

# Protection of Handloom Industry in India: Weaving India's Future

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## Abstract

“Indian handloom Textiles” are the most attractive, varied, versatile, environmentally friendly, and well-made products on the market. These items are older than five thousand years. Each Indian state offers a unique handloom product including its distinct weaving style. Handloom is the second oldest and greatest employment sector after agriculture. It has substantially contributed to India's economy by employing tens of thousands of weavers and support staff. Despite its many advantages, this industry faces significant obstacles that have a direct impact on its growth and survival. The implementation of intellectual property rights (IPR) inside the WTO framework highlights the impact of international decisions on the livelihoods of millions of individuals throughout the world. This has led to the implementation of additional regulations and prohibitions by national governments, such as the “Geographical Indications Act” of India in 1999. Developing nations have praised the inclusion of “Geographical Indications” (GIs) in the “Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights” (TRIPS) Agreement of the “World Trade Organization” (WTO) for its capacity to encourage rural progress, produce money, and safeguard traditional knowledge. The premium people are ready to pay for “GI-registered” products corresponds with the product's quality. This necessitates a comprehensive reorganisation of the supply chain in order to not only comply with quality criteria but also ensure that the revenue created by GI is dispersed equitably along the supply chain. This requires the establishment of relationships between all stakeholders in order to forward trust and allow market access. Examining the global success stories of geographical indications, this study addresses the fundamental issues associated with the adoption of geographical indications (GIs), a key constituent of intellectual property rights (IPR), in the traditional occupation sector in India, such as handloom weaving. This paper also examines the Indian government's goal to promote the handloom industry's exceptional growth through institutional support and initiatives, as well as its future goals.

**Keywords:** Geographical Indication, Handloom Sector, Intellectual Property, Textile, Weavers.

## Introduction

Indian handloom textiles are the subcontinent's treasure, as each region offers its own distinctive textiles. Each section of the nation manufactures textiles that are optimally suited for the local climate. Each region's rich textures and different handloom weaves reflect its cultural and geographical influences. Handlooms date back to the culture of the "Indus Valley". The innovation of "bone needles", "wooden spindles", and "cotton fragments" at the excavation sites of "Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro" demonstrates the antiquity of "hand spinning" and "weaving". In the Vedas and Upanishads, references to weaving can be found. In the ancient Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, a variety of fabrics prevalent at the time are mentioned<sup>1</sup>. Inscriptions from the Middle East dating back to 2350 B.C. indicate that Indian textiles passed through the ports of Gujarat on their way to various ancient civilizations. Greeks and Babylonians referred to Indian cotton as Sind and Sindon, Indian silk was revered in Rome, and traces of Gujarati cotton outfits were discovered in 5th-century Egyptian graves.<sup>2</sup> As keepsakes, travellers from various locations brought home handcrafted Indian textiles. In the seventeenth century, "Tavernier", the ambassador of the Shah of Persia, reportedly brought an exquisite "muslin turban" from India. It was thirty yards in length and had an almost imperceptible texture.<sup>3</sup> In 1800, the British Raj was established as a result of the allure of Indian textiles to Europeans.<sup>4</sup> The British traded in Indian handlooms, which almost quickly became a symbol of national pride. The artworks were admired worldwide and found their way into closets everywhere. Hence, the "Indian Handloom Industry" developed into a large cottage sector.<sup>5</sup>

## Handloom- Meaning and Status

Handlooms are sometimes categorised as artistic items, craft goods, usual artistic crafts, or creative or customary handicrafts.<sup>6</sup> No consensus has been reached regarding the ultimate definition of handlooms; however, the following characteristics are generally accepted:

- a) Manufactured goods manufactured by artisans using hand tools or machines, with the direct physical engagement of the craftsman remaining a crucial aspect of their production.
- b) Terms or symbols of craftsman traditions;
- c) Multiple products created from raw materials.
- d) Manufactured goods that are useful, artistic, imaginative, innovative, attached to traditions, ornamental, purposeful, customary, or figurative as well as consistently and communally notable;
- e) Manufactured goods without precise limitations corresponding to the amount of manufacture and those lacking indistinguishable portions. According to the UNESCO/CCI Symposium, "handicrafts (handlooms) are the items made by craftsmen, whether entirely by hand or with the assistance of physical or automatic instruments, so long as the direct physical involvement of the craftsman remains the most significant component of the finished product."<sup>7</sup>

The production of works of art is unrestricted in terms of capacity and utilises raw materials derived from renewable resources.

