

# National Handloom Day Announcements & Challenges Ahead

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This editorial analysis is based on the article **“Handloom Day announcements look like a mix of the good and the bad, but are mostly foggy”** which was published in the Indian Express on 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2020. It analyses the announcements made on the National Handloom Day 2020 and the challenges that lie ahead.

Sixth **National Handloom Day** was celebrated on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2020 and it was marked by many announcements by the Ministry of Textiles. Due to the **COVID-19 pandemic**, the day was celebrated on a virtual platform by the concerned ministry. These announcements pave way for much needed push for the handloom industry but it also poses some challenges.

## The Announcements

### Termination of the handloom, powerloom, wool, jute and silk boards:

- The Ministry of Textiles declared the termination of the handloom, powerloom, wool, jute and silk boards.
- The boards have been scrapped with a view on achieving minimum government and maximum governance.
- The moves are aimed at a leaner government machinery and for systematic rationalisation of government bodies.
- These boards had become spaces for political patronage and were of no real benefit to weavers.

**New Handloom Portal:** A handloom portal was launched on National Handloom Day along with a social media campaign to instil pride in the weaving community.

### Virtual Fair:

- The **Handloom Export Promotion Council** also organized a virtual fair.
- The fair is to connect more than 150 participants from various regions of the country to showcase their products with solitary designs and skills.
- The fair will showcase elegant and beautiful handloom products which can be bought by the buying community directly from the masters themselves.

**Meet The Maker campaign:** The Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), a not-for-profit organization that works to further the business of fashion in India and ensure its sustainable growth, launched campaigns including Meet the Makers which will promote the handloom makers.

### **COVID-19 support fund:**

- A new fund was also started by FDCI to support the upcoming designers across the country. FDCI will be buying merchandise from weavers, which would be used to make high-in-demand cotton masks or ensembles.
- The idea behind this is to buy unsold handloom fabrics stocked with them, which would help the weaving community earn a better livelihood.

**Atma Nirbhar Bharat:** PM Modi also urged everyone to be Vocal for handmade and strengthen efforts towards an **Atma Nirbhar Bharat**. Textiles minister Smriti Irani urged people to buy Handloom and celebrate this Indian heritage.

## **The Challenges**

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### **Creating new institutions:**

- The handloom, powerloom, wool, jute and silk boards may have been dismantled but demolitions must lead to building a better institution, not banish the voice of the weavers concerned.
- It has to be replaced by a well-chosen modern, dynamic, autonomous and inclusive body of genuinely experienced and credible voices from the handloom-weaving chain, including spinners, weavers, dyers, designers, private and public craft institutions, e-market platform providers and experts.

### **Interlinking:**

- The announcement also involves the integration of plans with other ministries like Tourism. Moreover, other ministries/departments such as the culture, social justice, women & child welfare, minority affairs should also be included.
- All these ministries touch textiles and crafts and often, their functioning results in duplication and overlapping rather than effectively integrating with the Ministry of Textiles.

### **IT Infrastructure:**

- Information technology(IT) is undoubtedly the new “king”, but if weavers have to avail of all knowledge from a special handloom portal, they need connectivity, computers and digital knowledge.

- 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 them in domestic as well as international markets.

### **Raw Material:**

- The Fourth All India Handloom Census (2019-2020) cites raw material support needed by nearly 59.5 percent of weaver households.
- From cotton, silk, and woollen yarn to dyes, costs have increased and so has the shortage.

### **Credit Support:**

- The Textile Association of India records that the budget allocation for the textile sector came down to Rs 4,831 crore in (2019-2020) from Rs 6,943 in the previous fiscal.
- This also means that various schemes be it housing, subsidies, health insurance will affect the weaver too.
- Quite often smaller weavers are at the mercy of money lenders, and they commit suicides.

### **Reduced numbers:**

- With many traditional families moving to cities for jobs as labourers, weavers have been leaving the loom.
- While the recent Handloom Census (2019-2020) records that there are nearly 31.44 lakh handloom households, and it has seen a rise from 27.83 lakh in the last census, the numbers are still dismal.
- If in 1995-96, the numbers were at 65.51 lakh, there is no denying that there is immense cause for concern.

### **Lack of access:**

- Poor infrastructure, older looms and inaccessibility to reach prime markets have made lives of handloom weavers even more difficult.
- While many organisations and NGOs have been helping local communities to reach consumers directly, there is a need to make it a level playing field of weavers of every income bracket, be it a master weaver with over 50 people working under him, or a smaller weaver, who with his six-member family works from home.

- While there are many government schemes currently for weavers, there's basically 3% of weavers who are aware of the Weavers Health Insurance Scheme and only 10.5 per cent know of the credit waivers for loans that they can avail (Handloom Census 2019-2020).

