

***Increasing earning of the
handloom weaver
brothers and sisters
few words on***



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Development of handloom on a sustainable basis

“Basic Tenets (Mula Mantra)

Development of handloom is like a “Worship”. In this Worship, Consumer is the “God” (Bhagwan) and Market is the “Heaven” (Swarga). Further in this Worship, the fundamental principle is to “Produce fabrics as per requirement of the Market”. The Basic tenet (Mula Mantra) of this Worship (Gayatri Mantra) is to “Weave Fabrics with New Colour and New Design, Without any Defect, as per the liking of the Consumer”. The primary Weavers' Cooperative Society is the “Temple” and Weaver is the “Priest” in this worship.

It is hoped that this Worship (handloom weaving) will play an important role in the socio economic development of our country in the coming days with active support and cooperation of the Government and general consumers.”

(Extract from the book “A word for the handloom weaver brothers and sisters” written in odiya by Mr. S.K. Panda, I.A.S. the then Director of Textiles, Odisha in **January, 1994**)



Increasing earning of the handloom weaver brothers and sisters Few words on¹

After food, cloth is the most important basic need of human beings. Nature of human clothing has evolved over decades. Initially, fibers of plant and animal origin woven by hand-operated looms were meeting this basic need. Nature and variety of fabrics has undergone significant changes with industrial revolution and later with technological upgradation and evolution of fashion. However, handloom fabrics continue to be integral part of the rich culture and heritage of India. Because of its unique colour, exquisite texture and design combination, handloom fabrics have been widely appreciated both within the country and abroad. As a matter of fact, when the Britishers first came to India, the rich handloom fabrics of India became an eyesore and the Company took steps to destroy indigenous handloom industry for pushing their fabrics into Indian market.

Handloom faced stiff competition with the advent of the powerloom. Because of obvious reasons, plain cloth woven on powerloom remains cheaper than similar cloth woven on handloom. Common people prefer powerloom fabrics due to its lower cost. After independence, number of plans and programmes has been implemented for

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assisting the handloom weavers. Certain products have also been reserved for production only by handloom. However, powerloom fabrics have acquired a lion share of the fabrics market due to its lower cost. Notwithstanding the technological evolution and growth of powerloom and composite mills, handloom fabrics continue to retain its place as a *niche* product.

During the independence struggle, Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, had stressed on the need for hand spinning, handloom weaving and wearing India made *Khadi* fabrics. As a matter of fact, this formed an integral part of our *Swadeshi* movement in the struggle for freedom. However, in the 21st Century, this scenario has changed and Indian textile industry has emerged as a major player in the global textile. The whole world is looking towards the Indian organized textile industry comprising of spinning, weaving, apparel, and garment and fashion segments. The handloom industry is required to be consolidated for facing this reality on a pragmatic basis keeping in view the fact that handloom, powerloom and mill made fabrics will continue to co-exist in the market. The decision for purchase of a particular fabric would ultimately lie with the consumers, who will chose the fabrics based on quality and price. It is necessary for the handloom weavers to appreciate and get prepared for facing this reality.

Handloom industry not only provides livelihood opportunity to lakhs of people living in rural areas at a low capital investment, with good domestic and international market, ensuring continuity of Indian heritage, culture

and tradition but also have several indirect benefits like low carbon emission, little demand on energy and other scarce resources, environmental conservation, checking migration to urban areas, thereby reducing rate of urbanization as well. On the social side, Handloom plays an important role in empowering the women and the disadvantaged segments like Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Classes and Minorities thereby making the development inclusive and sustainable.

The major strength of handloom lies in its diversity and ability to change design swiftly with ease. By simply changing the colour of the thread and/or the weave, the handloom weaver produces a range of fabrics, each different from the other, whereas the cloth woven on the powerloom remain monotonous and identical meter after meter. Apart from the design and colour, the fact that it is made by hand, make handloom fabrics unique as a "niche" product in the national and international market. A lady wearing a typical hand woven *Banarasi*, *Jamdani*, *Kancheepuram* or *Odisha Ikat* saree attract attention anywhere in the world, because of its exquisiteness and being different. It gives the person wearing it an identity, distinction and immense pride of being an Indian, which stands out anywhere in a crowd. As such the best way for the handloom industry to retain its place and importance in the competitive market lies in producing good quality, defect free, high value cloth with designs changing rapidly for meeting the requirement of the customers, who have the capacity to pay. Relatively low cost fabrics

produced on handloom will however continue to have a space for domestic consumption and local markets. But the moment handloom fabric reaches the market place, it has to face the competition from the powerloom in terms of quality and price. It would be difficult for plain cloth woven on handloom to face the competition from similar cloth produced on powerloom, as a common buyer may not be able to distinguish and appreciate the difference between the two.

