

A Tax on Living Heritage: Indian Carpet Council Warns US Tariffs Endanger Weavers' Livelihoods

Category: Business

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In a small village in Uttar Pradesh, I once sat beside a weaver named Shanti. Her fingers moved with a rhythm so

natural it felt like music – tying knots on a loom that had been in her family for generations. The rug she was working on, filled with tribal motifs, was not just meant to warm a floor in Dubai. It was meant to carry a piece of her story, her culture, her soul across borders.



Mr. Deepak Khanna Founder of Man-Made Rugs

That moment stayed etched in my memory. It made me realize that India's handmade carpets are so much more than a business – they are living traditions. Every design is history preserved; every thread is memory made visible.

And yet, this living tradition is under strain. The 50% tariff imposed by the United States on Indian handmade carpets strikes more than just the economics of an industry – it strikes at the heart of generations of artistry. Tariffs are not just numbers on paper. They decide whether a weaver's child goes to school, whether small businesses can stand a fair chance in global markets, whether artisans can sustain their craft with dignity, and whether centuries of heritage still find their place in homes around the world.

Handmade carpets are not factory goods. They sustain nearly 2 million artisans in India, anchored in rural prosperity, gender equality, and centuries of culture. To tax them as mere commodities is to undervalue their true contribution, not only to livelihoods and fair competition in global markets but also to the preservation of an art form that binds communities and stories together.

Making Indian Carpets a Global Symbol of Elegance

An Indian handmade carpet is not made; it is born. From the looms of Kashmir to the villages of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, these rugs carry the imprint of human patience and artistry.

The world must not only recognize Indian carpets as heritage products but embrace them as aspirational luxury goods on par with Italian leather or Persian rugs. This requires branding, storytelling, and positioning that elevate our identity from “craft” to cultural emblem.

We already know what is possible. When artisans from Kerala

wove the carpet for the Met Gala, the world walked on their artistry. Why should moments like that be rare With e-commerce and social media, a rug woven in Mirzapur can reach a hotel in Paris or a home in Tokyo with just a few clicks. Every “Made in India” carpet should carry not just a label, but a living story.

Inspiring the Next Generation of Weavers

Here is the hard truth: many young people from weaving families do not want to continue this craft. Why would they, when city jobs seem more secure

But change is possible. Priya, a 20-year-old from Mirzapur, once doubted weaving’s future – until she saw her designs sold online in France and Germany. Suddenly, weaving looked less like her parents’ struggle and more like her opportunity.

To keep this hope alive, we need structured educational platforms – teaching not only traditional techniques but also global design trends, sustainability, and digital branding. This industry can offer careers of pride, not compromise. But punitive tariffs cast a shadow, shrinking orders and discouraging youth just as they are stepping forward.

Reaching New Markets Through Young Entrepreneurs

For decades, the U.S. and Europe defined our exports. But the future lies in diversification. Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia are asking for our craft in new forms – eco-friendly jute rugs in Malaysia, bold kilims in Brazil, cultural weaves in the UAE.

Technology gives us new leverage. With AI we can personalize designs. With blockchain we can trace every rug back to its artisan. With better logistics we can compete on delivery. Tariffs may slow us down, but they will not define us. If one door closes, we must open three others.

A Tapestry of Tomorrow

India's handmade carpet industry is not just an export sector. It is a rural economy, a cultural legacy, and a heartbeat of human creativity.

When I step into the workshops of Bhadohi or Jaipur, I hear the quiet rhythm of looms. I watch as simple threads pass through hands and become breathtaking patterns. And in that moment, I know we are not weaving rugs at all. We are weaving legacy.

The world should not tax legacy. The story of Indian handmade carpets is too rich to be bound by borders or barriers. Each thread carries the weight of centuries, and together they form a tapestry not just of India's past but of the world's living heritage. With resilience, education, and vision, we will ensure it continues to be woven into the homes – and hearts – of the world.

Deepak Khanna

COA, Carpet Export Promotion Council (CEPC)

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