



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor (RJIF): 8.4
IJAR 2024; 10(3): 70-74
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 03-01-2024
Accepted: 02-02-2024

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Journey of Khadi: From freedom to transformation

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Abstract

The research paper explores the historical significance of khadi, how it holds the attention and a distinctive place as a symbol of India's struggle. The current paper delves with the revival of adaptability of khadi according to fashion trends and its Global influence. Khadi the hand spun and hand-woven fabric got its demarcation as the fabric of patriotic struggle during freedom. This fabric was adapted with the changing needs over a period. It holds the national significance of being 'fabric of Freedom'. The versatile properties of khadi being so comfortable, elegant, eco-friendly, skin friendly makes it unique. This fabric is fashionable, has special comfort properties and good absorbency. Government of India along with KVIC has taken initiatives to promote khadi and revive timeless beauty of this unique fabric. Khadi stands for self-sustainability and providing job opportunities to the rural areas. The paper throws light on the current innovations incorporated for the promotion of the fabric. Various efforts that have been taken to promote khadi through promotions and marketing strategy by various designers and institutions. In khadi innovation, tradition and science are woven together. Today Khadi stands for Nation, as passion, for fashion and had countered a huge transformation over decades.

Keywords: KVIC, hand spun, freedom, versatile, promotion, khadi

Introduction

The khadi industry has changed tremendously after seven and half decade of Independence. The word "khadi," has its origin from the Sanskrit word "khaddar," which is another name of a hand-spun and hand-woven fabric with significant historical and cultural value in India (Srivastava, 2017) [6]. The history of khadi includes its origins in traditional handicraft. This fabric is deeply embedded in Indian history, has become popular as a means of artistic expression, overcoming the gap between socio-political action and cultural legacy. Its metamorphosis into a potent means of protest during the Indian independence movement and its continued importance as a fashionable and sustainable fabric in the modern period. Mahatma Gandhi holds the credit of elevating khadi from a simple fabric to a symbol of independence and nationalism. And today Khadi has evolved from being a sign of political protest to a well-liked fashion trend in the modern era.

History of Khadi in Pre-Independent Era

Khadi was the outcome of Swadeshi movement in the year 1920 by Mahatma Gandhi. Swadeshi movement has its own significance in the history of Indian freedom struggle against the British. The word Swadeshi means one's own country (Raghani, 2020) (Raghani, 2020) [5]. As a result of British colonial Policy Indian Textile industry was exploited in the 19th century. The Indian markets were flooded with the British made textiles hurting the livelihood of regional weavers and the craft people. Under the visionary leadership of Gandhiji during early 20th century, the latent strength of this modest fabric was brilliantly linked with the quest for freedom. It relates to manufacturing and use of goods in one's own country. During independence period Swadeshi movement laid emphasis on use of khadi products and boycotting of foreign goods during freedom struggle. For Gandhi ji Khadi was not only a fabric, but a fabric of Indian Independence. The fabric supported Gandhi's non-violent (Satyagraha) philosophy. The use of khadi clothes and items signified a dedication to peaceful protest and passive opposition to British rule.

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Khadi Symbol of Self-Reliance

Khadi was whole heartedly promoted by Mahatma Gandhi for self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and rural self-employment. That's the reason why Indian flag is made of khadi fabric. Gandhiji described 'Swadeshi' as the soul and 'Khadi' as its body (Raghani, 2020) (Raghani, 2020) [5]. Therefore, the fabric khadi had acquired a patriotic status during freedom struggle, it sparked a 'Swadeshi spirit'. The spinning wheel, charkha was considered as a potent representation of peaceful resistance of independence. Gandhi's appeal to wear and create khadi clothes extended beyond economic considerations. As people from many castes and classes engaged in the spinning process, it became a means of bridging social divisions. Thus, the aura of khadi brought all the sections of society under one roof to attain complete Independence.

Khadi became an iconic representation and Gandhiji urged people to spin their own cloth (Raghani, 2020) (Raghani, 2020) [5]. Indian embraced khadi and resisted the economic slavery reclaiming their cultural identity. Khadi became the motivation behind rural development in the country. Its decentralised production supported grassroots economic growth in the villages. Gandhiji efforts resulted in the creation of numerous Khadi institutions throughout India, including Khadi Gramodyog Bhavans and Khadi Bhandars, to encourage the spinning and weaving of Khadi and give rural craftsmen a place to work.

