

# Worlds Beyond Business

*We work hard and have had and continue to have, consistent success and learnings in our professional lives, for which we can all be proud. However, we also aim to have a work-life balance. In this context we thought to start a quarterly issue on learning about another subject of pride, outside of business. We have selected the World of Crafts. Second in the series is another specialised handicraft, the thread that unites the world, Handlooms. Read on.*  
Chander Swamy

## THE MATCHLESS RESILIENCE OF INDIAN HANDLOOMS



Almost all ancient civilisations used handlooms but the manner in which this legendary craft has survived and thrived across India is without comparison. Weaving of fabric was a way of life for many rural communities in India for hundreds of years until the early 19th century when the British introduced industrial looms. As weaving became mechanised, handloom weavers gradually lost their traditional jobs. Mahatma Gandhi's campaign for khadi reversed this trend, as it used khadi to promote Indian Independence and self-reliance. His determined campaign led to an increase in the demand for handlooms across India. By the mid-20th century, handmade fabric had become a symbol of Indian culture.

When globalisation took hold from the 1990s, modern power looms producing cheaper fabric dealt a new blow to handlooms. It is telling that despite the cost constraints, India today produces 95% of the world's handwoven production. Miraculously, we have retained a precious skill in large measures that has been lost to much of the world.

### HANDLOOM HISTORY IN POSTAGE STAMPS



Powerloom 1923



Handloom 1983



72% of India's handloom weavers are women

It is only in India that every state of this vast country has its special signature handloom fabric



Soft cotton double Ikat fabric of Odisha



Muga, the prized wild organic silk of Assam



Doubly precious, Bandhani on gajji silk, Gujarat



Mysore silk gets its sheen and suppleness from pure mulberry silk



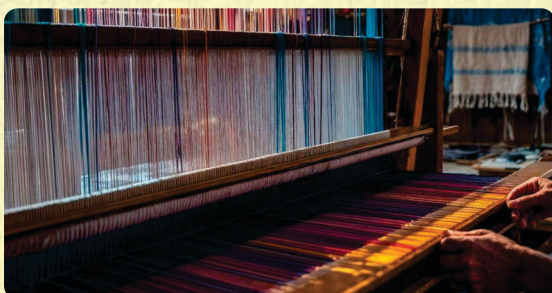
The delicate Maheshwari weave of Madhya Pradesh belies its strength



The intricacy of Banarasi brocade never fails to enthral



Bengal's Jamdani cotton's geometric floral weaves is recognised by UNESCO



The thread that unites the world

Being a laborious craft of highly skilled artisans, the cost of handloom is naturally high compared to speedy powerloom, whose cheap imitations often make the case for handloom harder. For every original weave there is a pretend ikat, maheshwari, patola, baluchari and kancheepuram fabric, to name a very few. It's easy to see therefore why it is imperative to nurture and support handlooms, India's national treasure. Besides being unique, they provide a livelihood to countless weaving communities and energise rural economies.

As a nation, we just need to seek, buy, use, wear and gift handlooms as a way of life so that demand rises and prices are no longer a concern. A day will come, as it must, when powerloom simply cannot compete.