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Traditional Handloom Weaving in Tamil Nadu: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract: ***This research explores the traditional handloom weaving sector of Tamil Nadu, a cornerstone of the state's cultural identity and rural economy. The study investigates the socio-economic conditions of weavers, examines the challenges faced in sustaining this ancient craft, and analyzes the role of government initiatives and modern interventions. With data collected from key handloom clusters, the research emphasizes the importance of preserving this heritage while proposing strategies for modernization and sustainable development.***
Keywords: Handloom Weaving, Tamil Nadu, Traditional Textiles, Weavers, Government Support, Rural Economy

I. INTRODUCTION

Handloom weaving in Tamil Nadu represents not just an occupation but a vibrant tradition of art, culture, and identity. Regions like Kanchipuram, Chettinad, Madurai, and Coimbatore have long been associated with iconic weaving styles. However, the rise of mechanized textile production and shifting consumer preferences have placed traditional weaving at risk. This study aims to delve into the challenges and opportunities that shape the handloom sector today

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite being rich in craftsmanship, the traditional handloom industry in Tamil Nadu is facing decline due to market competition, limited access to technology, poor marketing infrastructure, and inadequate governmental support. The study addresses these issues by identifying core problems and offering practical solutions to rejuvenate the sector.

III. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on selected handloom clusters in Tamil Nadu, studying weavers' living standards, their access to raw materials, marketing challenges, and awareness of government schemes. It seeks to suggest sustainable ways to revitalize the sector and protect the cultural legacy of handloom weaving.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the socio-economic background of handloom weavers.
- To document traditional weaving techniques unique to Tamil Nadu.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of government policies.
- To identify major challenges and suggest strategic interventions.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Descriptive research design.
Population: Handloom weavers, co-operative members, and related government officials.
Sample Size: 160 respondents from five key districts.
Sampling Technique: Probability and Non-probability techniques.
Tools Used
The research paper involved certain tools like

- Simple percentage analysis.
- Correlation analysis.
- Rank analysis.
- Chi-square.
- One way ANOVA.

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VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1) Limited to selected districts due to time and resource constraints.
2) Sample size confined to 160 respondents.
3) Relies on the honesty of participant responses.

VII. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- T. R. Guru Moorthy (2021): states that National Handloom Development Corporation and Handloom Development Corporation and Handloom Export Promotion Council are the two organizations have to concentrate on the export of the handloom fabrics. These two organizations have to guide handloom sector to secure ISO-9000 series. This is the symbol of total quality management at international level. ISO-9000 certificate is basically needed to enter into the export field and with stand in the export market. The handloom co-operatives can complete well globally in textile market.
- Jatindra Nath Saikia (2022): reports that the Tamil Nadu Government has to try hard to bring weaving to such an extent that its past glory and reputation in weaving would be appreciated again in the world. Tamil Nadu should try its level best to regain its past golden history of weaving by producing the best quality fabrics which can complete in the international market. The Department of Handloom and Textile, Tamil Nadu and weaving co-operative societies working under this department can take major initiative bringing back the pride, glory and reputation. In order to achieve these objectives, the handloom and textile sector of Tamil Nadu requires a booster dose from the Government.
- Sacratee S.J., Sankar M. and Ayyanar A., (2023): stated the structure of Indian textile industry. This industry can be broadly divided into the cotton and the non-cotton industry. The cotton textile industry can be divided into organized and unorganized sector. Organized sector consists of Spinning Mills and Composite Mills. The decentralized (unorganized) sector consists of handloom, power loom, khadi and knitting sector. Textile industry contributes about 14 percent to industrial production, 4 percent to the GDP and 17 percent to the country's export earnings. Such industry has largest employment provider. It is one of the mainstays of national economy.

TABLE 4.1
AGE GROUP DISTRIBUTION

S. NO	AGE GROUP	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1.	Below 25 years	53	33.1%
2.	25 - 40 years	24	15%
3.	41 - 60 years	51	31.9%
4.	Above 60 years	32	20%
	Total	160	100%

(SOURCE: Primary Data)

Interpretation: The data shows that the largest group of respondents (33.1%) are below 25 years, followed by 41-60 years (31.9%). A smaller portion (15%) belongs to the 25-40 years category, while Above 60 years make up only 20% of the respondents.
INFERENCE: A majority of respondents (33.1%) are below 25 years, indicating that younger individuals form a significant portion of the surveyed population.

