

Handloom Bonanza: A major attraction for Festival Season

Nirendra Dev

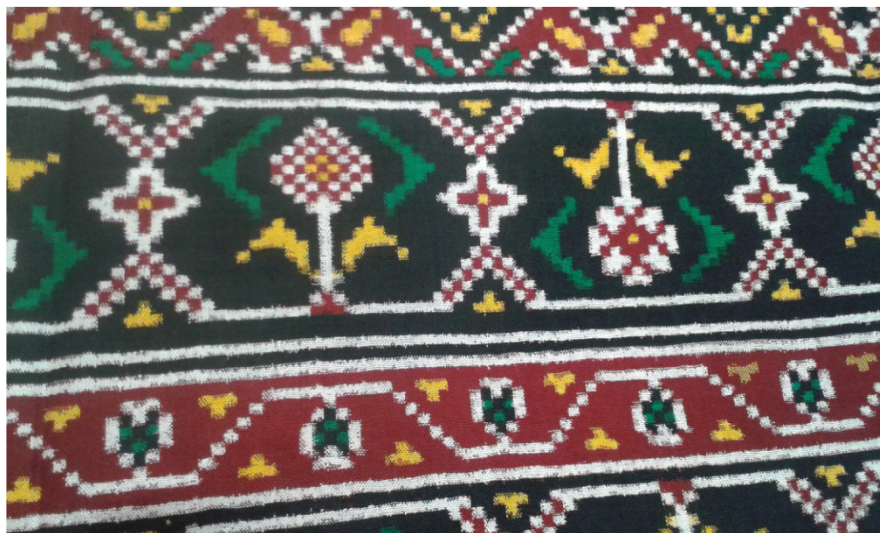
The newly inaugurated Handloom MARKETING complex run under the aegis of the union Textiles Ministry at Janpath in New Delhi has come alive these days with the rich handloom works during the fortnight long Exhibition. The 'Handloom of India' Exhibition-cum-sale of exquisite handloom fabrics from across the country from October 9 to October 22, 2014 offers a unique collection of cotton and silk sarees, dress materials, furnishings, dupattas and salwar-suits.

"This is a unique venue and sort of an ideal location at the busy Janpath at a stone's throw from MARKET in the heart of the national capital," says Rahul Varapatre from Bhandara in Maharashtra running a stall with his uncle.

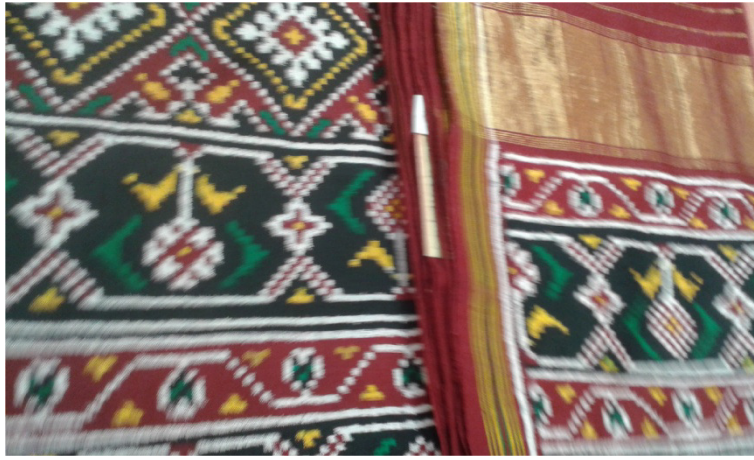
In fact, the office of Development Commissioner for Handlooms has constructed this Complex with cost of Rs 42 crore. The Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation, Government of India had allotted 1.779 acres of land to the Ministry of Textiles for construction of the MARKETING complex. Besides the permanent shops, the marketing complex has a provision for a 'Dilli Haat' type atmosphere where weavers from different parts of the country will be invited to exhibit and sell their handloom products.

Among a special attraction is Rs 2 lakh worth Patola Saree at the Sanskriti Silk counter from Surendranagar in Gujarat. "This saree requires at least one year for two weavers to give the final touch. This is among our classic high-priced collection," remarks a beaming counter-assistant.

Patola sarees are a double-woven sari, usually made from silk originally a rich heritage of Gujarat's Patan district. "The word Patola is the plural form, it's also known as Patalu," he says. Patola-weaving is actually a "closely guarded family tradition". To create a Patola sari, both the warp and weft threads are wrapped to resist the dye according to the desired pattern of the final woven fabric. "One unique feature is that the bundles of thread are strategically knotted before dyeing," he adds. Besides Rs 2 lakh unique collection special piece (see photograph); the counter has other good products in the price range from Rs 14,000 to Rs18,000.



Patola-Gujarat: Special priced Patola Saree from Gujarat worth Rs 2 lakh



The exhibition venue has similarly good offerings of Banarasi sarees in outlets set up by weavers and their sale-wings from places like Varanasi and Azamgarh. “Our collection ranges between Rs 1500 to Rs 18,000 and thus there is quite a good demand,” says Tanvir Ahmed of Mubarakpur Handloom, Azamgarh. In another counter run by award winning weaver Jallis Ahmed’s team, the Banarasi sarees collection ranges up to Rs 35,000. “The Jamawar collection of Banarasi sarees is our prized collection. These sarees can be weaved and given final shape in about 2 months time,” says P Sharma at the counter.

