

Special Feature: 'HastkalaSahyogShivirs'(7th – 17th October, 2017)

Taking Care of Artisans and Weavers

Over 1.20 lakh weavers and artisans to benefit through ongoing HastakalaSahyogShivirs in 421 handloom-handicrafts clusters



*Parul Chandra

India boasts of a rich tradition of hand-woven textiles and skilfully made handicrafts that draws appreciation and buyers not only from within the country but also abroad. Be it the intricately woven Ikats from Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, the Patan Patolas from Gujarat, the fine Benarasi weaves from Uttar Pradesh, the gossamer-like Maheshwari weaves of Madhya Pradesh or the figurines sculpted in wood or stone from Tamil Nadu--India has this and much more to offer to the world in terms of handlooms and handicrafts.

The weavers and artisans in India toil hard to produce a rich variety of textiles and handicrafts. And yet, the earnings of those weaving magic through the warp and the weft or handicrafts are often not commensurate with the intensive labour, immense skill and cost of raw materials that goes into their making.

Largely based in rural India, weavers and artisans also find market access for their products difficult. As a consequence, they're dependent on the middleman to sell their products—while they garner substantial profits, the weaver and artisans are left with just a pittance instead of getting a reasonable price.

In order to address the myriad challenges faced by weavers and artisans, the Union Textiles Ministry has been taking numerous steps to assist them. As part of these measures, the ministry is currently holding an 11-day 'HastkalaSahyogShivir'. The camps which began on October 7 are being held across the length and breadth of the country.

The initiative is dedicated to the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Garib Kalyan Varsh--the birth centenary of Pandit Deen Dayal is being observed.

The camps have been organised in over 200 handloom clusters and Weavers Service Centres as well as 200 handicraft clusters in the country. They are spread over 372 places in 228 districts to reach out to a large number of weavers and artisans.

The Union Textiles Minister Smriti Irani in a tweet last month had said: "More than 1.20 lakh weavers/artisans will benefit through the HastakalaSahyogShivirs that will be held in 421 handloom-handicrafts clusters." Among the states where the camps are being held are Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telengana, Tripura, Uttarakhand, UP and West Bengal.

Well aware of the difficulties a weaver or artisan faces in accessing credit—it is so essential to purchase raw materials for their product or to upgrade their technology, for instance the looms--the Textiles ministry has kept the primary focus of these camps on providing credit facilities to them.

As part of this endeavour, the camps are providing weavers and artisans services such as issuance of credit facilities through the government's MUDRA (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) which provides financial assistance to micro enterprises.

In addition, participants at these camps will also be provided with assistance for technology upgradation under the HathkargaSamvardhanSahayata and to buy modern tool kits and equipment. Under the Hathkarga scheme, the government helps weavers buy new looms by bearing 90 per cent of the cost. Importantly, the camps will also see the Pehchan (Identity) cards being issued to weavers and artisans.

With market access for their products being one of the major hurdles faced by weavers and artisans, expos/craft bazars/buyers-sellers meets too are being held at some of the camps.

Yet another important element of these camps is that a Yarn Pass-Book is being issued to weavers as yarn is the main raw material for weavers.

Further, recognising the importance of education for the children of weavers and artisans, the camps will also be providing assistance on how they can be enrolled into courses run by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and IGNOU.

In its efforts to eliminate the middleman, the Textiles Ministry has been assisting weavers and artisans sell their products directly by helping them to participate in marketing events both in India and abroad through funding under the National Handloom Development Programme.

Furthermore, over the last three years, the Textiles Ministry has provided financial assistance of Rs 151.90 crores to organize 849 marketing events in the country for the benefit of 8,46,900 weavers.

The 'HastkalaSahyogShivir' is part of the textiles ministry larger endeavour to improve the lot of weavers and artisans which in turn will give the necessary fillip to these sectors. For instance, it has launched the 'E-Dhaga' App which enables weavers to order and track the shipping of yarn and 'BunkarMitra' helpline, also for weavers.

The impetus being given to the handlooms and handicraft sectors also recognizes the fact that they make an enormous contribution to the country's economy and help earn valuable foreign exchange. As part of its endeavour to give a boost to the handloom sector, Prime Minister Modi had launched the first National Handloom Day on August 7, 2015.

The handloom and handicraft sectors are among the largest employment provider in the country, and combinedly next only to agriculture. According to the 2016-17 annual report of the textiles ministry, the handloom and handicraft sectors provided employment to 43.31 lakh and 68.86 lakh persons, respectively. The two sectors also bring in considerable foreign exchange through exports of quality products.

Besides, there is no gainsaying the fact that handlooms and handicrafts are a valuable and integral part of India's heritage that need to be both preserved and promoted.

*The writer is a senior Delhi-based journalist.

Views expressed in the article are author's personal.

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