INTRODUCTION

The current state of handloom and handicraft in India is symbolic of the potential integration of traditional ethos with modern techniques. Both the sectors provide immense opportunity for employment generation and foreign exchange earnings. Handicrafts comprise of a variety of products like Metal ware, Wood ware, Hand printed textiles, Embroidered and crocheted goods, Shawls, Carpets, Bamboo products, Zari goods, Imitation jewellery, Paintings, Earthenware, Jute products, Marble Sculpture, Bronze Sculpture, Leather Products etc. Indian handicraft is a $100 billion industry and contributes 1.2% to world economy. Rs 40,000 crore worth products are produced every year and approximately exports Rs18, 000 crore worth of products. In terms of providing livelihood, it provides direct employment to 4 million craftsmen while another 5 million a dependent on this sector indirectly.

According to 3rd Handlooms Census conducted in 2009-10, around 43 lakh people are engaged in weaving and allied activities. Out of the 38.47 lakh adult weavers and allied workers in the country, 77% are women and 23% male weavers. Handloom products accounted for exports worth Rs. 2246.48 crore during the financial year 2014-2015. It is a labour intensive industry absorbing a manpower base secondary only to the agricultural sector. The importance of this sector in Indian economy is further underlined by the fact that it uses the agricultural produce as raw material, thereby providing a market to the agricultural sector. In 1996-97, India exported handloom worth Rs 2100 crore and the sector accounts for 22% of the total cloth production in the country.

Traditional Indian products had huge salability both in domestic and international markets till India came under the British rule. The British Government focused on the production of utilitarian products instead of aesthetic products. The Industrial Revolution in the 18th century further weakened the condition of the artisans as consumer preference shifted towards machine made products. After independence, the national government started focusing on the development of the traditional crafts. All India Cottage Industries Board was set up in 1948 with the objective of reviving the plight of the artisans. The Central Government started providing
funds to the State Governments for implementing developmental programmes. However, these efforts were not very effective as the various cottage and small scale industries have very specific challenges, which could not be effectively handled by one nodal agency. As such, the Central Government split the Cottage Industries Board into the following All India Boards in the year 1952.

1) All India Handloom Board;
2) All India Handicrafts Board and
3) All India Khadi and Village Industries Board.

The All India Handicraft Board was further divided into two wings in 1980, namely, Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) and Development Commissioner (Handloom) and both the units are controlled by the Ministry of Textiles (Central Government).

However, the present state of the sectors is dismal as they are plagued by various challenges. Lack of financial support, poor infrastructure facilities, weak marketing and technological support, insufficient training and capacity building, R&D, product development and market inputs regarding current trends and poor bargaining power of artisans retard the growth of these sectors. Globalization, although has led to greater access to products from across the world, has also resulted in mass production due to increased global demand. As a result, a lot of craft products are being produced in factories rather than being handmade which is harming the interests of the real artisans.

With the current market scenario witnessing demographic changes, psychographic and sociological shifts, evolving consumer tastes and preferences and economic upheavals; reviving the languishing crafts and providing a sustainable source of livelihood to the artisans becomes a mammoth task. A clear strategic direction and collaborative efforts between government, private players, marketing and design experts and NGOs is imperative to understand the dynamic consumer landscape in order to re-model the value chain and develop consumer-oriented craft-based products.

Indian consumer market is destined to become the fifth largest consumer market by 2025. With the increase in income levels, more than 291 million people will move from below the poverty line to a better quality of life, Indian middle class will expand to 583 million as opposed to 50
million today and approximately 23 million Indians will come under the wealthy bracket. The majority of the Indian consumers are expected to belong to the urban ecosystem contributing to 62% of the consumption by 2025 compared to 42% today.

One of the most lucrative consumer sub-segments in recent times is the women consumer market. Women consumers are spending around $20 trillion annually at a global level. At a comparative level the total women’s growth market is equal to both China and India put together. “The women’s market is Economic Opportunity Number One for the foreseeable future,” says marketing guru Tom Peters, “and there’s no close second.” Even in the Indian context, there has been significant increase in the income levels of women which directly translates into their spending power. This financial independence has led to greater aspirations and hence they have become more demanding as consumers choosing to settle for nothing but the best within the specified budget. The Indian women consumer is quite complex in terms of her psychographics and decision making variables. She is traditional as well as enjoys her independence and likes to express herself through her purchase choices which range from ethnic to contemporary. The urban woman is equally interested in innovative modern technology as well as enjoys exploring the heritage products as long as they meet her functional and aesthetic needs. However, the real challenge for the marketer is to understand the expressed and latent needs of this target group and to communicate with them in a manner which resonates with their attitude, emotions and value system.

From the above discussion it is evident that Indian women form a potentially substantial consumer market which can be leveraged for economic benefit of the handlooms and handicrafts as they have an innate significant competitive advantage of being able to strike the right emotional chord with this segment. The major challenges faced by the craft sector are marketing and product development. Therefore, from the standpoint of both academic learning as well as marketing insights, it is worthwhile to research about the factors that influence purchase of handicraft and handloom products by Indian women consumers. It is imperative to identify the underlying psycho-sociological constructs that govern female consumer behavior in order to design marketing strategies and develop business model for the sustainable growth of the craft segment by adapting to the needs of the Indian women consumer segment.