The distinctive nature of craftsman's wares derives from their defining characteristics, which may be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, imaginative, ethnically significant, beautiful, intentional, conventional, consistently and collectively symbolic and significant. In addition to Traditional handicrafts are items that have been passed down from generation to generation and are associated with indigenous communities or local civilizations.

The definition of handloom is "any loom other than a power loom" as per the "Reservation of Articles for Production" Act, 1985. The handloom industry is India's second largest unorganized sector and has deep roots in rural and semi-rural life. It is an asset of the cottage industry, which has grown as generations have passed down their talents. The Indian handloom business offers a large assortment of traditional textiles and spans the entire nation. In the North are loom woven "Pashmina Kani" shawls from "Kashmir", various "Brocades" from Varanasi, "Panja" woven textiles from "Punjab and Haryana", and vibrant "Bandhej", "Laharia", and "Kota Doria" from "Rajasthan"; in the Northeast are exquisite "Eri" silk weaves from Assam, "Loin" loom-woven textiles from "Nagaland", and "Manipuri weave", "Mizo Puan" woven textiles from "Mizoram" (KPMG 2013; FICCI FIO, 2019). (KPMG 2013; FICCI FIO, 2019). Corresponding to the "Fourth All India Handloom Census" which is the latest handloom census conducted by the "Government of India" in 2019-2020, there are 28.2 million handlooms in India's various states.

Recognising that handlooms have the potential to provide livelihoods for a large population, the fourth handloom census was an attempt to collect information on weavers, their needs, and policy impact assessment.<sup>8</sup> This census included up to 31 states and territories that engage in weaving.<sup>9</sup>

According to the fourth census, the total number of handloom workers is 35.2 lakh, with 30.5 lakh workers residing in rural India and 4.6 lakh workers in urban India. 93.96% of this total is comprised of employees who are adults (at least 18 years old).<sup>10</sup> Of the 35.2 million labourers, 26.7 million are weavers while 8.4 million are allied workers. The ratio of full-time to part-time employees is nearly identical at 50.8% to 49.2%. The gender distribution of handloom workers is males at 9.7 lakhs or 28%, females at 25.4 lakhs or 72.3%, and transgenders at 494 (the inclusion of transgender workers in this census is a new feature).

The majority of the nearly 31.44 million handloom worker households are found in the following four states: Assam (10.90 lakhs), West Bengal (3.40 lakhs), Manipur (2.1 lakhs), and Tamil Nadu (1.7 lakhs). The number of weaver households is 25.45 million, with a total of 26.73 million weavers living in these households. There are 22.5 lakhs (88.7%) weavers' households in rural areas and 2.8 lakhs (11.3%) in urban areas.

53.1 percent of these households weaved solely for commercial purposes, 28.2 percent for domestic purposes, and 15.8 percent for both domestic and commercial purposes. Goa (68.2%), Maharashtra (60.6%), Manipur (40.6%), Telangana (33.6%), and Himachal Pradesh (32.6%) are the states with the most highly educated weavers (high school diploma or higher).<sup>11</sup> 23% of all workers are uneducated,<sup>102</sup> indicating that nearly one in four weavers have not received any formal education, while 14% have not completed primary school, and female workers have a higher education level than male workers. 25.77 lakhs of the 35.2 lakhs of workers are independent, followed by 6.8 lakhs who work under master weavers and 2.2 lakhs who work in cooperatives.

The majority of weavers' households (66,3%) earn less than R5,000 per month.<sup>105</sup> A little more than a quarter of households earn between R 5,000 and R 10,000 per month, while only 7.4% earn more than R 10,000 per month. 36.1% of urban weaver households earn more than R 5,000 per month, compared to only 25% of rural households. Goa (95.5%), Uttarakhand (69.8%), and Maharashtra (60.3%), each had at least 60% of the weavers' households generating more than Rs. 5,000 per month. The survey also reveals that 82.5% of weaver households earn less than R 5,000 per month from handloom activities alone. Given that the total monthly household income for 66.3% of households is less than R 5,000, this would infer that for a significant proportion of weaver households, weaving is the only source of income.

## **Handloom's Influence on the Indian Economy**

As an old industry, handlooms have conventionally contributed to India's economy. It is the second largest source of rural employment in terms of income generation, after agriculture. According to India's Fourth Handloom Census, 88.7 percent of rural households and 11.3 percent of urban households out of a total of 31.45 million households participate in handloom occupations. This sector employs around 35,22 million handloom workers, 34,14 million of whom are adults. 72.3 percent of handloom weavers are female, compared to 28.2 percent of male weavers, demonstrating that this business greatly contributes to the empowerment of women in India.

