Suneja, 2020). Projects have also been launched by organizations like India Post and companies like Microsoft for promoting handlooms. Flipkart signed MoU in 2014 while in 2016 'Kala Haat' program was initiated by Amazon.in and Weavesmart, the e-commerce site, in 2018, in partnership with the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India (Dutta, 2018). It has more than 3000 weavers and more than 20,000 handloom and handcrafted products, having Indian Handloom Brand and Handloom Mark. Such an initiative has directly connected the weavers to millions of Amazon customers across India. Amazon has partnered with various government bodies in this regard like Development Commission (Handlooms) and Gujarat Tribal Development Department, TRIFED & Craft Cottage Industries Corporation. It has signed MoU with the Telangana government for APCO (Handloom) and Lepakshi (Handicraft), West Bengal and Orissa for Tantuja (Handloom), Jute Corporation of India and Boyanika (Handloom), Karnataka & Tamil Nadu for Cauvery Handlooms and Loomworld (Handloom) and with Uttar Pradesh for UP Khadi and Handlooms.

Intending to help weaver communities in expanding their markets by connecting them to a larger number of buyers, Microsoft in 2016 introduced Telangana re-weave.in which is an e-commerce platform. Similarly, India Post launched an e-commerce website in 2018 to provide an e-marketplace, especially for artisans, self-help groups, and women entrepreneurs. This has assisted them in the online selling of their products (<https://www.thehindu.com>).

Sensitizing people and promotion of handlooms:

- Introduction of Handloom mark: A mark of assurance for authenticity and Genuity of handloom products, the Ministry of Textiles introduced the "Handloom mark" scheme in 2006 to preserve and protect the identity of the handlooms. This scheme has supported the promotion of handloom products globally by assuring buyers about the genuineness of the product.
- Initiation of National Handloom Day: To sensitize Indians, particularly youth, towards rich and indigenous Indian handloom textiles and their contribution to the socio-economic development of weavers, the government declared 7th August as National Han-

dloom Day in 2015. 7th August has been chosen for the celebration of National Handloom Day every year since on this date Swadeshi Movement was started in our country in 1905 to encourage Indians to incorporate native handmade products made by weaver communities and artisans in their life and boycott machine-made goods at the same time. (Pachauri, 2018).

- Branding of Indian Handlooms: The Government of India launched India Handloom Brand on 7th August 2015 to promote the handloom industry under its marketing scheme (Figure 4). This brand assures the buyers about premium quality and authentic handloom products which have used good raw materials, processing techniques, weaving, design, and embellishment procedures besides following social and environmental compliance. Particular consideration is given to handwoven products having “Zero Defect and Zero Effect”. Till 2017, under 113 product categories, 1007 registrations have been made.

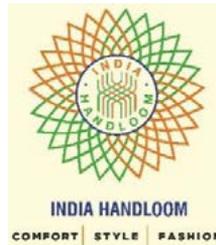


Fig. 4: India Handloom Brand

Source: www.indiahandloombrand.gov.in

- The setting of Handloom Haat: Under yet another initiative to build marketing opportunities, the Ministry of Textiles has set up Handloom Haat at Janpath, New Delhi to sell authentic handloom products from various States/PSUs/Cooperative Societies. Haat provides infrastructure support for exhibiting a variety of handloom products produced all over the country and boosts sales. Regular exhibitions are organized in the complex since 2016 for the promotion of handloom products.
- Initiation of *Hunar Haat*: Organization of *Hunar Haat* is another endeavour of the Government of India to provide a marketing

platform, self-employment opportunities, and to promote handlooms and other traditional crafts and artisans from the minority communities. *Hunar Haat* has been initiated since 2014 under the aegis of the Ministry of Minority Affairs. It is organized in various parts of the country employment and employment opportunities to several craftspeople associated with them (<http://www.uniindia.com>).

