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### A Midas touch of sustainability in handloom sector and tale of sustainability crafted through crafts

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#### Abstract

This paper is a confluence of thoughts, approach and practices to sustainability in the handloom and craft sector and expresses how people approach to sustainability in the above sector has Midas touch. Their success story is the story of success of Sustainability at the grass root level. This paper creates a mosaic picture of their steps towards sustainability. The very basic tenet of craft and handloom is classics and slow fashion which has a huge impact on the sector. India being global leader in Handloom capturing 95% of the world market, this makes a tremendous difference. The research paper documents the approach of sustainability in handloom and craft sector touching upon the major aspects of sustainability.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, handloom and craft sector, social sustainability

#### Introduction

Indian handloom and Handicraft has been the identity and pride of India reflecting the cultural diversity of our country. Be it Kalamkari of Andhra Pradesh or Patola of Gujarat Ministry of culture has listed them all under "National List of intangible Cultural Heritage" (Ministry of Culture-<https://www.indiaculture.nic.in/national-list-intangible-cultural-heritage-ich>).

UNESCO has recognized Chanderi of Madhya Pradesh, Banarsi of Uttar Pradesh and many more as world Heritage (UNESCO). Geographical Indication status being given to Muga silk, sujni embroidery of Bihar and many more has acted as magic wand to revive the dying crafts. Despite the efforts taken at Regional, National and International levels, handloom & handicraft sector despite having niche market segment is losing to Fast Fashion. Handloom Mark differentiates genuine and knock offs taking these products to international market with all the due credibility. The need of the hour has been rightly felt. Many measures have been taken, many are being taken and many need to be taken to resurrect them.

As stated by "The state of Fashion" 2021 Report- "A more Circular Fashion Industry shall require Collective Effort" As pioneers in this field industry leaders and practitioners have used technology and digital media to connect the missing links of Sustainability. Joining the dots is what really stops industry practitioners from being blind enough not to see value or worth in waste created by them. Through collaborative efforts, waste moves from cradle to cradle. What else can be more beautiful example of Circular economy and waste management than this?

#### Objective

This paper is a conceptual paper, a confluence of success stories, examples and corselets, approaches and practices of handloom & handicraft sector in giving midas touch of sustainability to the textile and apparel sector of India. It's our USP, Unique selling proposition.

#### Methodology

The success stories and case lets discussed and a myriad of them have revived the age old culture and tradition of practicing sustainability in Indian Textiles through craft. The glory of the crafts is resurrected through outreach to the global market and falling in tune with the global fashion trends. Through the participation of craftsmen using traditional methods and practices in textile have exhibited a 360 degree approach to sustainability as.

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## Study

Three pillars of sustainability are People, Planet and Profit. Craft and Handloom sector happens to be most untouched by automation, mechanization, artificial Intelligence and so many such technological advancements at large.

### People Aspect of sustainability

The impact is that it's very labor intensive. The labor is highly skilled with rare skills which is traditional and generally has geographical indication. They defy all the concepts of "skilled labor" as per mass production. They do not follow the rules of mass scale production and defy productivity and efficiency. Giving them employment. Giving them employment within the comfort of home. Preventing mass emigration like in COVID context as witnessed by major manufacturing hubs very recently during the pandemic.

Giving facility to skill the next generation without disrupting their education and within the boundaries of labor laws. Gender equality and safety of workplace which may be home or a craft cluster. Equal wages to women especially where the work can be managed within the expectations of family members and the work gets recognized and remuneration earned as well. Women workforce comprises of a majority of the workforce in the sector.

What can Sustainability mean without social aspect of it? After all Social sustainability is all about creating socially responsible enterprises. Globally, the USD 1.3 trillion clothing industry employs more than 300 million people along the value chain. [[https://www.bsr.org/reports/Taking\\_a\\_PeopleCentered\\_Approach\\_to\\_a\\_Circular\\_Fashion\\_Economy.pdf](https://www.bsr.org/reports/Taking_a_PeopleCentered_Approach_to_a_Circular_Fashion_Economy.pdf)]. It is through social accountability that there can be fair use of human workforce. Social accountability is the heart and soul of sustainability

### Planet Aspect of sustainability

The create luxury products. They create classics. They create masterpieces and not fast fashion. Isn't that good enough to justify the basic tenet of sustainability.

It follows Zero waste in designing where most of the garments created are created on loom. They are drape garments like saari, mundum, dhoti, lungi, chaddar, stole, shawl etc. They are garments which a wearer never grow out of size so fit is not a problem at all eliminating waste in the processes.

It also means that the product is created on loom in these instances. So the value addition in the product created while cutting it may not be required at all eliminating the scope of scrap/ katran / cutting room losses as defined in production systems.

CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility is the core of Handloom and craft sector making it inherently sustainable.

Energy footprint is minimal. As the sector is hugely human intensive. The carbon emissions are minimal leading to zero or minimal carbon footprint. The electricity consumption is bare minimum. Hence the impact on climate is minimal

Most of the traditional systems follow the ZDHC/ Zero discharge of hazardous chemicals as a traditional and age old practice. The dyes used are generally natural, chemical footprint less or minimal, discharge/ is minimum. In the past/ historically Indian handloom sector has been very sustainable with Zero waste, natural dyes, community weaving, sustainable design and practices of closing the loop.

### Profit Aspect of sustainability

Large scale employment through cooperative societies giving them Geographical Indication and protecting them from copy

left and theft of ideas. Giving them outreach to the global market. Giving them labels of sustainability like in Cooptex and many other such government agencies. Helping them source raw materials at affordable prices.

Capturing 95% of the world's handloom market in itself proves beyond measure that the sector has sustained profitability and has emerged a global leader due to the value systems being so deeply engrained.

### Cultural heritage

Sustainability is a core of Indian Textile heritage. These industry practitioners have revived the age old culture and tradition of practicing Sustainability in Indian Textiles through craft. The glory of the crafts is resurrected through outreach to the global market and falling in tune with the trends. Goes unsaid that through participation of craftsmen, the industry practitioners have exhibited a 360 degree approach to sustainability.

Dealing with the bits of fabric solves a huge problem. Those katran (fabric waste/ scrap) are crafted into beautiful products and the fabric bits reimaged into new products. They have re-imagined creation of resource from waste giving it a new life. They have changed the form of waste to treating it as a resource in wrong place and transforming them into upcycled products. The sweet taste of resource from waste is worth admiring. Circular economy (textile) presents a \$500 billion opportunity to the fashion industry. [The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) – "A New Textiles Economy: Redesigning Fashion's Future"]. With a grave to cradle approach, it translates linear economy to circular economy.

The story of these sustainable enterprises is laid on the foundation of Sustainability. The synergy of thoughts from practitioners who have gone beyond words to practice sustainability is worth learning and emulating. This is the tale of their "Entrepreneurial Success through sustainability". Tale of Sustainability crafted through Crafts, Recycling, Reimagining, Waste Management and Social Accountability. Sustainability which directly impacts the waste generators who cannot deal with it, the lives and livelihood of people involved in the values chain, and largely the consumers.

### Conclusion

To conclude these policy makers/ auditors and entrepreneurs through their efforts and perseverance have successfully turned waste into sweet taste of treasure and integrated sustainability beautifully in their entrepreneurial systems defying the challenges and along with the stakeholders generating employment, keeping the crafts alive, saving every katran, reimagining every product, recycling wastes in all possibility and giving a practical meaning to sustainability. These efforts are small but the "true cost of Fashion" cannot be assessed in dollars but through Environmental cost.

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