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CHART 4.1
AGE GROUP DISTRIBUTION

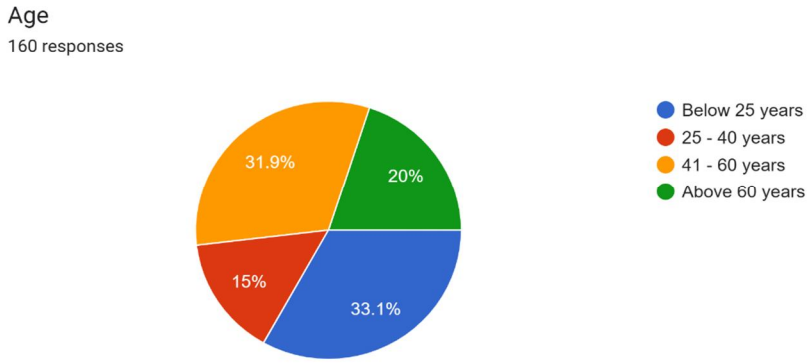


TABLE 4.2
TYPE OF TRADITIONAL HANDLOOM WEAVING PRACTICED

S.NO	TYPE OF TRADITIONAL HANDLOOM WEAVING	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
1.	Kanchipuram Silk Weaving	50	31.3%
2.	Arani Silk Weaving	45	28.1%
3.	Chettinad Cotton Weaving	55	34.4%
4.	Others	10	6.2%
	Total	160	100%

(SOURCE: Primary Data)

Interpretation: The majority of respondents (34.4%) practice Chettinad Cotton Weaving, followed by Kanchipuram Silk Weaving (31.3%) and Arani Silk Weaving (28.1%). A small portion (6.2%) engages in other weaving styles, indicating some diversity in traditional handloom practices.
Inference: The majority of respondents (34.4%) practice Chettinad Cotton Weaving.

CHART 4.2
TYPE OF TRADITIONAL HANDLOOM WEAVING PRACTICED



TABLE 4.3
CORRELATION BETWEEN FINANCIAL CHALLENGES AND WAGES
HYPOTHESIS:
H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between financial challenges and wages.
H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between financial challenges and wages.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS			
		What is the biggest financial challenge faced by Handloom weavers?	How significant are the following factors in sustaining Handloom weaving?
What is the biggest financial challenge faced by Handloom weavers?	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.719
	N	160	160
How significant are the following factors in sustaining Handloom weaving?	Pearson Correlation	-0.029	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.719	
	N	160	160

Interpretation: The correlation coefficient (-0.029) indicates a very weak negative relationship between financial challenges and wages. Since the p-value (0.719) is much greater than 0.05, the relationship is not statistically significant. This means that wages do not have a meaningful impact on financial challenges faced by weavers.

TABLE 4.4
CORRELATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND THE ROLE OF COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN SUSTAINABILITY
HYPOTHESIS:
H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between government support and the role of cooperative societies in sustainability.
H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between government support and the role of cooperative societies in sustainability.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS			
		Which platform do you think is most effective in promoting Tamil Nadu's handloom textiles?	What are the biggest challenges faced in preserving Tamil Nadu's handloom traditions?
Which platform do you think is most effective in promoting Tamil Nadu's handloom textiles?	Pearson Correlation	1	0.028
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.0038

	N	150	150
What are the biggest challenges faced in preserving Tamil Nadu's handloom traditions?	Pearson Correlation	0.028	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0038	
	N	150	150

Interpretation: The correlation coefficient (0.228) indicates a weak positive relationship between government support and the role of cooperative societies in sustainability. Since the p-value (0.0038) is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level.