Keeping the above in view, production of good quality cloth, without any defect and with new design typical to different traditional handloom pattern of the country for the niche market and for the consumers with higher paying capacity has to be taken as the major plank for revival and promotion of handlooms.

The Central and State Governments have been taking several steps for promotion of handloom in general and increasing income and improving standards of living of the handloom weavers in particular. These interventions broadly fall under two categories namely; statutory and promotional. The statutory measures include reservation of certain category of cloth for production only by handloom and making it obligatory for the yarn spinning factories to produce a portion of yarn in hank form for ensuring supply to handloom. The promotional measures include number of plans and programmes implemented by the office of the Development Commissioner (Handlooms) under Ministry of Textiles and the State Governments for benefit of the handloom weavers.

The ongoing Government policy and programmes are required to be reviewed and strengthened for achieving the desired objectives. Protection given by reservation of some products for production only by handloom is required to be strengthened by taking a pragmatic view of the entire textile industry and safeguarding interest of the handloom weavers for marketing their products. Similarly hank yarn obligation for ensuring supply of raw material to the handloom sector need to be revisited and strengthened for achieving the objective in ensuring availability of quality raw material to the handloom weavers in adequate quantity, at reasonable price and in time on the one hand and ensuring that these benefits are not misutilised on the other.

The Development Commissioner (Handlooms), through the network of 27 Weavers' Service Centre located at different parts of the country, has been providing technical guidance to handloom weavers on designing, dyeing and weaving new products. Besides, Indian Institutes of Handloom Technology at Varanasi, Guwahati, Jodhpur, Salem, Baragrhand Shantipurare running diploma programmes for developing trained man-power for promotion of handloom. Action has been initiated for modifying this course with addition of fashion, Information Technology, accounting, business management etc. for meeting the emerging needs.

The strategy adopted for development of handlooms is mainly based on organizing the individual handloom weavers into primary weavers' cooperative society and

supporting them for taking up production and sale of fabrics as per market requirement. The primary weavers' cooperative societies have been federated into Apex Weavers' Cooperative Society at the State level. Besides state run Handloom Development Corporations have also been set up in some States for assisting the weavers working outside the cooperative fold. Handloom products are also being marketed by private business houses and as art and craft items by various agencies. The Apex Weavers' Cooperative Society and Handloom Development Corporation played a meaningful role in promotion of handloom initially after independence. However over years these organizations have got overburdened with huge administrative machinery and high salary bills. This in turn has been affecting ability of these organizations adversely in serving the handloom weavers. On the other hand, advancement of internet and other Information Technology based interventions have brought about radical changes in the field of communication and reduced geographical distance to a great extent. Information Technology based financial inclusion initiative "Prime Minister's *Jan dhan Yojana*", launched by Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister has come as a landmark intervention in empowering the poor living in the rural area. The handloom weavers need to come forward and take advantage of these developments for accessing institutional credit and market.

While every weaver, who has loom, represents a commercial production unit, it is necessary to bring 100

or more weavers onto a common platform for interacting with the market and producing cloth in required quantity, with quality and as per the time schedule on a continuous and dynamic basis. This is of importance for making the handloom industry market oriented in general and production of high value, fashion oriented fabrics in particular. For the purpose, it is necessary to re-strategize the approach to handloom for developing at least one cluster in each block, where hand-weaving is either prevalent or is possible. More than one cluster may also come up in a block, in case number of weavers is high and there is adequate business to support salary related expenditure.

Keeping this in view, Ministry of Textiles, in consultation with the State Government, has initiated action for setting up a Common Facility Centre (CFC) for supporting group of handloom weavers in each block. Each CFC will be provided with basic infrastructure comprising of a godown for storage of raw material and finished products, and an office with internet connectivity for providing Information Technology based interventions including the benefits of financial inclusion under “Prime Minister’s *Jan dhan Yojana*” to the handloom weavers. The centre will also have a rest room for accommodation of the designer/bulk buyer from urban area, who may like to stay in the production area for a day or two. Required facilities for training in design, dyeing and weaving along with equipment for dyeing/designing, water supply, effluent treatment and bulk processing will be provided in each CFC. The CFC will be set up by strengthening the

existing infrastructure in the primary weavers' cooperative society, which is running in profit in the block. Where there is no functional primary society, such facility may be developed on a piece of land to be provided by the gram panchayat or State Government or any donor. In such a case, the CFC will be managed by registered Self Help Group or any organization of the handloom weavers active in the area. The CFC will be manned by one handloom diploma holder having technical knowledge on handloom along with an ex-service man from the local area for providing required administrative support. Technical officers available with the Weavers' Service Centre and State Government dealing with handloom will provide technical support at the CFC.