- **#Vocal 4 Handmade:** #Vocal 4 Handmade is an online campaign launched by the Ministry of Textiles for social media handles. It aims to promote crafts and support local artisans by buying their products to make India more self-reliant. This was first launched on 6th National Handloom Day (7th August 2020) to promote the handlooms and the people who are related to the Indian textile and craft industry.
- **Vocal For Local:** Vocal for local is another online campaign launched during the COVID 19 pandemic on 12th May 2020 by the Government of India for promotion of local products and to encourage people for buying more localized products to strengthen Indian vendors/weavers/artisans and the economy.

Future Prospects

The level of craftsmanship achieved in Indian handlooms is still beyond the scope of any mechanized version. These possess the capability to fulfil the needs of all by producing a wide range of textiles from very fine exquisite varieties, that take months to be produced and can meet the demands of a few elites, to popular mass-produced items for daily usage. According to Liebl and Roy (2003), the Indian handlooms have emerged as a major export item highlighting how the traditional techniques are capable of meeting present and future demands. Looking into the future needs and trends, these are the most suitable sustainable, eco-friendly products (Note on Handloom, 2015). Irrespective of many initiatives being taken by the government in promoting handlooms, there are still a huge number of promising prospects that lie for further expansion of this sector. These may be in the terms of abundant and easy availability of raw material, development of databases, value addition, quality improvement, multi-channel marketing strategies and promotional campaigns, the introduction of e-commerce platforms to increase the outreach of handloom products, launching National Handloom Day as a national campaign, improving infrastructure facilities, promotion of handloom mark and India

Handloom Brand, technological advancements, generating awareness in consumers about handlooms and making them educated about differences between handloom and power loom products.

The path is long to bring the desired change. Indian handloom textiles can also be promoted among young consumers by spreading the word through famous personalities which will stimulate the growth of the handloom industry. To name a few initiatives taken in the past are actress Sharmila Tagore's initiative in 2013 to launch centenary celebrations of Bengal Home Industries –the country's first NGO to promote the handloom industry and an initiative #iwearhandloom taken by Union Textile Minister, Smriti Irani in 2016 on Twitter and Facebook to encourage consumers to wear handloom. Well-known fashion designers have also come forward to promote Indian handlooms by organizing fashion shows based on this theme. One such name is of designer Anita Dongre (Naqshib, 2018). Shaina NC, designer and politician, has also worked for the promotion of Varanasi handlooms in association with Lakme Fashion Week.

Various initiatives that can be taken in the future for the betterment of the handloom sector are suggested as below. These suggestions have been made based upon the report of The TARI Research Team, FICCI FLO (2019), Indian Handloom Industry, Working Paper No. 80, EXIM Bank and Vision (2018), Strategy and Action Plan for Indian Textile and Apparel Sector, Ministry of Textiles, GoI (2015) and various related articles.

- Sustainable earning by the provision of market intelligence to weavers to produce consumer need-based products. For this regular market studies should be conducted to understand present-day consumer consumption behaviour and the findings should be communicated to the weavers.
- Training weavers to make them capable of using innovative production techniques.
- Since a good quality yarn is the backbone of a good quality handloom product, provisions should be made for easy and regular access to raw materials. NHDC is accountable to provide and supply yarn to meet the needs of the handloom weavers, which is at present only 15%. Hence, an increase in this is required by setting up a network of regional yarn depots with assistance from mills operating in the private sector. Production of Eri and Muga silk should be promoted as well as the e-Dhaga app should be made

popular among weavers to make fulfil their yarn requirements.

- Regular design interventions should be done with the weavers by involving them in design workshops and guiding them to innovate and experiment to improve the marketability of new products. Government and private Fashion and Academic institutes can join hands with weavers' communities for their development through design interventions.
- Weavers and artisans must be made aware of the easy credit facilities available for them. They should be brought under Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) Trinity. This will help them to gain the benefit of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), remove forged beneficiaries, and aid in financial inclusion. Weavers must be assisted and trained in opening up bank accounts, direct delivery of subsidies, and digital governance.
- Common infrastructure facilities are required to be strengthened for all weaving clusters. To ensure the quality of handloom products yarns, dyeing, finishing, and packaging should be regularly assessed. Under the Cluster Development Programmes of Integrated Handlooms Development Scheme (IHDS) common facility centres and dyeing units should be promoted.
- Weavers should be sensitized to focus on high-quality standard products through education campaigns and workshops. They must be made to understand that domestically and globally higher prices for the handloom products can be received only if high-quality products are made. Good quality products will boost this sector.
- Using e-commerce platforms is the need of the hour. Weavers and artisans must be encouraged to explore online platforms for improving their outreach to global markets. On the other hand, following the footsteps of e-commerce companies such as Amazon and Flipkart, other such online platforms should be encouraged to give their support to the artisans.
- Scaling up marketplaces for handloom products is another initiative that can be taken for expanding prospects of this sector. Market places like Dilli Haat can be imitated across various cities of India.

