TATA TRUSTS

Press Release For Immediate Use

Weaving In The Time Of Covid-19
Antaran Says Buy – Not Donate - To Save The Livelihoods Of India's Artisans

Rather than soliciting donations, ***Antaran***, an initiative by India's oldest philanthropic organization ***Tata Trusts***, urges everyone to purchase handwoven products at wholesale prices directly from the artisans they work with, at www.antaranartisanconnect.in. In order to mitigate the hardships caused by this downturn, beautiful handlooms and weaves can be purchased and the payment can be made directly to the artisan through the portal. Thereby, enabling him/her to live a dignified life in these difficult times, and as soon as life returns to normal, deliveries will be made at the earliest.

It comes as no surprise that a world-renowned centre for handlooms and textile weaving industry of India, like most other industries, is suffering terribly under the current countrywide lockdown. Covid19 has hit the heart of the handloom sector. The lockdown in effect from 24 March took everyone by surprise, especially this particular industry, which has now led to its questions of survivability. Craftspeople, who are, mainly self-employed, and dependent on seasonal retail sales and direct orders, are suffering the brunt of this pandemic.

Antaran, an initiative by India's oldest philanthropic organisation ***Tata Trusts*** is bringing seminal changes in the crafts sector, to begin with, the handloom sector. India is recognized for its rich handlooms, and only about a few have seen the light of the day while the others remain unexposed commercially. These fine and unique weaves with undiluted skills of artisans have immense potential in contemporary markets - especially from a Sustainable Fashion point of view.

Says S***harda Gautam, Head of Craft, Tata Trusts***, "Our artisans are enterprising and resilient and we need to stand by them in these trying times. None of us has ever witnessed a situation like the ongoing one, more so our brothers and sisters in the interior of India. They do not need our charity. They need our reaffirmation in their art and craft and we can demonstrate this by continuing to purchase from them."

Antaran focusses on such hidden handloom clusters and has started with four States known for their rich cultural weaves viz. Assam (Kamrup cotton and Eri silk), Nagaland (Dimapur and Phek, backstrap loom textiles), Andhra Pradesh (Venkatgiri - fine cotton and silk weave embellished with Jamdani, Zari) and Odisha (Maniabandha weft Ikat in fine cotton, silk & Gopalpur weaves in Ghicha and Tussar).

Belonging to an informal economical sector, small artisans and producer groups lack access to financial assistance and cannot rely on financial institutions to tide them through such a crisis. At the same time raw material suppliers do not give them any credit for supplies. Although, the Indian government is supplying free food rations to a maximum extent possible but most of the artisans, especially daily wagers are finding it extremely difficult to feed their families and cater to other emergencies.

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Antaran team and the artisans associated with them are utilizing this lockdown period to the fullest in developing new designs in the online consultation. They are sharing ideas, exchanging feedback, finalizing concepts and the artisans are showing a keen interest in developing these samples as soon as the lockdown is lifted. The *artisan entrepreneurs,* as addressed by the team, are being encouraged to utilize this break by turning it into an opportunity to plan and rethink a new direction and interpretation for the weaves of their clusters. Interactive online communications with the Antaran team are helping the artisans to sharpen their knowledge for product presentation, business communications while they continue to engage with customers through the Antaran Artisan Connect initiative. This regular interaction between the customer and the artisans is helping in a constant exchange of knowledge between the customer and the artisan in knowing about the craft and customer demands respectively.

With a developing base in strong entrepreneurship skills, in order to become independent brand owners, the artisans are also consolidating their business, improving their product catalogue, re-organizing inventory of raw material and finished products. They are also actively trying to set up microenterprises in order to scale up their operations. At this point they are trying to unlock their working capital, which has been blocked due to buyers not being able to take deliveries of orders nor give any commitments due to their own uncertain situation. Therefore, it is need of the hour to support artisans with much-required monies through direct purchases, to avert and come out of this crisis with the least possible trauma

About Antaran

An initiative by Tata Trusts to bring seminal changes in craft development, beginning with the Handloom sector, designed to transform traditional crafts through a multidimensional approach for technical, design, enterprise and market development interventions to strengthen craft based livelihoods. Antaran creates awareness about the rich heritage of Indian handloom and handicrafts, bring due recognition and returns to traditional artisans for their unique skills through a five-year program through Incubation & Design Centres for handloom development in select lesser-known clusters of Assam, Nagaland, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. These Centres work as education and business development hubs for artisans, enabling them to be designer-weavers and build a community of micro-entrepreneurs across the handloom value chain in each region.

About Tata Trusts

Since its inception in 1892, Tata Trusts, India’s oldest philanthropic organization, has played a pioneering role in bringing about an enduring difference in the lives of the communities it serves. Guided by the principles and the vision of proactive philanthropy of the Founder, Jamsetji Tata, the Trusts’ purpose is to catalyse development in the areas of health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and hygiene, livelihood, digital transformation, migration and urban habitat, social justice and inclusion, environment and energy, skill development, sports, and arts and culture.

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The Trusts programmes, achieved through direct implementation, partnerships and grant making, are marked by innovations, relevant to the country. For more information, please visit http://tatatrusts.org/