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“It’s A Crime To Wrap A Child In Polyfiber” : Sadhguru During Interaction With Smriti Irani

8 August 2020, Coimbatore: “I am not against machines, I am not against industrialisation but what is done with human hands has a certain aesthetic, has a certain beauty, uniqueness and above all is a human expression,” said Sadhguru, Founder, Isha Foundation, in an absorbing conversation with Ms. Smriti Irani, Union Minister of Textiles and Minister of Women and Child Development which centered around breathing new life into India’s textile industries and reversing the fortunes of indigenous weavers. The conversation, a part of the **In Conversation with the Mystic** series, was webcast live on 7 August to mark National Handloom Day. Sadhguru launched Save the Weave last year, a campaign to revive and popularize India’s ancient weaves.

“I think that's where the challenge lies,” Ms. Irani said referring to the disconnect between handloom products, the youth and modern markets. She said the Textile Ministry is now in talks with big commercial brands like BIBA and Arvind Mills to promote handmade weaves. “We are appealing to people in the commercial segment to source their cloth directly from the weavers, bringing about a synergy that was long absent,” she said.

The session was moderated by Lavina Baldota, a patron of arts and crafts, who has been tirelessly working with the weavers to create exquisite hand-crafted textiles.

Sadhguru spoke about the need to encourage the Indian textile industry by introducing handloom products in schools, tourism circuits and aviation industry. He also made a strong pitch for school uniforms to be made from handmade weaves of the state. “It is a crime to wrap a child in a polyfiber. You do that to dead fish, not to living children. Especially a child's body is very vulnerable to this – both their physical and psychological well being is impacted by polyfiber entering into their system.” The Minister who welcomed his remarks spoke about the several vital changes the Ministry has instituted to make weaving a commercially viable proposition for weavers.

The conversation that generated quite a few laughs took an in-depth look at challenges facing the handloom industry and dwelt on solutions for this ancient trade of India. Sadhguru welcomed the government’s recent move to introduce barrier-free trade for agricultural produce which will encourage more farmers to plant yarn yielding tree crops. Isha has been promoting tree-based agriculture as an economically beneficial and ecologically sustainable farming choice through its Cauvery Calling movement in southern India. “All of us know the struggles that the Indian farmer has been going through for variety of reasons, but one fundamental reason is because farmers are completely invested in growing monoculture agriculture and perishable items. By 2030, if 30% of the land is dedicated to fibre cultivation, (it would be) a *huge* relief to the farmer because now he has a product, which is not perishable where there is more opportunity to market it in a lucrative way,”Sadhguru explained.

Stating that “No nation, no culture ever has come up with so many varieties of textiles,” Sadhguru spoke about India’s pride of place as the primary supplier of textiles to the world at one time. “Ancient India had the pride of clothing the world. We have to bring back the hand weavers in a big way because it (the handloom industry) is the second largest employer next to agriculture. I think in many ways we will be presenting India in a much more aesthetic and sensible way, and also in a commercially sensible way.” Sadhguru said natural fibers can be generated from sugarcane bagasse, banana plant and jute.

Though the government has invested Rs. 1300 crore for skill development in the sector, Ms. Irani acknowledged that a lot remains to be done. “I'm conscious that much more needs to be done. We want to make handloom not only better designed, but also

better priced. Our endeavour is to also ensure it becomes an everyday, affordable article for more Indians so that our weavers get a bigger market.”

To mark the National Handloom Day, the Textile Ministry also unveiled its plans to develop 10 craft and handloom villages across the country. The government hopes to attract tourists to these villages to popularise the products and help people discover the rich legacy of Indian weavers.

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