

Reviving Aak Fibre

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Why in News?

Recently, researchers highlighted the urgent need to preserve traditional knowledge around Aak fibre extraction and weaving in the arid landscapes of western Rajasthan.

Key Attributes of Aak (*Calotropis*)

- **Botanical Profile** - It belongs to the family **Apocynaceae** (milkweed family).
- A hardy, drought-resistant perennial shrub that thrives in dry, hot, sandy, and semi-arid climates across West Asia, North Africa, and India (predominantly Rajasthan, Gujarat, MP, and UP).
- **Lifespan** - **5 to 7 years**, producing flowers and seed pods within its first year.
- **Fibre Properties (Bhambhuriya)**
 - **Seed Floss / Silk** - The fine, soft pappus fibers inside the seed pods (locally termed *bhambhuriya*) yield a silky, lightweight, insulating natural texturing material used for spinning fine yarn, quilts, and pillows.
 - **Bast Fibre** - The inner bark of the stem yields strong, durable coarse fibers traditionally processed to make resilient ropes, charpoys, fishing lines, and agricultural bindings.



- **Significance**
 - Represents an eco-friendly, bio-based economic opportunity for rural desert women and artisans.
 - Revival of Aak fibre weaving offers sustainable income diversification in rainfed regions vulnerable to recurrent agricultural droughts.
 - Unlike water-intensive cash crops like cotton, Aak grows naturally on degraded and marginal soils without synthetic fertilizers, irrigation, or pesticides.
 - Helps bind soil particles, combating soil erosion and desertification along desert margins.
- **Threat of "Silent Loss"** - Due to changing rural lifestyles, synthetic plastic ropes, and the widespread neglect of traditional handicrafts, the intergenerational skill of harvesting and spinning Aak fibre faces severe risk of extinction.
- **Honour by State Government** - The state government honored rural artisan Kabbu Devi from Aati village in Barmer district for her craftsmanship in weaving traditional textiles.
- She includes mufflers made from **bhambhuriya**, a fine, silk-like natural fibre harvested from the pods of the Aak plant (*Calotropis gigantea* / *Calotropis procera*).
- **Community Preservation** - The **Maru Meghwal community** and farmers of western Rajasthan have preserved the indigenous craft of extracting and weaving fibre from aak bark for generations.

Reference

[Down to Earth | Saving a desert tradition](#)



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