Traditionally, master weavers have been running handloom business as commercial enterprises and providing marketing support for handloom products. There are reports of the master weavers exploiting the producer weavers by cornering bulk of the profit and passing only a miniscule to the primary producer-weavers. For tackling this situation, each handloom weaver needs to come forward and avail Government assistance for setting up looms with accessories in his own house. This will give the weaver the freedom to produce and sale fabrics either of his own, through the primary society or through the weaver entrepreneur as per his own choice.

Handloom weaving is a household based activity. It has potential to provide livelihood opportunity to the women in particular, who may take up handloom weaving in the house along with other household chores

like looking after the children and elderly. Such women can avail government assistance for training, getting loom and accessories and take up production of fabrics on a commercial scale. This would empower the rural women in the true sense and enable them in getting a decent earning from handloom.

Assistance for construction of work shed, acquisition of loom and accessories under the ongoing schemes may be availed by weavers for augmenting the existing facilities and acquiring of new ones as per requirement. Such assistance can be credited directly to the bank account of the weaver, who may procure required material as per his own choice, with help of the technical staff of the Weavers Service Centre and the State Government. With a view to provide health care facility to the handloom weavers, ongoing weavers welfare scheme is being revised on the lines of the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY). Implementation of this scheme is being dealt by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, who have been requested for working out details for providing necessary health care to the handloom weavers. Further, benefits of Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, launched on the 9th May 2015, providing Insurance coverage of Rs. 2 lakh in case of death or deformity can also be availed by the handloom weavers.

Availability of credit is another important need of the handloom weavers, which is being provided through the primary cooperative society and cooperative banks.

Central Government, with help of NABARD and State Governments, has launched a scheme for revival of the weavers' cooperative societies for provision of working capital at a reasonable rate. However, success of this endeavor varies from State to State. For the handloom weavers working outside cooperative fold, weaver credit card is being issued for provision of credit from the Commercial banks. Besides margin money support is being provided for enabling weavers to get credit. Opening bank account with other benefits under "*Prime Minister's Jan dhan Yojana*" is yet another new development for enabling the weavers in getting credit directly through internet based banking mechanism. Once the weavers are able to produce good fabrics as per market demand and sale it in time, they will be able to repay the loan and the credit facility will be rotated on a continuous and long term basis.

For development of handloom in an integrated manner, it is necessary to have correct data. The Third Handloom Census was conducted in 2010. However, the information available in this Census is not adequate and is required to be updated covering (i) Weavers profile such as details of the weaver, other members of his family Aadhaar number, bank account etc. (ii) Economic profile with reference to the poverty line as per available documents and (iii) Production profile giving details of the product being woven or can be woven by the weaver. Action has been initiated for updating available data, computerizing and placing it on the website. This

information will facilitate the bulk buyers dealing with export, fashion garment etc. as well as whole sellers and retailers. With this data base, the buyer can directly interact with the producer weavers, which will lead to bulk production and marketing at ease. Handloom weavers need to come forward to take advantage of all such technology based interventions.

In the past decades, the level of education in the weavers' family has gone up substantially and there are number of graduates and post-graduates in the weavers' family. Such educated youth of the weavers' family can take up production and sale of the handloom fabrics as per the market demand as weaver entrepreneur. As majority of the weavers belong to the Other Backward Class (OBC), Scheduled Castes(SC) and Minorities, enterprising youth from such weavers family can avail concessional finance for starting their enterprises from the National Backwards Class/Scheduled Castes/Minorities Finance Development Corporations operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Minority Affairs respectively. These Corporations provide loan up to Rs. 10 lakh on easy terms through the State channelizing agencies. The commercial banks are also financing such enterprises.

Availability of quality raw material like cotton/silk yarn, dyes, chemicals and loom and accessories is another important requirement for production of quality handloom fabrics. Under the hank yarn obligation scheme, the spinning mills are required to produce yarn in hank

form for meeting the need of the handloom weavers. The National Handloom Development Corporation Limited (NHDC), a Central Public Sector Undertaking with headquarters in Lucknow, has been set up with the main objective of supplying quality yarn, dyes and chemicals to the handloom weavers at a reasonable price and in time. This is being supported under the Mill Gate Price Scheme (MGPS) along with rebate. NHDC has been providing these facilities through its branches in states and has been advised to co-locate its branch office in the Weavers Service Centre in each State for convenience of weavers. The State Governments have been requested to prepare production plan indicating requirement of raw material for each handloom cluster, with quarterly break-up and send it to NHDC well in time. NHDC has been advised to ensure that required quantity of yarn and chemicals are made available in each cluster in time at a reasonable price.