Around 95% of the world's handloom textiles are produced in India, according to the “Annual Report” (2022-2023) of the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. The annual production of handloom textiles in India has steadily climbed from 6.91 billion square metres in 2010-2011. It was predicted to be roughly 8,01 billion square metres in 2016-2017. This has contributed 17.4% of the nation's total fabric production (EXIM Bank of India, 2018).

The handloom business has always shown prospective for foreign exchange earnings, thereby contributing to the country's economic expansion. According to the “Handloom Export Promotion Council of India”, handlooms generated 2,280,19 Crore INR in 2017-18, an increase from 2013, when they generated 2,233,19 Crore INR.

The handloom sector is undergoing significant transformations to adapt to the shifting interests and preferences of consumers. There is an emphasis on improving the quality of products and expanding into new markets and consumption hubs. Numerous private organizations and major stores have partnered with traditional weavers and artists and are assisting them in promoting their products to consumers throughout the world. In addition, e-commerce platforms play a crucial role in supplying handloom weavers with new markets and clients. “Amazon” and “Flipkart” have taken steps to encourage Indian handloom products, for instance.

## Major Handloom Clusters in India

As was previously noted, various regions of the country offer distinct and distinct handloom products. The following table provides a summary of the available goods and specialties as well as the primary manufacturing centers/clusters.

Region	State(s)	Product / Speciality Work	Major Clusters
North Indian States	Jammu and Kashmir	Pashmina (Weaving)	'Srinagar'
	Uttar Pradesh	Butidar, Brocade, Cutwork, Jangla, Tanchoi, Tissue and Vaskat	'Varanasi'
	Haryana, Punjab and Rajasthan	Panja (Weaving)	'Panipat', 'Jaisalmer', 'Barmer'
		Bandhej and Lehariya	'Jaipur', 'Jodhpur', 'Alwar', 'Ajmer'
		Kota Doria	'Kaithun', 'Magrol', 'Siswali'
Northeast India	Assam	Sualkuchi	'Guwahati'
	Mizoram	Mizo Puan (Weaving)	'Thenzwal', 'Aizwal'
	Nagaland	Loin Loom (Weaving)	'Dimapur', 'Kohima'
East Indian States	Odisha	Sambalpuri (Weave)	'Sambalpur', 'Kalahandi', 'Phulbani', 'Bolangir'
		Koraput (Weave)	'Koraput'
	West Bengal	Carpet (Weaving)	'Darjeeling'
South Indian States	Kerala	Coir Work	'Allapuzha'
		Dhurrie (Weaving)	'Warangal', 'Kothawada'
	Andhra Pradesh	Pochampalli (Weave)	'Pochampalli'
		Mangalagiri	'Mangalagiri'
Tamil Nadu	Kanchipuram	'Kanchipuram'	
West Indian States	Gujarat	Patola (Weaving)	'Patan'
		Mashru (Weaving)	'Patan'
	Maharashtra	Paithani	'Yeola', 'Paithan'
Central India	Chhatisgarh	Pata (Weaving)	'Bastar'
	Madhya Pradesh	Maheshwari (Weaving)	'Maheshwari'
		Chanderi (Weaving)	'Chanderi'

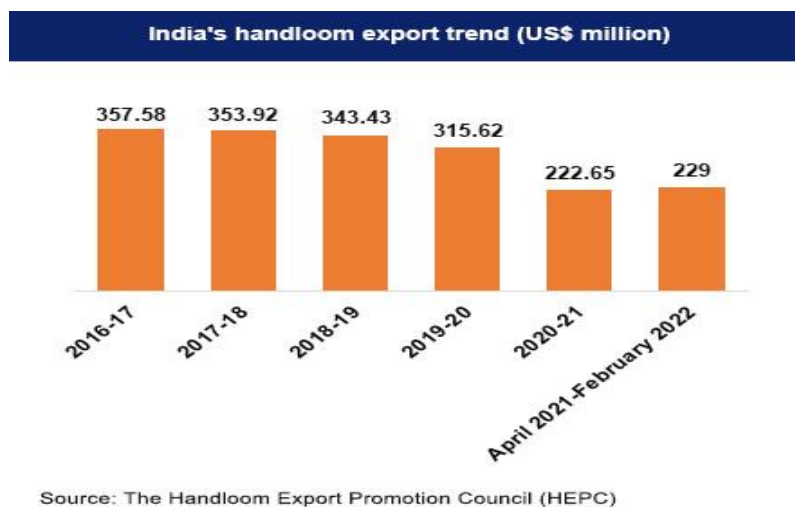
Source: "Human Resource and Skill Requirements in the Handlooms and Handicrafts Sector, KPMG"