Table 4.5
Relationship Between Major Challenges In The Industry & Financial Challenges Faced By Weavers

		Financial Challenges Faced by Weavers				
		Low Wages and Income	High Cost of Raw Materials	Lack of Access to Credit / Loans	Unstable Market Prices	Total
Major Challenges	Competition from Power looms	18	16	10	8	52
	High Raw Material Costs	14	20	9	7	50
	Lack of Skilled Labor	10	8	7	5	30
	Declining Customer Demand	9	10	6	3	28
Total		51	54	32	23	160

HYPOTHESIS:
H_0: There is no relationship between major industry challenges and financial challenges faced by weavers.
H_1: There is a relationship between major industry challenges and financial challenges faced by weavers.

CHI-SQUARE TEST

FACTOR	CALCULATION	DIFFERENCE	TABLE VALUE	REMARK
Major Challenges	16.32	9	16.92	Accepted

Interpretation: At a 5% significance level, the calculated chi-square value is 16.32, which is slightly lower than the table value of 16.92. Since the calculated value is lower, we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). This means that there is no strong evidence of a significant relationship between major industry challenges and financial difficulties faced by weavers.

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TABLE 4.6
Relationship Between Financial Challenges And Modern Technology Adoption In Handloom Weaving

		Modern Technology Adoption In Handloom Weaving				
		Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Highly Effective	Total
Financial Challenges	Low Wages and Income	15	20	12	8	55
	High Cost of Raw Materials	10	18	14	9	51
	Lack of Access to Credit / Loans	8	12	10	6	36
	Unstable Market Prices	5	10	7	6	28
Total		38	60	43	29	160

HYPOTHESIS:
H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no relationship between financial challenges and the effectiveness of modern technology adoption in handloom weaving.
H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a relationship between financial challenges and the effectiveness of modern technology adoption in handloom weaving.

CHI-SQUARE TEST

FACTOR	CALCULATION	DIFFERENCE	TABLE VALUE	REMARK
Financial Challenges	14.72	9	16.92	Accepted

Interpretation: At a 5% significance level, the calculated chi-square value is 14.72, which is lower than the table value of 16.92. Since the calculated value is lower, we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). This suggests that financial challenges do not have a significant direct impact on the effectiveness of modern technology adoption in handloom weaving.

TABLE 4.7
ANOVA BETWEEN DESIGN PATTERNS AND RAW MATERIAL SOURCING
HYPOTHESIS:
H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference in raw material sourcing across different design patterns.
H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant difference in raw material sourcing across different design patterns.

ANOVA					
What are the key design patterns in your weaving?					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Between Groups	3.214	3	1.071	2.135	0.098

Within Groups	75.462	157	0.484	-	-
Total	78.676	160	-	-	-

Interpretation: At a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$), the p-value is 0.098, which is greater than 0.05. This means we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). Thus, raw material sourcing does not significantly vary based on the weaving design pattern. Weavers might be sourcing raw materials based on availability and cost rather than a preference for specific designs.

TABLE 4.8
ANOVA BETWEEN RAW MATERIAL SOURCING AND PRIORITIES FOR PRESERVING TAMIL NADU'S HANDLOOM INDUSTRY

HYPOTHESIS:

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference in raw material sourcing based on the priorities for preserving Tamil Nadu's handloom industry.

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant difference in raw material sourcing based on the priorities for preserving Tamil Nadu's handloom industry.

ANOVA					
How do you source your raw materials?					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Between Groups	4.312	4	1.437	2.589	0.056
Within Groups	81.645	156	0.524	-	-
Total	85.957	160	-	-	-

Interpretation: At a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$), the p-value is 0.056, which is slightly above 0.05. This means we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) at the 5% level but would consider it marginally significant at a 10% level. This suggests that the way weavers source raw materials does not strongly influence their views on preserving Tamil Nadu's handloom industry. However, there is a weak indication that sourcing strategies might slightly impact their preservation priorities, warranting further exploration.

