



Rise of Handloom to a Global Industry

- The Indian handloom industry is one of the oldest and largest cottage industries in India with a standing ancient tradition dating back thousands of years for their excellent craftsmanship, representing the vibrant Indian culture. Indian artisans dating back to the Egyptian Babylonian times had such fine mastery over their fabrics they were appreciated globally for their hand spinning, weaving and printing techniques that were handed down from generations.
- Historically handloom Industry could be found in every state of India and each region had a unique take on their handloom product, like the Tie and Die technique from Rajasthan, Chanderi from Madhya Pradesh or the Jacquard from Uttar Pradesh, due to their unique rich variety Indian Handloom Industry had a constant high demand in the Indian market as well as all over the world for their craftsmanship and intricacy of designs.
- This industry was a household based Industry and was one of the largest employment sectors both directly and indirectly, providing jobs to lakhs of weavers in India. The handloom industry due to its unique nature of requiring minimum capital and little to no power and flexible environment-friendly innovative product thrived in India for thousands of years.
- During British rule, the export of the raw cotton and flooding the Indian market with machine based imported yarn and the authorities resorted to violence and coercion to stop domestic handlooms. Summarily, this resulted in a complete loss of livelihoods first for the spinners, and increased dependency of handloom weavers on machine yarn. Despite this the Indian handloom industry survived and sustained itself up until the World War 1 when imported machine made clothes flooded the Indian Market. The beginning of Powerlooms in the 1920's, and the consolidation of the mills and the higher cost of yarn, made it impossible for traditional

handloom artisans and with the rise of unfair competition led to the decline of Traditional India Handloom.

- Mahatma Gandhi – Father of the nation, started the Swadeshi Movement by using 'khadi' with the objective of promoting self-reliance and self-sustainability among the rural villages and used it as a tool of passive resistance to reject British raj. Every Indian was urged to spin their own yarn by using a simple charkha and to proudly wear Khadi. This movement led to the closure of the Mills in Manchester and was a big turning point in the struggle to achieve independence.
- After Independence, the Indian government introduced several schemes and made various interventions to revive the rich Indian Handloom heritage industry to its previous glory and promote regional handloom culture. To promote Khadi and other village industries, the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) was formed by the Government of India. It is an apex organisation under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), with regard to Khadi and village industries within India.
- Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium enterprises have evolved during the last few decades as a pivotal instrument in India to patron the entrepreneurs-both clusters and individuals to move ahead and expand their trade. This practice of cottage industry clusters were formed by the Government is pouring into rural India. Schemes by the Ministry of MSME like the Micro and Small Enterprises – Cluster Development Programme (MSE-CDP) is aimed at enhancing the productivity of rural cluster of artisan in the view of revitalize the approach and subsequent effect in the livelihood in India. The artisans by adopting the cluster development approach can enhance their productivity and competitiveness as well as their capacity building as a group. This scheme helps with the volume manufacturing processes, technology assistance and upgradation, marketing strategy, maintaining quality, testing, purchase, outsourcing, etc to find out its strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT), problems and impediments, suggestions and a well drawn action plan for enhancing the competitiveness of the units of the

cluster and to position the cluster on a self sustaining trajectory of growth.

- Currently, the Indian handloom sector has evolved and grown and holds a unique position in the export market, where the share of Indian handloom fabric in the world is 95% (Annual report 2016-17, Ministry of Textiles, GOI) being exported to over 125 countries. India is the second largest exporter of handloom products in the world, with exports valued at US\$ 353.9 million in 2017- 18 (Indian handloom industry: potential and prospects, EXIM Banks working paper 80, 2018). In the neighboring economies such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and China, they are using fully automotive machines to mass produce and changing the existing customer preferences; another factor playing in the slowdown of the Indian handloom sector is the slowdown in EU and US to be blamed. The
- To conclude, the Indian handloom industry has a rich heritage that has persevered through time immemorial. Conversely, the sector is surrounded by manifold challenges such as small productivity, globalisation, insufficient working capital, rapid technology development, etc. Hence, the handloom sector will have to play to its different strengths in the modern economy. The energy impacts and environmental harm from handloom technology are almost zero. The nature of powerloom industry is such that there is great scope for many newcomers. It is also true that the industry will survive and prosper because of originality, individuality and workmanship of the artistic weaver. The prudent strategy lies in bringing a balanced compromise between retaining the cultural heritage of the profession and the introduction of modern advanced technology weavers in the weaving industry.