## Handlooms' Contribution to the Indian Economy

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The handloom business has always shown capability for “foreign exchange earnings”, thereby supplying to the country's economic expansion. According to the “Handloom Export Promotion Council” of India, handlooms generated 2,280,19 Crore INR in 2017-18, an increase from 2013, when they generated 2,233,19 Crore INR but it had reduced significantly during the subsequent years. The export revenues of handloom products are displayed in the following Figure.



## Handloom Protection and Geographical Indications

Every region in India is renowned for a distinctive handloom creation in terms of design and appearance. What is woven, where it is woven, and how it is woven are intricately linked. “Geographical Indication” (GI) is one of the six World Trade Organization-recognized “Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights” (TRIPS) (WTO). “GI” include information on the item's origin and other characteristics, such as the quality or attributes of the goods. The attribute of a product, as indicated by its geographical designation of origin, is contingent on natural and human elements that are unique to a certain locality or zone.

Important characteristics of “Geographical Indications” include “collective monopoly” (held collectively by producers), “public domain”, “non-transferability” (cannot be produced by others) and thus promotes “sustainable livelihood”, “non-excludability” (individuals from the region cannot be easily debarred from enjoying the benefits), “non-rivalry” (the enjoyment of GI by one party does not moderate the enjoyment of GI by another party), and “perpetuity” (as long as the goods-price relationship exists).<sup>14</sup>

## **The Need for Protection of Geographical Indication in the Handloom Industry**

In 2003, the GI Act was enacted in response to the likelihood of grave danger that imitation of “handicrafts and handlooms” posed to the employment of tens of thousands of “artisans”. The Indian market was flooded with mass-produced counterfeit Kashmiri carpets and Pashmina shawls from inside and outside the country. Moreover, fake items were sent. This had a significant effect on the craftsmen.

Owing to acute hardship and falling demand, weavers abandoned their looms, and some workers committed themselves. GI strives to increase producer revenue, prevent product theft, protect traditional knowledge, and promote rural development by helping farmers identify their products from those on the market by labelling them as "original." The “Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection)” Act, 1999, which went into force on September 15, 2003, is India's primary GI legislation. This one-of-a-kind piece of legislation that was designed to preserve India's GIs. Geographical Indications Registry in Chennai is responsible for registration.<sup>15</sup> Over 400 GI products are officially registered in the country.<sup>16</sup>

### **The “Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999’:**

This law was primarily designed to safeguard the interests of those who generate things like food, natural resources, manufactured goods, handicrafts, or industrial items. The law forbids unauthorised individuals from abusing geographical indicators. This is primarily done to safeguard consumers from misleading products, boost the prosperity of these products' producers, and advertise products with Indian geographical indications on the global market. A product cannot be recognised as such in another nation as required by the TRIPS agreement unless it is given geographical indication in the country of origin.

The awarding of GIs to a product highlights details regarding the place of its manufacture as well as other characteristics, such as the product's quality and uniqueness to the region. Several textile and handicraft traditions in India, including Pochampalli Ikat, Chanderi Sarees, Solapur Chaddar, Mysore Silk, Kacheepuram Silk, Ilkal Sarees, and Gadwal Sarees, to name a few, have received GI designations. These regionally specialised handloom traditions are distinctive and distinctive in terms of the materials used, designs, applications, and methods of production. Giving handlooms GIs will serve as a buffer against the rapidly growing power loom industry and stop the MNC behemoths from demolishing the traditional weavers.

The weavers or individuals responsible for producing handlooms are given a sizable collective monopoly when GI is granted. The majority of weavers produce handlooms as a cottage enterprise for their families, typically in the form of clusters or cooperatives. Although the GIs may give weavers any financial opportunity to safeguard their handlooms, several challenges can be seen under the GI regime.

Major economic dividends cannot be reached due to the high degree of decentralisation, which is evident in the handloom sector, because the highly decentralised units are unable to expand or develop to the economies of scale. The trader or middleman is better positioned in the current scenario to take advantage of the GI for financial gain.