“Jallis Ahmed’s weave designing is quite famous. He received the national award in 1990. One of our unique collections is the kind of weaving fusion we have brought between Muga of Assam and Katan of Varanasi,” he says proudly displaying a unique collection worth over Rs 10,000.

What’s the idea behind weaving fusion?

“It’s only an innovation. Over the decades, the Banarasi silk handloom industry has been suffering huge losses because of competition from mechanised units producing the Banarasi silk sarees at a faster rate and at cheaper cost. Moreover, another source of competition has been sarees made of cheaper synthetics. We are trying to address these issues,” he says.

The collection at the first floor of the exhibition venue also offers good collection of Jamdani and Uppada sarees. Good rush has been also reported at the outlets from other states like Rajasthan, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra.

A weaver himself, Govinda in Mangram Resham counter from Birbhum district in West Bengal says the lowest collection in the counter is common cotton saree worth Rs 550. “But our strong point in terms of sales is wide range of products in Jamdani and Matka varieties”.



Exhibit-Bengal-Matka: A unique Matka saree in new design

He does not like to take further questions on pricing and chuckles rather smartly: Bengal sarees like Matka and Jamdani are one of the most time consuming and labor-intensive forms of hand loom weaving and hence what matters is quality.

“Jamdani products are a mixture of cotton and GOLD threads. Either figured or flowered, Jamdani is a woven fabric and is fabulously rich in motifs,” he explains adding Jamdani is a fine muslin cloth on which decorative motifs are woven on the loom, typically in grey and white.

In another West Bengal counter, Nabapally from Birbhum, West Bengal, weaver Y Hussain says, “Naksi Khata variety in price range of Rs 7000 has gone down well with visitors”.

This year, he says, a unique blending ‘Baul collection of Sarees’ based on life-style theme of world famous Baul singers is too doing well. “In this category price range is from Rs 12,000 to Rs 25,000,” he says.

The sarees from Rajasthan and Maharashtra’s print-works both on sarees and salwar suits have also gone down well.



Exhibit-Rajasthan: Sarees exhibited at Rajasthan counter

By and large the exhibition has proved successful and visitors and customers are making beelines taking advantage of the festive season. Officials in the Textile Ministry say that the new venue ‘Handloom House’ was set up to create a permanent MARKETING outlet that will enable handloom agencies to augment their sales as well as also make available quality handloom products to the discerning consumers. “Looking at the response, the efforts have yielded results, I can say,” says one of them.

The move to organize such exhibition and sales outlets also reflect the government’s sincerity to boost textile sector in the country. This year’s exhibition has thus given opportunity to small-time organization from places like Ranchi, ‘Beroezgar Mahila Kalyan Kendra’, to sell their products from Jharkhand.

The government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is already working on a new Textiles Policy. The handloom sector in the country provides employment to 43.31 lakh persons engaged on 23.77 lakh handlooms across the country. It also accounts for 11 per cent of textile production and makes a significant contribution in export earnings. Because of the uniqueness and exclusivity of designs, capability to produce small batch sizes and being eco-friendly fabric, handloom products are in high demand in domestic and international MARKET,

say officials. “There is also immense demand for handloom products in the niche domestic market wherein not only consumers, discerning retailers look for reliable source for constant supply of authentic handloom products on regular basis.”

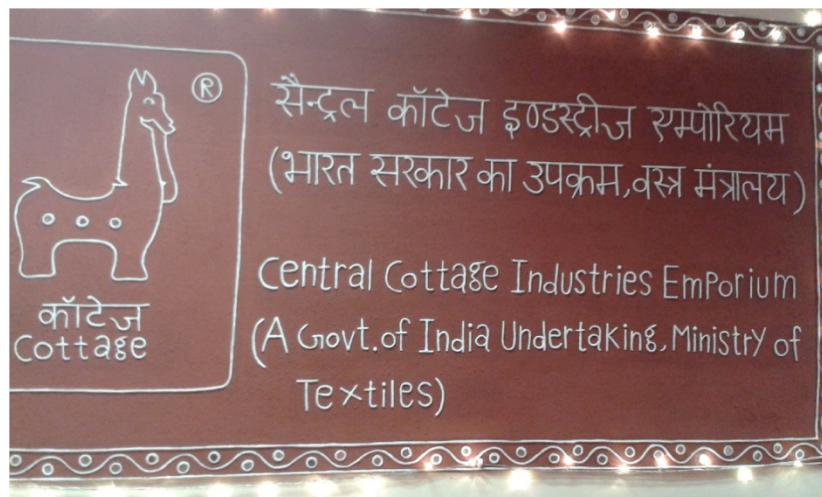


Multi-pronged strategies of the Modi Govt. for Promotion of Handloom and Handicrafts are:

1. The government wants to unveil innovative steps to promote handloom and handicrafts with focus on developing high-end niche products by linking it with contemporary fashion. Further, e-MARKETING initiatives will be pursued which will cut down intermediaries and increase wage earning of the weavers.
2. Steps to be taken to make the handloom attractive to younger generations and also promotion of handicrafts and handloom villages will be linked up with tourism and traditional handloom weaver/handicraft artisan villages.
3. Setting up of Textile Parks and Incubation centres:

Guidelines of the Scheme for Integrated Textile Parks and Scheme for Incubation Centres are being “examined and amended suitably” for meeting the field level needs.

The Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, has rightly taken many initiatives from time to time such as organizations of domestic marketing events, participation in international fairs and buyer-seller meets and other such strategies to provide a marketing support to handloom weavers.



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