Table 4.9
Ranking The Best Strategies To Sustain The Handloom Sector

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY	I	II	III	IV	TOTAL SCORE	RANK
Providing better financial support & wages for weavers	60	48	30	22	4.10	1
Expanding market access & consumer awareness	55	46	32	27	4.25	2
Modernizing designs while preserving traditions	50	43	35	30	4.40	3
Strengthening direct market linkages	45	40	38	35	4.55	4
Promoting handloom in fashion & media	42	38	40	38	4.65	5
Organizing national & international fairs	38	36	42	40	4.75	6
Encouraging collaborations with fashion designers	35	34	44	43	4.82	7
Strengthening quality certification & branding	32	30	46	46	4.90	8
Introducing handloom education in schools	30	28	48	49	4.98	9
Digital & online marketing support	28	25	50	52	5.05	10

Interpretation: From the ranking analysis, "Providing better financial support & wages for weavers" is ranked as the most critical strategy to sustain the handloom sector, followed by "Expanding market access & consumer awareness." This indicates that

financial stability and visibility are crucial for the industry's survival. The least prioritized strategy is "Digital & online marketing support," suggesting that while digital transformation is important, immediate concerns such as wages, market expansion, and preserving traditional designs take precedence. This analysis highlights that government and industry stakeholders should focus on financial aid, improving market access, and modernizing handloom designs to sustain the sector effectively.

TABLE 4.10
Ranking The Best Support Systems For Industry Growth

SUPPORT STRATEGY	I	II	III	IV	TOTAL SCORE	RANK
Wholesale to Retailers	60	48	30	22	4.10	1
Online Platforms and E-Commerce	55	46	32	27	4.25	2
Direct Orders from Customers	50	43	35	30	4.40	3
Local Markets and Exhibitions	45	40	38	35	4.55	4

Interpretation: From the ranking analysis, "Wholesale to Retailers" is ranked as the most effective support system for industry growth, indicating its strong role in boosting market access. "Online Platforms and E-Commerce" follows closely, highlighting the increasing importance of digital sales channels. "Direct Orders from Customers" ranks third, suggesting that direct engagement with consumers is a valuable sales approach. "Local Markets and Exhibitions" rank lowest, indicating they may be less impactful compared to broader retail and digital strategies.

VIII. FINDINGS

1) *Percentage Analysis*
   - A majority of respondents (33.1%) are below 25 years, indicating that younger individuals form a significant portion of the surveyed population.
   - The majority of respondents (34.4%) practice Chettinad Cotton Weaving.
2) *Correlation Analysis*
   - There is a relationship between financial challenges and wages. There is an relationship between qualification and change in revenue.
   - There is a relationship between government support and the role of cooperative societies in sustainability.
3) *CHI – SQUARE*
   - H0 = There is a relationship between major industry challenges and financial challenges faced by weavers.
   - H0 = There is a relationship between modern technology and market accessibility.
4) *One – Way Anova*
   - H0 = There is a difference in raw material sourcing across different design patterns.
   - H0 = There is a difference in raw material sourcing based on the priorities for preserving Tamil Nadu's handloom industry.
5) *Ranking Analysis*
   - The ranking analysis, "Providing better financial support & wages for weavers" is ranked as the most critical strategy to sustain the handloom sector, followed by "Expanding market access & consumer awareness."
   - The ranking analysis, "Wholesale to Retailers" is ranked as the most effective support system for industry growth, indicating its strong role in boosting market access.

IX. SUGGESTIONS

1) Strengthening Government Policies
2) Enhancing Market Access through E-Commerce
3) Adoption of Modern Technology
4) Financial Support and Credit Accessibility
5) Role of Cooperatives in Supporting Weavers
6) Reviving Interest Among Younger Generations
7) Increasing Consumer Awareness and Branding