The grant of the GI assumes that there is group discussion among the weavers regarding expertise, business complexities, as well as the relationship between the locality and the product. However, the legal process for getting GI and the issues encountered later frequently impede the development of the handloom industry. The application for GI involves a lot of documentation, is time-consuming, and expensive. The sharing of registration fees, ambiguity surrounding the provision of GI, and its enforcement following the issuance of GI are some issues with the weavers' collective activity. Also, some handloom operators might not be interested in carrying on the tradition of weaving. If they deviate from the property's standard of excellence, this could harm the property's reputation as well as the people who are actively participating in the industry. Yet, despite the drawbacks, GI are currently the only viable IPR protection accessible to the nation's handloom weavers.

### **Government's Institutional Support Framework for Handlooms**

It is crucial to appreciate the structural arrangement of any entity in order to comprehend its functional characteristics, whether they be formal or informal, organised or unorganised. This is true even when discussing the handloom industry, whose difficulties can be better understood by being aware of the involved parties. Domestic GI law, as discussed in the preceding chapters, primarily focuses on the primary stakeholder, which in the case of handlooms is the weaver. However, as this chapter moves forward to highlight the policy initiatives taken for this sector, additional stakeholders come to the fore, whose role in handloom development is undeniably important and who are responsible for bridging the gap between the benefits and the beneficiaries.<sup>17</sup>

The handloom sector differs from the other components of India's enormous textile industry due to a number of characteristics. First off, weaving requires substantial financial and physical investment, which increases a weaver's reliance on numerous other organisations. Second, because weaving is primarily practised in rural areas of India, families that are involved in the trade are compelled to combine weaving with other sources of income rather than engage in it exclusively due to their socioeconomic circumstances.

Thirdly, a lack of education and general awareness place weavers in a vulnerable spot when it comes to their understanding of the complexities involved in the benefit-claiming mechanism. Lastly, weaving is often an inherited skill, and it is sometimes necessary for domestic use; therefore, not all weavers may possess the ability to make trade profits from this activity. These fundamental elements of the handloom industry are evident and must be taken into account in policy formulation and enforcement.



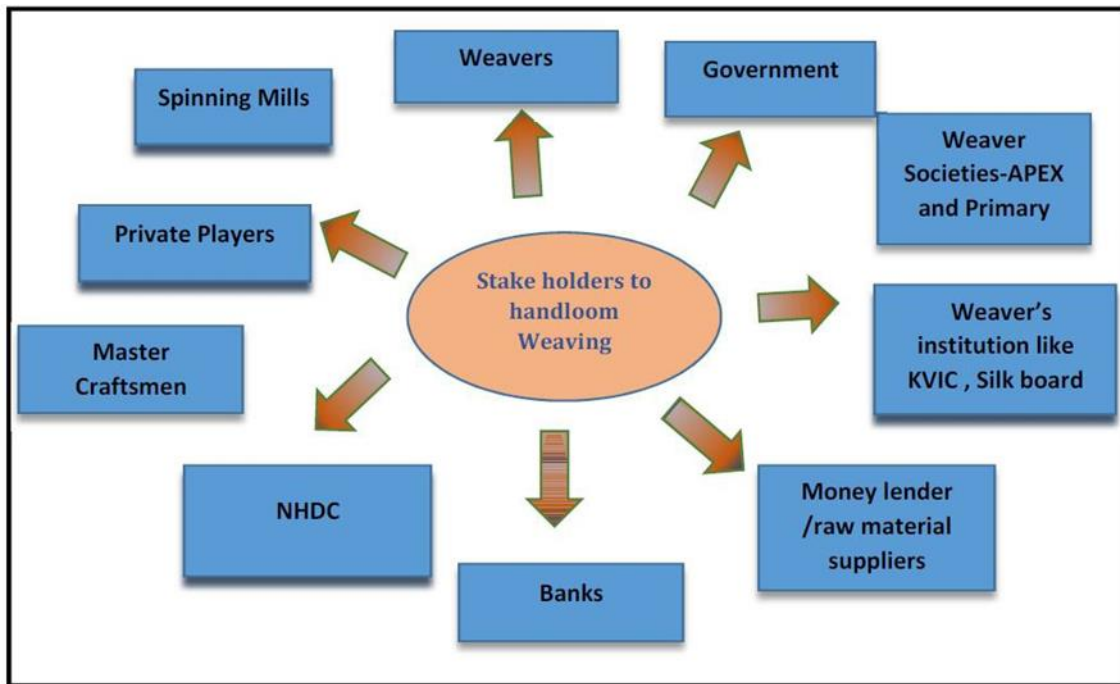


Figure: Stakeholders in the handloom sector. (Source: Bankers Institute of Rural Development (BIRD), Lucknow Study Report on Problems and Prospects of Handloom Sector in Employment Generation in the Globally Competitive Environment (2016) at 37 <<http://www.birdlucknow.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Study-Report-on-Problems-Prospects-of-handloom-Sector-by-BIRD-Lucknow1.pdf>>

### Government Schemes for Sustenance of Indian Handlooms

The craft weavers belong the villages area are mostly illiterate or lowly literate for which keeping information about the various details of government and non-government programmes and schemes are not possible. The ministry of textile and handloom and the department of MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) have brought many programmes and schemes having a positive impact on handloom sector.