Khadi in Post-Independence Era

The post independent era was an important phase in the history of khadi, as it had historical significance as well as modern aspirations. While the fabric's traditional relevance and meaning were preserved, it also experienced changes to adapt to shifting socio-economic landscapes and customer tastes. Therefore, attempts were made to elevate and maintain khadi legacy ensuring that it would remain relevant in a rapidly changing country.

Khadi played a crucial in reviving rural economies after independence. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is an organisation formed by the government of India in the year 1954 for the promotion of Khadi and Village industries after independence. KVIC aims to plan, promote, and facilitate small and medium enterprises specially in the rural areas. The main purpose of KVIC was to generate employment in rural areas, manufacture cheap affordable articles and creation of self-reliance spirit among the community. Numerous Indian weavers, spinners and craftsmen have turned to khadi as a means of generating revenue. Today KVIC is working in many areas for promotion of this fabric for empowering craftsmen. It is organising skill development training programs for the youths for creation of entrepreneurs and self-employment opportunities in every possible way. This not only aided economic progress but also helped to maintain traditional trades and talents.

The Indian government has maintained its backing for the khadi industry, through different policies and programmes. Several Khadi Vikas Gramodyog centres have been established all over the country which promotes or sell the apparels and fabrics made from khadi. These centres offer attractive discounts from October to January on their products to lure the customers. Various exhibitions, trade fairs are organised regularly in the country to promote Khadi Bhandars. For the authenticity of khadi products and

for safeguarding the interests of craftsmen and customers khadi mark has also been created.

“As we purchase khadi, we are brightening the lives of lakhs of weavers who toil day and night”.

Versatility of Khadi Fabric

Khadi or well-known word 'khaddar' is a woven fabric made from natural fibre cotton (Srivastava, 2017) [6]. This fabric has its own significance and is associated with the 'Swadeshi movement'. Khadi is a hand spun and hand-woven fabric made by inter-twinning of yarns, stretching and spinning through the wheel called 'charkha'. The traditional fabric khadi was very coarse in texture and dull due to which it was not accepted easily by the masses. But today khadi is available in fine textures and is dye able in vibrant colours. Khadi fabric is a versatile fabric. It generally possesses unique property of being cool in summer and warm in winter. The inter twinning process of khadi enables air circulation in the fabric that makes it a special one. Khadi fabric can be made stiff and firm easily using starch on it. Cotton, silk and wool are the raw materials used for spinning threads on charkha (Srivastava, 2017) [6]. Thus, manufacturing of khadi is a very lengthy and time-consuming process.

‘Every time when khadi appears, it acts like a showstopper with its versatility, simplicity and its fresh look’.

Khadi as a Sustainable Fabric

Khadi is an example of a sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative for the aware customers and connecting traditional practises with modern environmental concerns. In the context of global environmental concerns, khadi stands as a model of how handcrafted processes may co-exist with modern sustainability goals and encouraging a more environment conscious future. Khadi has gained importance for being eco-friendly and sustainable due to use of natural fibres, being hand woven and has low carbon footprints (Karim1, 2021) (Karim1, 2021) (Karim1, 2021) [2]. It has continued to be a symbol of identity during national festivals and events. But over decades revival of khadi has become a turning point in this changing fashion. The fabric khadi has become a canvas for imaginations in the existing fashion industry.

Today Khadi has moved from freedom fighter's identity to a fashion statement. From changing trends in fashion, it is being adopted and liked by the youths irrespective of the gender. As khadi has undergone severe transformations over decades from Independence to modern times. It has become a timeless beauty and a balance of tradition and modernity. Along with clothing khadi had found its place in crafts and home décor. Therefore, today customers prefer indigenous and environment friendly fashion.