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- A National Campaign on Handlooms, as is being done for Khadi, should be initiated.
 - This will encourage the consumption of domestically produced textiles among Indians.
 - Development and distribution of Informative Educational Material such as a handbook enlisting handloom textiles produced in India and the sources from where these can be purchased.
 - Handloom Mark and India Handloom Brand should be promoted to make consumers aware of the reason for the higher prices of handloom products.
 - A multi-pronged approach should be adopted by the government for increasing the market of handloom products by tying up with places having good footfall like malls, retail chains, etc.
 - The organization of events amongst youth to make them aware of Indian handloom products should be done. Promotional Exhibitions –cum –sales can be conducted in colleges and educational institutes. During such programs loom showcasing handloom weaving, fashion shows based on handloom themes, display of handloom products from various states should be done.
 - Youth must be educated about rich textile heritage through various informative programs like seminars, after school programs.
 - Adapting the handloom products to suit the present consumer preferences, improving the quality of the products, and ensuring its larger reach to the consumer markets.
 - State-level initiatives should be taken to increase the usage and production of handloom products. Following the model adopted by Kerala state of supplying school uniforms in government schools made from handloom fabric, other states too can take similar initiatives to boost up the handloom industry (<http://www.newindianexpress.com>). Plans can be drawn to provide handloom uniforms to bus conductors, policemen, etc. Companies can be encouraged to invest in handloom products for corporate gifting. All such activities will result in the strengthening of the handloom sector.

- To empower women weavers and artisans, private companies can be connected with corporate CSR funds through CSR programs.
- To increase awareness about indigenous traditional handloom textiles among people,
- inspiration can be taken from ASEAN countries' initiatives concerning steps taken for revival and promotion of the handloom sector. Due to their efforts, they have seen a boost in demand for such products. Initiatives followed by them include collection and preservation of traditional weaving and embroidery products and another being development of an illustrative storytelling book about weaving tradition.

Conclusion

The Indian handlooms are a symbol of India's traditions and culture with diverse textiles renowned globally. Almost every Indian State offers an exclusive handloom product. Besides providing employment and empowering women of the country, this sector has played an important role in revenue generation. Unfortunately, as stated by Khatoon (2016), over the years weavers from the handloom sector are facing a myriad of adverse problems that has resulted in the closure of many handloom weaving units. To safeguard our handlooms, it is important to make weavers understand that though it is good to hold on to traditions but to be able to sustain, they will have to change and diversify their products and techniques. They will have to adapt handloom products to contemporary times without losing the essence of their fine craftsmanship so that the younger generations start understanding and supporting these fabrics.

At the government level, immense hand-holding is required to bring this sector to the forefront. It should play an active role in investing in capacity and skill development programs for weavers, providing market linkages, regulating raw material pricing, regular quality checks, making credit facilities easy for the weavers, helping in technological up-gradation, initiating marketing through a multi-pronged approach on regular basis and creating awareness amongst the consumers about sustainable features and advantages of handloom products. A larger number of private organizations and retailers must also join hands with weavers and artisans to help them increase their outreach to global consumers. Also, e-commerce platforms need to be expanded to provide new markets and customers to handloom weavers. Multi-level interventions along with the right policies and incentives

will ensure sustenance of the handloom sector, revival, and promotion of weaving skills that will foster their future and that of the country. It is a goal that might not be impossible to achieve provided it is given the right direction and platform. It is imperative to pervade energy into this sector with the hope to save weaving traditions from becoming extinct.

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