**“National Handloom Development Program” (NHDP):** The primary elements of the NHDP, which is a centrally supported initiative, are block level clusters, handloom marketing assistance, and conventional credit. By forgiving unpaid debts, offering loans at reduced interest rates, providing a market interface through events that highlight crafts, and running weaver training programmes, it has benefited the stakeholders.<sup>18</sup>

**“Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme”:** “Bunkar Bima Yojana” of Mahatma Gandhi for Life Insurance This programme was launched by the Indian government in 2003. It intends to give handloom weavers life insurance coverage in the event of natural or accidental death or entire or partial disability as a result of an accident.<sup>19</sup>

**“Health Insurance Scheme”** for access to health care amenities: This health insurance programme was introduced in November 2005 to give weavers and their families who make at least 50% of their income through handloom weaving access to medical insurance (ILO South Asia, 2015).

**“Concessional Credit Scheme”:** The “PNB WEAVER MUDRA SCHEME” (PNB WMS) has been launched as part of the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana. It intends to offer weavers and weavers' entrepreneurs who are involved in handloom weaving concessional finance. This programme, which partners with “Punjab National Bank”, offers benefits to weavers under the "Concessional Credit Component" such as an interest subsidy, margin money, and credit insurance.

**“Comprehensive Handloom Cluster Development Scheme” (Mega Cluster Scheme):** This programme has been introduced to give the handloom weavers' products national and worldwide competitive levels in terms of dependability and sustainability. Through this programme, weavers receive support for their technical and core infrastructure, advice on product diversification and design enhancement, connections to raw material banks, assistance with marketing and product promotion, among many other elements vital to the survival of ‘handloom weavers’.

**“Block level cluster projects”:** A cluster within the block is qualified to receive financial support of up to Rs. 2.00 crores for “Common Facility Centre” (CFC) including Common Service Centre (CSC), engagement of textile designer for marketing initiative, construction of common and individual work sheds, appointment of “Cluster Development Executive” (CDE), and technological and skill improvement. The Govt. of India supports Handloom activities in the country by way of schematic assistance through Central Sector Schemes. Since 2015-16 to 2022- 23 (upto December 2022), financial assistance has been accorded to 613 Handloom Clusters. The following number of clusters have been accorded financial assistance during 2018-19 to 2022-23 (upto December 2022):

Sl. No.	Year	No. of cluster sanctioned	Amount released (Rs. In Crore)
1	2018-19	16	8.56
2	2019-20	21	16.84
3	2020-21	2	17.60
4	2021-22	69	59.92
5	2022-23	109	74.24

*Source: Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, Annual Report 2022-23*

Also, at present, 9 Mega Handloom Clusters are under implementation in 8 States i.e. Assam (Sivasagar), Uttar Pradesh (Varanasi), Tamil Nadu (Virudhunagar and Trichy), West Bengal (Murshidabad), Jharkhand (Godda & neighboring Distt.), Andhra Pradesh (Prakasam & Guntur Distt.) and Bihar (Bhagalpur) & Manipur (East Imphal).

During the year 2022-23 (as on 21.11.2022), an amount of Rs.11.21 Crore has been released for implementation of various interventions in Mega Clusters.

**“Legal Protection Initiatives”:** In order to give legal protection, prevent illegitimate use of items that have been registered, and to promote exports, the government introduced the Geographical Indication of Products Act in 2003. (1999). In India, 57 handloom items have been registered under this statute.

**“Easy Raw Material Availability”:** In 2016, the “National Handloom Development Corporation” (NHDC) adopted the “Enterprise Resource Planning” (ERP) system and the “e-Dhaga” smartphone application to aid handloom weavers in acquiring raw materials. The “e-Dhaga” mobile app” permits handloom weavers to place orders and make online payments directly through the app, while the ERP system expedites the release of materials to the weavers.