## Way Out

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### Awareness and Access:

- Providing awareness, accessibility to markets and design R&D, easy access to raw material and better credit support can make a difference to weavers in different corners of the country.
- This would go a long way in promoting the Handloom heritage of our country.

### Implementation of Satyam and Ajay Shankar Committee recommendations:

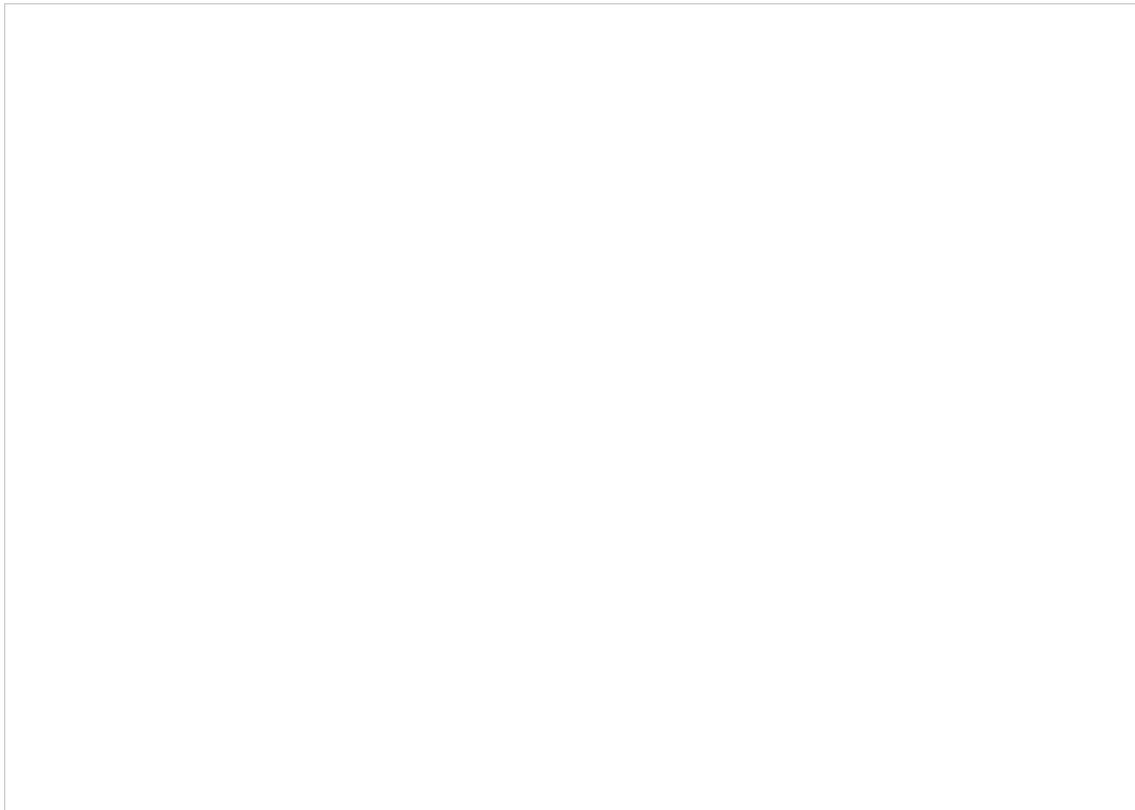
The government must implement the **Satyam and Ajay Shankar committee reports** which dealt with ease of doing business and the handloom sectors of India similar to what it did to the Kasturirangan Report which is the basis for the **New Education Policy 2020**.

### Bottom-up Approach:

- The prime minister's call of "Local to Global" clearly indicates a bottom-up approach from production to marketing.
- This is a way through which migrants will stay home. Local production for local markets is a brilliant strategy and needs encouragement.

### National Handloom Day

- In July 2015, it was decided by the Government of India to celebrate August 7 every year as the National Handloom Day to revive the roots of handlooms and provide work to weavers.
- On August 7, 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the first National Handloom Day, at the centenary of Madras University in Chennai.
- August 7 was chosen as the National Handloom Day to commemorate the Swadeshi Movement which was launched on this day in 1905 in Calcutta Town Hall to protest against the partition of Bengal by the British government.
- The main essence behind National Handloom Day is just to boost the confidence or income of artisans but also to provide greater recognition to handloom products.



***Drishti Mains Question***

Discuss the challenges of handloom industries in India. Is the government doing enough to address the issues?



Watch Video At:

<https://youtu.be/WKqKaESD8LY>

This editorial is based on **“Step back from parochialism”** which was published in The Hindustan Times on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.