Economical Contribution of Khadi

Post-Independence Khadi played a crucial role for the development of the country. The khadi fabric involves employment creation and self-sustainability. This industry is people's industry' as it is labour intensive in nature making rural people economically viable. As this industry has provided employment opportunities, has helped in poverty elevation, increase in productivity level, rural

industrialisation and decreased migration of locale. Appropriate promotions and well execution of marketing strategies can help in empowerment of khadi. Khadi stands for all that is local and sustainable in the economy, society and environment. Production of khadi integrates many steps of processing like spinning, weaving, dyeing, printing and sewing which involves existence of weavers, artisans, spinners and craftsmen to support their livelihood.

Promotion of khadi after independence has been an essential aspect of social and economic development policies of India. Khadi has evolved and has major contribution even after the independence for the growth of the economy. Generation of employment has been an important aspect of khadi for the rural artisans. For the promotion and marketing of khadi products government is undertaking various steps for providing subsidies and incentives to the consumers. Government has made rigorous efforts in form of campaigns for raising awareness about importance of khadi, its role in rural employment and supporting rural people.

Transitions of Khadi to Contemporary Form

Khadi fabric was born out of economical need but not as a fashion statement. Earlier people were in dilemma of accepting khadi which was dull, coarse and rough fabric. But today khadi fabric is choice of eminent fashion designers. Numerous innovative elements have been introduced to khadi by fashion houses and designer's which has paved way for the wider acceptance. Fashion innovation has been an integral to khadi's transformation and continued relevance in the modern world. Khadi being comfortable and stylish is fulfilling the desires of customers through its classy vibrant colours and designs.

- Khadi is a fabric which has adopted according to the changing needs of modern times. This fabric is skin friendly, eco-friendly, elegant and versatile that's why it is known as the 'fabric which breathes'.
- Designers have given khadi garments a contemporary aesthetic look by experimenting with different styles, cuts, silhouettes, fusion wear, adding western elements and unfamiliar draping patterns.
- Application of dyeing and printing techniques have imparted brilliant hues to khadi fabric which had earthy tones traditionally.
- Role of artisans in modifying various motifs, distinctive designs, texture, natural pigments, and eco-friendly dyes for colouring and experimenting with the khadi fabric has given a boost to this khadi industry.
- The fashion design council of India has played a remarkable role in the revival of khadi fabric today. The fashion designers have changed the concept of simple khadi with amalgamation of traditional embroideries like Phulkari, Chikankari, Kantha, handwork, printing work like Kalamkari and use of embellishment techniques. Today khadi is embellished with mirror, beads, sequins, beautiful threads, gotta Patti work etc.
- To create novel texture, to improve its property of comfort and usefulness, it is blended with other textiles like silk, wool, linen etc. therefore combinations of khadi enable varied designs and improves its adaptability to various climatic conditions and satisfy the fashion and tastes of the customers.

Incorporation of numerous innovations and additions has led a revolution to uplift the contemporary stylized khadi.

Today, khadi fabric is not only for making garments like kurtas, skirts, jackets, kaftans (Fig.1 &2) but a product range has been launched like scarfs, stole, shawls, trousers and apparels like sarees, dupatta etc. Fashion statement of khadi kurta along with denim jeans has been adopted by all youths of the country. Designer have tried to explore every bit for promoting khadi today.



Source: www.manjulikapramod.com

Fig 1: Khadi on ramp as fusion wear



Source: economictimes.indiatimes.com

Fig 2: Khadi jackets in trend

As fashion is reoccurring, it repeats itself after a period, so khadi has been revived after independence and has become everyone's choice today. Khadi fabric being so comfortable and elegant is the right choice. It accelerates the beauty, simplicity and style of the fabric. Today the statement "Khadi for Nation, Khadi for Fashion" is the perfect one fits to the current scenario.

Khadi being symbol of nations pride is the most appealing fabric and a fashion statement. Khadi fabric is an inseparable part of our Indian culture is woven like a tapestry in our history. It's the versatility of the fabric that has led khadi to find its place in fashionistas wardrobe. Thou, it provides immense potential to explore various areas of research. As demand for contemporary and attractive product is high and successfully catered by the designers.