**“Yarn Supply Scheme”:** The Yarn Supply Program was introduced by the Indian government to maximize the handloom industry's employment potential. By doing this, it guarantees that handloom weavers can purchase yarn at mill gate prices. According to the plan, depot operating agencies receive 2% of the reimbursed freight costs. Also, there is a 10% price subsidy for hank yarn, which only applies to a certain number of cottons, domestic silk, and woollen yarn. In order to assure prompt cash deliveries to users and to assist lone weavers who require tiny amounts of yarn, NHDC has created ten yarn depots and warehouses. The funds released during the 2017–18 fiscal year will total 162.07 crores.<sup>20</sup> The Yarn Supply Scheme (YSS) has been modified partially and renamed the Raw Material Supply Scheme (RMSS) for implementation between 2021-22 and 2025-26. Nationwide implementation of the Raw Material Supply Scheme makes all varieties of yarn available to Handloom weavers. National Handloom Development Corporation, State Governments via Commissioner/ Director of Handlooms & Textiles, Apex Societies and State Handloom Corporations under the direct control & supervision of State Governments are the implementing agencies. The following information applies to yarn supplied under the scheme from 2018-19 onwards:

Year	Supply of Yarn	
	Quantity (in lakh kg.)	Value (Rs. in Crore)
2018-19	442.04	897.15
2019-20	406.17	700.61
2020-21	215.09	521.67
2021-22	235.80	732.09
2022-23 (upto 31 <sup>st</sup> Oct, 22)	175.84	620.69

Source: Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, Annual Report 2022-23

**Government E-Market Place (GeM):** On August 9, 2016, the Commerce & Industry Minister introduced the Government e-Marketplace. Handloom weavers and handicraft makers can sell their goods directly to government agencies and organizations thanks to this online marketplace. There are 150 product categories with more than 7400 goods available on the GeM portal, where 1.5 million weavers are registered.<sup>21</sup>

**“Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan”:** The Indian government established “Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan” to provide financial assistance to Indian craftsmen, companies, and enterprises, particularly MSMEs, in order to aid them in recovering from financial losses incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Indian Prime Minister launched an economic package worth Rs. 20 lakh crores as part of their plan to make India independent. The Aatma Nirbhar Bharat scheme also made an effort to offer online channels to link textile craftsmen with retailers and exporters from throughout the nation and to market their goods and expertise internationally.

**“E-commerce Ventures”:** Direct marketing has repeatedly demonstrated that e-commerce is an effective platform. In light of this, Indian handlooms are currently being marketed by twenty-one of the leading e-commerce corporations. Due to this effort, handloom weavers are now connected to customers on a larger platform, allowing them to reach a larger audience. ‘Amazon India’ and ‘Flipkart’, the two major e-commerce platforms in India, are responsible for launching this initiative.<sup>22</sup> Organizations like India Post and companies like Microsoft have also initiated handloom promotion initiatives. In 2014, Flipkart signed a Memorandum of Understanding, while Amazon.in launched its “Kala Haat” programme in 2016 and Weavesmart, an e-commerce website, teamed with India's Ministry of Textiles in 2018.<sup>23</sup> With the Indian Handloom Brand and Handloom Mark, it has over 3000 weavers and over 20,000 handloom and handcrafted items. Hence, millions of Amazon buyers in India are now directly connected to the weavers.

Amazon has cooperated with several government agencies in this industry, including the Gujarat Tribal Development Department, the Development Commission (Handlooms), and the Craft Cottage Industries Corporation.<sup>24</sup> MoUs were signed with the governments of “Telengana” for “APCO” (Handloom) and “Lepakshi” (Handicraft), “West Bengal” and “Orissa” for “Tantuja” (Handloom), Jute Corporation of India and “Boyanika” (Handloom), Karnataka & Tamil Nadu for “Cauvery Hand- looms” and “Loomworld” (Handloom), and Uttar Pradesh for UP ‘Khadi’ and Handlooms. Microsoft created “Telangana re-weave.in” in 2016 with the intention of supporting weaver communities in expanding their businesses by connecting them with new clients. India Post launched a similar e-commerce website in 2018 to serve as an online marketplace for artisans, self-help organisations, and female company owners. This has aided in their online product sales (<https://www.thehindu.com>).