Training for improving quality of dyeing, weaving, designing and weaving new products is another important component for promotion of handlooms. The Weavers Service Centre is providing this support to the weavers along with the technical officers and staff of the State Government dealing with promotion of handlooms. NHDC has been advised to organize decentralized training in dyeing in the Weavers Service Centre and CFC.

With a view to encourage weavers for outstanding work, National Award and Sant Kabir Awardare being conferred on the handloom weaver in recognition of

outstanding contributions, craftsmanship to development of handloom. This recognition seeks to encourage the talented weavers to continue handloom weaving with greater interest and enthusiasm.

As per the advice of Hon'ble Prime Minister, efforts are being made for linking handloom with fashion. Students and faculty of 15 campuses of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) are being encouraged for assisting handloom weavers for taking up weaving with new designs as per the requirement of the fashion industry. A National workshop on promotion of handloom with fashion was held on the 22nd January 2015 at Bhubaneswar, Odisha which generated lot of enthusiasm among the handloom weavers as well as students, faculty and members of the fashion industry. Details for promotion of handloom and handicraft with tourism has been worked out for exploiting tourist potential for marketing handloom products, which are being pursued for promotion of handloom.

Marketing of handloom products is the most important and critical requirement for revival of handloom. As indicated, the handloom fabric has to face the competition from the powerloom on its own strength based on unique design, colour combination and quality as a '*niche*' product. Accordingly, production plan for handloom has to remain dynamic and changing continuously as per the need of the market. Each weaver being an artist and a designer, with little support from those dealing with marketing of products, this inherent strength of handloom can be exploited, which will provide a big

boost of production and sale of handloom products.

It is noteworthy that a number of private enterprises like Good Earth, BIBA, Tulsi, South Handlooms, Sundari Silks, Angadi silks, etc. dealing with ethnic handwoven fabrics have come up in the recent past. Their success reflects the potential of handloom as a niche product for meeting the need of high end customers. Such private entrepreneurs are being encouraged to undertake design development as per the market demand and assist the handloom weavers for production of fabrics with new design. Such efforts are being encouraged for promotion of designing along with marketing tie ups.

E-commerce initiative has also been launched for marketing handloom fabrics. A Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) was signed with M/s Flipkart for providing a platform to the handloom weavers for marketing handloom products directly to the consumers. This initiative is required to be developed further. In due course, this measure will lead to enhancement in the wage of the primary producers by eliminating intermediaries and also provide him market information on a continuous basis in time with ease.

With a view to build up trust of the customer on quality of handloom product, a special brand "*India handloom*" is being developed. This brand will ensure quality, purity of design and give assurance to the consumers the best value for the money spent on handloom product. Production with "Zero defect and Zero effect (on environment)", environmental compliance like avoiding harmful carcinogenic azo dyes and chemicals in dyeing,

proper effluent treatment; social compliance like avoiding child labour in any form would form part of the branding process. This concept was put on “MyGov.in” website and got enthusiastic responses from the public, which are being considered for finalizing the guidelines.

“Make in India” initiative, launched by Hon’ble Prime Minister, provides yet another opportunity for promotion of handloom. Educated youth from the weavers’ family need to come forward as weaver entrepreneur for taking up production based on appropriate and new technology and exploit the available market for handloom both within and outside the country.

Promotion of the handloom industry requires active participation of the State Government. Accordingly, all State Government have been requested in a number of meetings as well as in written communications to prepare production plan, provide required assistance to the handloom weavers like supply of raw materials, loom and accessories, technical guidance as well as marketing facilities under the Central Schemes and supplementing it with their own sources for promotion of handloom. Further private entrepreneurs, fashion designers dealing with sale of handloom products have been requested to step up their efforts for production and marketing of handloom.

The handloom product and handloom weavers form an integral and inseparable part of our rich culture and tradition. While assistance is being provided under various schemes, it is necessary that the handloom weavers-

brothers and sisters feel proud of their occupation and the significant contribution made by them to the society and come forward to avail the benefits under various schemes for producing quality handloom fabrics with new design as per the market demand. It is beyond doubt that this would ensure increase in their earnings, leading a comfortable life with dignity and providing continuity to the unique place - the Indian Handloom has in the World of Textiles.