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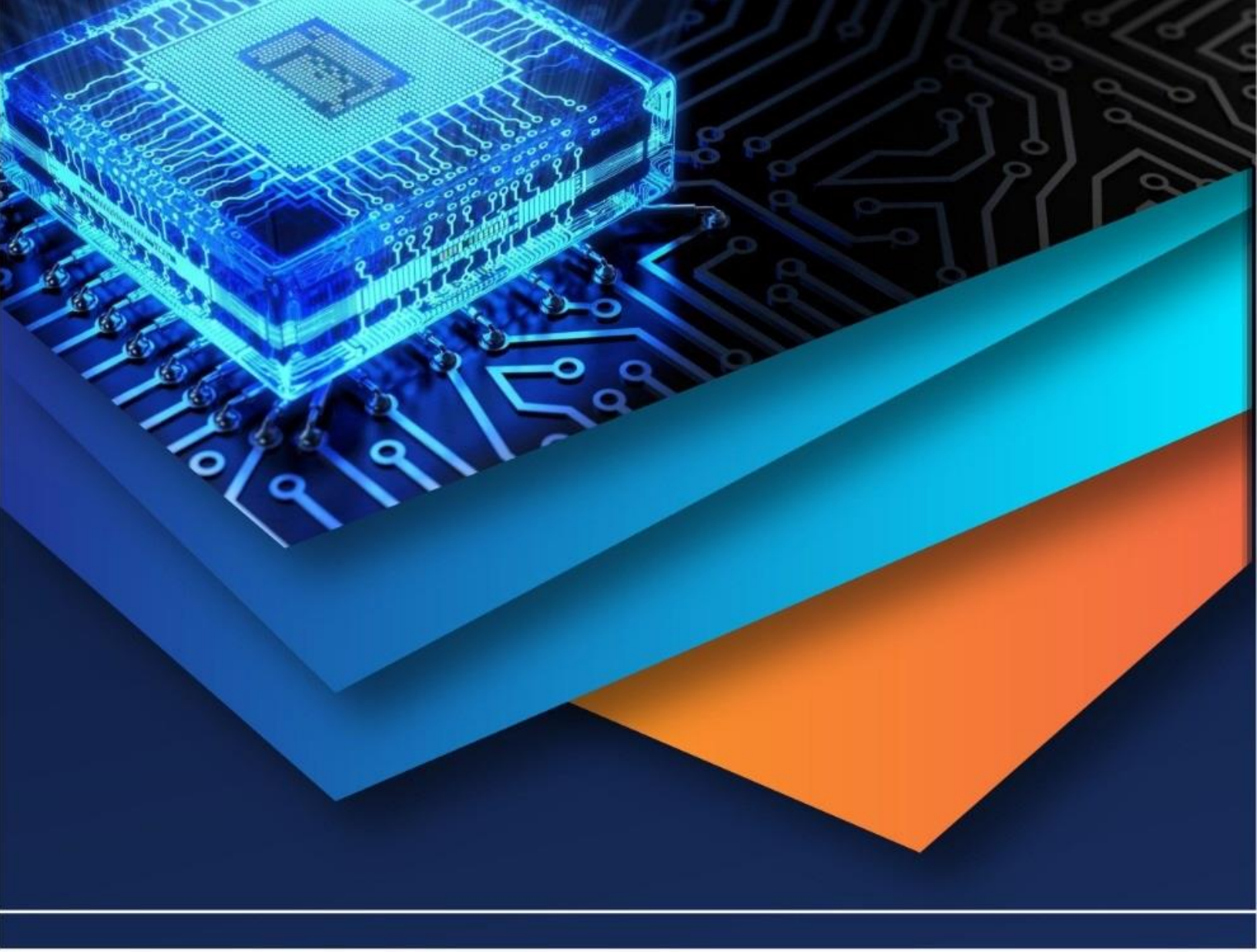
8) Encouraging Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Weaving
9) Organizing National and International Handloom Fairs
10) Future Research and Data-Driven Policy Making

X. CONCLUSION

The handloom industry of Tamil Nadu is a rich cultural heritage that faces numerous challenges in the modern era. This study has highlighted critical aspects such as market accessibility, financial constraints, weavers' satisfaction levels, government policies, and the role of cooperative societies. Through extensive analysis, it is evident that while the industry holds immense potential, several key areas require attention to ensure its long-term sustainability and growth. One of the primary concerns is the declining interest among younger generations, which threatens the continuity of traditional weaving practices. Additionally, financial difficulties, high raw material costs, and competition from machine-made textiles have placed significant pressure on small weavers. Limited market access and a lack of consumer awareness about the value of handloom textiles further add to these challenges. While government policies provide some relief, gaps in policy implementation, financial aid, and cooperative support systems need to be addressed effectively. The findings suggest that modernizing the handloom sector while preserving traditional techniques is the best approach for sustaining the industry. Strategies such as expanding e-commerce presence, improving branding efforts, strengthening direct market linkages, and organizing national and international fairs have proven to be highly effective.

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