**“E-Dhaga App”:**The National Handloom Development Corporation (NHDC) launched the e-Dhaga mobile app and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in 2016 to improve the efficiency of the yarn supply. Because the weavers can put their orders directly on the app and then pay for them online, the mobile app promotes transparency. The app, which is accessible in ten languages, also provides shipment status information. The weavers may now access information anytime, anyplace thanks to the app. Users can also examine the yarn stock at the NHDC's depots, warehouses, and CFCs, as well as the supplier list and product catalogue. Hence, the app is crucial to focus upon specific issues of weavers such raw material obtainability, supply delays, and assuring stocks in depots.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion and Future Prospects

The inclusion of “Geographical Indications” (GIs) in the “Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights” (TRIPS) Agreement of the World Trade Organization has been praised by developing nations for its capacity to encourage rural development, generate cash, and safeguard traditional knowledge. The premium people are ready to pay for GI-registered products corresponds with the product's quality. This necessitates a comprehensive reorganisation of the “supply chain” in order to not only comply with quality criteria but also warrant that the revenue created by GI is dispersed equitably along the “supply chain”. If a national programme to supply handloom fabric to government departments is established, it will be a good sign for weavers, handloom fabric in general, and Geographical Indications in particular, as they can anticipate brighter times.

The many textiles created by handlooms in India are a global representation of India's traditions and culture. Almost every Indian state offers a distinctive handloom product. In addition to creating jobs and empowering women, this industry has played a key role in generating cash. Handloom weavers have encountered a variety of unfavourable issues over the years, resulting in the closure of a number of handlooms weaving companies. To ensure the survival of handlooms, it is essential that weavers recognise that, while it is commendable to uphold traditions, they must change and diversify their products and processes to thrive. So that future generations might begin to appreciate and support traditional textiles, they will have to adapt handloom items to current times without compromising the spirit of their exceptional artistry. This industry needs substantial aid from the government in order to grab the lead. It should play a dynamic role in capitalising in “capacity and skill development programmes” for weavers, affording ‘market links’, regulating ‘raw material pricing’, conducting ‘regular quality checks’, making ‘credit facilities accessible’ to weavers, assisting with ‘technological advancement’, initiating ‘marketing on a regular basis’ through a “multi-pronged approach”, and ‘educating consumers’ about the sustainable landscapes and benefits of handloom products. Also, a substantial number of private organisations and retailers must cooperate with weavers and artists to broaden their reach among worldwide consumers. In addition, e-commerce platforms must be expanded to offer handloom weavers access to new markets and customers. In conjunction with the right laws and incentives, multilevel interventions will ensure the survival of the handloom industry, its resuscitation, and the promotion of weavers' talents, which will be to their and the nation's advantage in the future. It is a goal that may not be insurmountable if the proper guidance and platform are provided. It is crucial to inject vitality into this industry in order to prevent the extinction of weaving traditions.

India's handloom industry is a symbol of the nation's centuries-old culture and history. The industry is well known across the world for its fine and traditionally made handwoven goods. The activities, which span the entire nation, involve passing on abilities from one generation to the following. The distinctive offerings of handmade goods from each state in India demonstrate how this distinguishes the industry from other industries.

Understanding the massive share of both the handloom and handicrafts sectors in India's development as well as their employment-generating capacity, the Government of India along with State governments have time and again made programmatic interventions. The policy initiatives have mainly been aimed at generating sustained, productive and gainful employment with decent working conditions for the entire weaver population. Although certain programmes have yielded positive results, the work is far from complete even at present. Policy initiatives since the early pre-independence years have aggressively pushed to revive the sector, but such revival efforts that have lasted for more than 70 years cannot be called the most suitable solution, which is why we see that the handloom industry has failed to travel beyond rural areas and is reduced to a mere form of art in need of preservation. In fact, treating the weavers on a par with any other entrepreneur is essential in order for them to secure confidence in their financial independence, which can also lead to other kinds of independence, such as working under a master weaver. With policies that are scattered and non-uniform as well as the disbursement of funds being sporadic and inconsistent, the change as envisioned cannot be achieved. Therefore, a need has emerged to consolidate policies and schemes that vary from State to State under a clear central arrangement to avoid some of the core features of the handloom industry, such as its prevalence in rural areas, lack of industrial organization etc., which act as impediments to its prosperity.

Additionally, the industry has the ability to create job opportunities for thousands of weavers, including women craftsmen, and as a result, play a significant role in the empowerment of women. It is impossible to understate the sector's importance, and it is necessary to expand and promote its global reach. By encouraging capacity and skill growth together with design, quality, and marketing intervention, the development of the wealth of traditional skills and capabilities will not only assure the sector's sustainability but also assist in reviving the dwindling skills while promoting exports.

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