

National Handloom Day

National Handloom Day is observed on 7th August every year in India. The day honours the handloom weavers in the country and also highlights the handloom industry. It highlights the contribution of handloom to the socio-economic development of the country and increases the income of the weavers.

National Handloom Day - Overview

1. In July 2015, the Union Government had declared 7th of August as the National Handloom Day and it was celebrated at the Centenary Hall of Madras University in Chennai.
2. The day is observed to generate awareness about the importance of the handloom industry and handloom weaving community is honoured who have made commendable efforts to preserve the indigenous crafts of our nation.
3. It aims to strengthen efforts towards Atmanirbhar Bharat and promotes the Vocal for Handmade on the lines of the Vocal for Local campaign.

What is Handloom?

- Different definitions for handloom have evolved since the Handloom (Reservation and Articles for Production) Act, 1985, where 'handloom' meant "any loom other than powerloom".
- A new definition was proposed in 2012, Handloom means any loom other than powerloom; and includes any hybrid loom on which at least one process of weaving requires manual intervention or human energy for production.

Objective of National Handloom Day

- 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.

National handloom day - Background

1. The handloom sector is one of the major symbols of the cultural heritage of India
2. August 7 was chosen as the National Handloom Day to commemorate the 'Swadeshi' Movement which was launched on the same date in 1905, and was based on Bal Gangadhar Tilak's ideology of swadeshi.
3. The swadeshi movement's objective was also to revive domestic products and production processes.
4. With the partition of Bengal, the Swadeshi Movement gained strength. It was on August 7, 1905 that a formal proclamation was made at the Calcutta Town Hall to boycott foreign goods and rely on Indian-made products.

Significance of Handloom Sector

1. Handloom sector depicts the nation's glorious cultural heritage.
2. It is an important source of livelihood for people in the country. The textiles and handloom sector in India is the second-largest source of employment to people, after agriculture.
3. It acts as a key to women empowerment as over 70% of handloom weavers and allied workers are women.
4. Around 31.45 lakh households are engaged in handloom, weaving and allied activities as per the Fourth All India Handloom Census 2019-20.
5. The handloom and handicraft space has been endorsing India's soft power for a long time. 'Saree diplomacy' and 'Khadi diplomacy' are major examples.

Challenges associated with Handloom Sector

1. Cost of raw materials have increased - From cotton, silk, and woollen yarn to dyes, costs have increased and so has the shortage.
2. Lack of proper credit support - 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. Thus, various schemes be it housing, subsidies, health insurance will affect the weaver too. Smaller weavers often are at the mercy of money lenders.
3. Reduced number of Weavers - With many traditional families moving to cities for jobs as labourers, weavers have been leaving the loom. The recent Handloom Census (2019-2020) records that there are nearly 31.44 lakh handloom households, though it has seen a rise from the last census, the numbers are still dismal which is an immense cause for concern.
4. 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.

Way Forward with National Handloom Day

1. Government programmes like Make in India, Vocal for Local and Atma Nirbhar Bharat need to be popularised within the country to increase the domestic demand.
2. The need for 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.
3. Promotion of the finesse of Indian weavers globally to communicate, disseminate and engage with not just the global audience but the Indian diaspora as well.
4. With everything going digital, it is important for artisans and weavers to get trained and equipped adequately in operating online portals. This will also strengthen the Digital India campaign.

5. Indian embassies must organize online exhibitions to make the global audience aware of the rich legacy of handlooms from India.