

National Handloom Day

Every year on 7th August, India celebrates National Handloom Day, which marks the launch of the Swadeshi Movement on this day in 1905. The movement promoted indigenous industries, with a special focus on handloom weaving, as a means of economic resistance to British colonial rule.

National Handloom Day

The day was officially declared by the Government of India in 2015 to honour the handloom community and their contribution. It highlights handlooms as a pillar of rural economy, women's empowerment, and sustainable, eco-friendly production. National Handloom Day Theme 2025: "Weaving Innovation into Tradition."

1. Origins of the Swadeshi Movement

1. Trigger Partition of Bengal (1905)

The British decision to divide Bengal into a Muslim-majority East Bengal and a Hindu-majority West Bengal was widely seen as a deliberate strategy to create religious and political divisions. This administrative act weakened nationalist unity and inflamed anti-colonial sentiment.

2. Lord Curzon's Repressive Policies

Curzon's administrative reforms, such as reducing elected representation in the Calcutta Corporation and imposing the Indian Universities Act of 1904 (curbing academic freedom), created widespread resentment among the educated middle class.

3. Formal Launch at Calcutta Town Hall Meeting (August 1905)

A mass meeting at Calcutta Town Hall resolved to boycott British goods, particularly targeting "Manchester-made cloth" and "Liverpool salt," while urging the use of Indian-made alternatives.

Key Methods of the Swadeshi Movement

1. Boycott of British Goods

The central strategy involved rejecting imported British goods, thereby encouraging economic self-reliance and boosting indigenous industries such as handlooms, handicrafts, and local manufacturing.

2. Promotion of National Education

Discontent with colonial education led to the establishment of Indian-run institutions. The Carlyle Circular of 1905, threatening scholarships of protesting students, drove many to leave British schools. The 1906 creation of the National Council of Education paved the way for institutions like Bengal National College and Bengal Technical Institute.

3. Formation of Samitis (Voluntary Associations)

Local organizations such as Ashwini Kumar Dutta's Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in Barisal mobilized youth and rural communities to spread Swadeshi ideals through meetings, patrols, and relief work.

4. Use of Cultural and Religious Platforms

Traditional festivals and fairs were adapted as vehicles for nationalist messaging. In Maharashtra, Ganapati and Shivaji festivals became rallying points; in Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore used Raksha Bandhan as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity against the partition.

5. Emphasis on Self-Reliance and Social Reform

The concept of *Atma Shakti* (self-strength) linked political independence with moral and social reform, encouraging campaigns against caste discrimination, early marriage, dowry, and alcoholism.

Phases of the Swadeshi Movement

1. Moderate Phase (1905–1906)

Led by figures like Surendranath Banerjee, this phase focused on petitions, public meetings, and economic boycott as constitutional methods to persuade the British to revoke Bengal's partition.

2. Radical Phase (1906–1908)

Spearheaded by Lal-Bal-Pal (Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bipin Chandra Pal), radicals demanded *Swaraj* (self-rule) and endorsed more direct action, including passive resistance, mass mobilization, and at times revolutionary violence.

Impact of the Swadeshi Movement

1. On the Indian National Congress (INC)

INC condemned the partition and, at its 1906 Calcutta session under Dadabhai Naoroji, declared *Swaraj* as its ultimate aim. However, ideological differences between moderates and extremists culminated in the 1907 Surat split.

2. Cultural Awakening

Rabindranath Tagore's song *Amar Sonar Bangla*, later adopted as Bangladesh's national anthem, became a unifying cultural expression. Artists like Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose contributed to a nationalist revival in Indian art.

3. Economic Impact

Between 1905 and 1908, British imports—especially textiles—declined sharply. Indigenous enterprises like Bengal Chemicals (Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray) and Lakshmi Cotton Mills emerged as symbols of economic nationalism.

4. Women's Participation

Women played a vital role by boycotting foreign products, producing Swadeshi goods at home, and participating in public campaigns, setting a precedent for their later role in the freedom movement.

5. British Policy Response

Alarmed by the growing unrest, the British enacted the Morley-Minto Reforms (1909) to provide limited Indian representation, and in 1911, Lord Hardinge annulled Bengal's partition to stem revolutionary activities.

Contemporary Relevance of the Swadeshi Movement

1. Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (Self-Reliant India Mission)

Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic with a ₹20 lakh crore package (~10% of GDP), it echoes Swadeshi ideals through the themes *vocal for local* and *local for global*, aiming to make India a global manufacturing and supply hub.

2. Make in India Initiative

Since 2014, this program has boosted domestic production, simplified investment norms, and raised FDI inflows from USD 45 billion (2015) to USD 81.04 billion (2024–25). Exports reached USD 437 billion in 2024, with notable growth in pharmaceuticals, defence manufacturing, and textiles.

3. Revival of Khadi and Cottage Industries

Under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), khadi production increased by 347% and sales by 447% over 2013–2025, providing jobs to nearly 1.94 crore people. Economic Nationalism and

Protectionism – In critical sectors like defence, health, and energy, India promotes domestic production through import substitution, tariffs, and Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes across 14 sectors.

Role of Handloom Sector in India's Economy

1. Economic Significance

As the largest cottage industry, the handloom sector employs over 35 lakh workers, 72% of whom are women, making it a pillar of rural livelihoods and women's empowerment.

2. Sustainability and Cultural Heritage

Handloom products are eco-friendly, preserve traditional weaving skills, and carry unique regional identities. India accounts for 95% of the world's handwoven fabric output.

3. Export Performance

In FY23, India exported handloom products worth USD 10.94 billion to over 20 countries. Major exports include carpets, rugs, bedsheets, and silk scarves, with the US as the largest importer.

Government Initiatives for the Handloom Sector

1. National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) – Provides raw materials, design input, technology upgrades, marketing platforms, and infrastructure like Urban Haats.
2. Raw Material Supply Scheme (RMSS) – Supplies quality yarn at subsidized rates, reimburses freight costs, and offers a 15% yarn subsidy to help handloom compete with power loom.
3. Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) – Offers low-interest loans to weavers for working capital and expansion.
4. Workshed Scheme – Allocates ₹1.2 lakh per unit for building workspace near weavers' homes, with full funding for marginalized weavers.
5. GI Tag Protection – 104 handloom products have been registered under the Geographical Indications Act, 1999, to safeguard traditional designs.
6. Digital Market Access – About 1.8 lakh weavers have been onboarded onto the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) to access wider buyers.
7. Social Security – Schemes like PMJJBY, PMSBY, and MGBBY offer insurance and financial protection to weavers and their families.

Source: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2153053>