Challenges Faced by Khadi Industry

Being one of the oldest textiles in the world, with continuous efforts and support made by the government of India, khadi still has been facing several challenges after attaining the independence. Today availability of cheap and machine-made fabrics has flooded the market posing a

threat to khadi. In terms of affordability and availability making difficult for khadi fabric to compete and survive. These fabrics being eco-friendly and unique has failed to reach the widespread market. As the fashion choices and lifestyle of modern consumers is unpredictable. The younger generation prefer the latest fashion possibilities rather than sticking to historical significance of khadi. Changes in consumer preferences, inadequate marketing and poor branding further complicates the situation.

Moreover, lack of infrastructure and technology in handloom sector reduces productivity and quality that hinder khadi's scalability. There are additional obstacles such as global competition, high production costs and challenges with the distribution of khadi. The protection of its traditional knowledge and the management of environmental concerns pose further complications. A very big challenge for the artisans is the seasonal demand of khadi for only specific or festive periods. Therefore, to address these challenges the continuous support of government and consumers is required to promote sustainability and preserve cultural significance of khadi.

Government Approaches for Supporting Khadi Industry

Various schemes have been implemented by the government of India in support with KVIC to enhance production of khadi and village industry and to support artisans. Khadi institutions cooperative and craftsmen can seek help in form of loans, subsidies and financial help from government organisations. These aids help them in procuring raw materials, equipments and enhance manufacturing capacity. Continuous efforts are being made to conduct skill development and training workshops to improve craftsmanship techniques and market trends. Schemes facilitate the use of modern technology and machinery to increase the efficiency and reduce production time therefore maintaining the quality. Khadi products are promoted internationally and domestically through trade fairs, seminars, exhibitions etc. As a result of these initiatives the heritage craftsmanship and its relevance to contemporary fashion are brought to public's attention. Several efforts are being made to revitalise and support traditional artisan clusters with infrastructure, designing inputs and marketing support for the global promotion of khadi products. A collaborative effort is needed among the designers, retailers and export houses to work together and promote khadi and its credibility.

Role of Khadi Mark

The Khadi Mark (Fig. 3) witnesses to the authenticity and superiority of real khadi cloth. Consumer confidence is fostered by the strict standards it sets to produce hand-spun and hand-woven khadi. Khadi mark is the symbol for genuine khadi fabric which specifies that product is hand spun and hand-woven fabric from India. This mark aids in global recognition of khadi fabric and plays an important role in preserving quality and heritage of khadi. By supporting rural craftspeople, this mark helps to preserve traditional workmanship and strengthen rural economies. It preserves India's cultural legacy and identity by setting authentic khadi apart from fakes. Export prospects and worldwide reputation are aided by the Khadi Mark, which stands for ethical sources. Its presence on items helps consumers make informed judgements by ensuring they are getting authentic and high-quality khadi fabric. The logo

essentially protects the history of khadi, helps craftspeople and advertise genuine ethical khadi goods both locally and globally.



Source: fashionnetwork.com

Fig 3: Khadi mark

Prospects of Khadi

Khadi has a bright future ahead. It is predicted to thrive in the future due to growing demand globally for being ethical and sustainable fashion. Various technological advancements for infrastructure, collaboration with the fashion industry, conscious consumerism, export opportunities, fashion innovation all these factors favour the positive change for the khadi industry in future. In addition to providing a solid base for growth, acceptance and recognition of khadi in fashion industry and will help in continued success.

Conclusion

After India got independence khadi was forgotten by everyone and it was shifted to the back shelves of the racks. As birth of khadi fabric was always out of economical need, it was never a choice. Khadi's rich history is revealed as we probe into its many facets, charting its evolution from a representation of crafted perfection to a resonant plea for independence and sovereignty. Khadi's transformation from a representation of the Indian independence struggle to an eco-friendly and sustainable option illustrates the strength and cultural relevance. The fabric continues to be a demonstration of strength of grassroots movements, socio-economic development and relevance in the contemporary era. Today khadi's history persists as a symbol of independence, sustainability and classic elegance. Recently UGC has directed universities and college to use khadi products for the felicitation of renowned guests and dignitaries for seminars, workshops and academic conferences. Government is taking many initiatives to support and help the artisans in every possible way to appreciate nations textile tradition.

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