



National Handloom Day

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Why in News

On the occasion of the **6th National Handloom Day** on **7th August** 2020, the Ministry of Textiles is organizing a virtual function in the wake of the **Covid-19 pandemic**.

The **first** National Handloom Day was celebrated in **Chennai in 2015**.

Key Points

- The date, 7th August, was chosen as the **Swadeshi Movement was launched** on the same date in the year **1905**, which was based on **Bal Gangadhar Tilak's ideology of swadeshi**.
- On this day, the **handloom weaving community is honoured** and the **contribution of this sector is highlighted**.
- **Objectives:**
 - To **generate awareness** about the handloom industry amongst the public at large and its contribution to socio-economic development.
 - To **protect India's handloom heritage** and to enable the handloom weavers and workers with greater opportunities.
 - To **ensure sustainable development** of the handloom sector thereby empowering handloom workers financially and instilling pride in their exquisite craftsmanship.

- **Significance:**

- Handloom sector is a **symbol of India's glorious cultural heritage**. India's **soft power** has long been endorsed by the handloom and handicraft space. 'Saree diplomacy' and '**Khadi diplomacy**' are some such examples.
- The textiles and handloom sector in India is the **second-largest source of employment** to people, after **agriculture**.
According to the **Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20**, 31.45 lakh households are engaged in handloom, weaving and allied activities.
- It is an important **source of livelihood** in the country and a **key to women empowerment** as over 70% of handloom weavers and allied workers are women.

Steps Taken

- A **social media campaign** has been planned for the handloom weaving community.
All the Secretaries of the States, Textile Bodies like the **Central Silk Board**, **National Jute Board**, **e-commerce** entities, retail companies and designer bodies have been requested to amplify the campaign.
- The Prime Minister has **urged the people to use Indian handlooms and handicrafts and further spread awareness** to others as well.
The more the world knows about the richness and diversity of these products, the greater Indian artisans and weavers will benefit.
- Under **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, Handloom Export Promotion Council** (HEPC) is organising a **Virtual Fair**, connecting more than 150 participants from different regions of the country showcasing their products with unique designs and skills.
Various exquisite handloom products and numerous other **Geographical Indication (GI) Tagged** products will be displayed to attract the attention of international buyers.
- Other events include the **launching of a mobile app and backend website for Handloom Mark Scheme** (HLM), the **launching of My Handloom Portal**, etc.
HLM was **launched in 2006** with the basic objective to brand Indian handloom products and secure a premium position for them in domestic as well as international markets.

Handloom Export Promotion Council

- It is a **nodal agency** constituted under the **Ministry of Textiles**, Government of India.
- It was incorporated as a **not-for-profit company under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956.**
- **Aim:** To promote the exports of all handloom products like fabrics, home furnishings, carpets, floor coverings, etc.

Challenges

- Due to the Covid-19 induced **lockdowns**, norms of **social distancing** and the **resultant economic turbulence**, there are no handicraft and handloom exhibitions or markets.
 - It has **impacted incomes and the entire supply chains** involved in handloom and handicraft, along with **supplies of raw materials and unused inventory.**
 - According to the **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)**, tribal handicraft and handloom worth Rs. 100 crore went unsold owing to the lockdown.
- **Natural calamities** such as the recent **Assam floods** also **impact the livelihoods** of artisans, especially in the silk clusters of the state.
- The sector also faces the issues of **cheap emulations, automated looms** which **threaten the sustenance of original arts and the timeless skills** of the weavers.
- The Centre has **abolished the All India Handicrafts Board, ending the one official forum where weavers and craftspeople could raise their voices** directly and were empowered to advise the government on policy and spending.
 - The move is in consonance with the government's vision of '**minimum government and maximum governance**' in the pursuit of achieving **good governance, leaner government machinery** and the **need for systematic rationalisation** of government bodies.

The government platforms for such direct interactions are **fastly reducing which is a cause for concern.**
 - The board was **established in 1952** and used to **advise the Ministry of Textile on development programmes** for handicrafts.

Suggestions

- There is a need to **promote the finesse of Indian weavers globally to communicate, disseminate and engage** with not just the global audience but the Indian diaspora as well.

- The **textile clusters should be encouraged in making masks and other medical equipment that uses textiles** such as bedsheets, etc. contributing to the medical infrastructure.
- Government programmes like **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, Vocal for Local** campaign and **Make in India** need to be popularised within the country to increase the domestic demand.
- **Corporate organisations** must buy products from **artisans for the purposes of awards, corporate engagement programmes, and business gifting** which will facilitate direct producer-consumer interface, thereby ensuring proper returns on the products to artisans.

Way Forward

- Initiatives such as the **Northeast Expo 2019** must be continued digitally so that states and the Centre have more online market portals for Indian handlooms, handicrafts and forest produce, as the sectors are interlinked.

The Northeast Expo 2019 through '**Tea and Khadi**' diplomacy helped in improving the trade ties with the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations** (ASEAN) and **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation** (BIMSTEC) nations.

- While the markets move online, it is **equally important for the artisans to get adequately equipped and trained** in operating online portals.
- **Online exhibitions through Indian embassies must be organised** to make the global audience aware of the rich legacy of handlooms and to honour artisans from India.

Source: PIB