



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**INDIAN HANDLOOM SECTOR: KEY PART OF
INDIA'S ECONOMY**

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Context

- **National Handloom Day**, observed on **August 7**, commemorates the **Swadeshi Movement (1905)** and highlights handloom's role in India's economic resistance, cultural identity, rural employment and sustainable development.

Handloom Sector in India & Current Status

- Historically, Indian textiles were central to global trade and made India one of the **world's leading manufacturing economies** before colonial industrialisation disrupted indigenous production.
- Today, the sector continues to have considerable socio-economic importance.
- It provides livelihoods to **over 35 lakh weavers and allied workers across more than 31 lakh households**, with women accounting for nearly **70% of the workforce**.
- Handloom contributes nearly **15% of India's cloth production**, making it an important source of rural, non-farm employment despite its largely manual production base.
- Handloom supports women's economic participation, decentralised production, preservation of traditional knowledge and environmentally sustainable manufacturing.

Handloom Sector & Economy

- The Indian handloom industry is one of the oldest and most vibrant cottage industries in the world.
- **Handloom Census:**
 - ♦ India has conducted **four censuses** so far: 1987-88, 1995-96, 2009-10 and 2019-20.
 - ♦ They are conducted at intervals averaging **8-12 years**.
- **According to the 4th All India Handloom Census (2019-20)**, about 35.22 lakh households are involved in this work, and around **72% of economic handloom weavers are women**.
- **Top Export Destination:** In FY 2024-25, the **United States** remained the largest destination, followed by the **UAE, the Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom**, respectively.
- **Products:** Made-ups such as cushion covers, curtains, table linen, and other household items contributed 42.4% in 2024-25, followed by floor coverings like carpets, rugs, and mats, which made up 40.6%.
 - ♦ Clothing accessories contributed 12.7%, while fabrics accounted for 4.3%.

Key Issues & Concerns

- **Declining economic viability:** Low and uncertain returns, rising input costs and fragmented markets are discouraging younger generations from entering the profession.
- **Disappearing traditional knowledge:** Several lesser-known weaving traditions face extinction. The disappearance of a weave means the loss of accumulated craftsmanship, design vocabulary and community knowledge.
- **Weak market linkages:** Many weavers remain dependent on intermediaries and have limited access to organised retail, e-commerce and international markets.
- **Competition and imitation:** Powerloom and machine-made products can replicate traditional designs at lower prices.
 - ♦ Weak enforcement of **Geographical Indications (GIs)** and cultural appropriation can further reduce the economic returns to original artisan communities.
- **Inadequate data:** The handloom economy is not adequately captured in conventional economic statistics.
 - ♦ Better information on employment, household incomes, exports and value addition is essential for evidence-based policymaking.

Related Efforts & Initiatives

- The government has adopted several measures under the **National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP)**, focusing on skill development, design innovation, technology adoption, branding and market access.
- Greater integration with **e-commerce platforms** has enabled artisan clusters to reach wider consumer markets.
 - ♦ Export promotion can similarly connect Indian handlooms with global demand for sustainable and handcrafted products.
- The **Office of the Development Commissioner (Handlooms)**, including collaborations for documentation of languishing and endangered weaves, can help preserve traditional knowledge.
 - ♦ **GI registration** provides another mechanism for protecting region-specific products and enhancing their market value.
- Examples such as the revival of **Tangaliya weaving in Gujarat**, the transformation of **Badturang village in Odisha**, and the growing popularity of **Siddipet Gollabhama sarees** demonstrate that traditional crafts can become commercially viable when design, institutional support and market access converge.

Way Forward: From Preservation to Aspiration

- **Make handloom aspirational:** Policy needs to move beyond treating handloom merely as heritage.
 - ♦ For younger consumers, Indian weaves should be positioned as **premium, contemporary and sustainable lifestyle products** through designer collaborations, celebrity endorsements, digital storytelling and limited-edition collections.
- **Build globally competitive brands:** India should leverage its advantage in **authenticity, craftsmanship and sustainability** to expand exports.
 - ♦ It requires quality standards, professional branding, GI enforcement, traceability and action against counterfeit products and cultural misappropriation.
- **Strengthen the artisan ecosystem:** Producer organisations, cooperatives and self-help groups should receive better access to credit, technology, design support, logistics and digital marketplaces.
 - ♦ A national platform for States and producer organisations to share successful practices can accelerate innovation.
- **Improve measurement and policy convergence:** Reliable data on the sector's contribution to **employment, household incomes, exports and value addition** should inform policy.
 - ♦ Handloom policy should also converge with initiatives relating to women's empowerment, rural livelihoods, tourism, skilling, ODOP and the creative economy.

Conclusion

- Handloom is **not a relic of India's past but a strategic asset for its future**. It combines employment-intensive growth with women's empowerment, cultural preservation, sustainability and global branding.
- The ultimate measure of policy success should be whether India can keep its looms **active, profitable and attractive to the next generation**.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the challenges confronting the Indian handloom sector and suggest measures to make it globally competitive and sustainable.

Source: TH

