

EVOLUTION OF KHADI AS A BRAND

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Abstract:

Khadi is an Indigenous product deeply rooted in Indian culture, lifestyle and environment. It has had a legacy since the Vedic period. It is an emotion instrumental in unifying the nation against colonial rule. With the evolution of time, Khadi transformed into different facets withstanding different challenges. Additionally, with government encouragement, Khadi is growing fast and becoming pivotal in enhancing the rural economy in all aspects. In this study, the author explores the traversing of Khadi from humble clothing to a new paradigm of fashion and the type of diversification it has gone into. This study explores the economic benefit and positive impact of Khadi on the environment. Khadi needs to be branded for its positive features. But some constraints are explored in this study. This study also suggested possible measures to take up Khadi to its logical position in the global scenario.

Key words: *Khadi, Charkha, E-Charkha, Branding*

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Introduction:

The origin of Khadi traces back to ancient Indian scripture Vedas some 5000 years back vividly depicting home-spun fabric. This indicates that Khadi (derived from the word 'Khadar' meaning hand-woven cloth) is deeply rooted in Indian tradition, ethos, and culture. It is an authentic attire based on indigenous Indian techniques. The resurgence of Khadi was the brainchild of Mahatma Gandhi who made this a symbol of patriotism, and national pride and a tool for the economic self-reliance of millions of Indians. The revitalization of the concept of Khadi also gave impetus to the Indian freedom movement boycotting of foreign cloth and unifying the nation against colonial rule. Khadi emerged as an ideology and lifestyle.

Khadi is a fabric that comes out after sustained labour-intensive operation of spinning yarn from cotton, wool and silk fibers through a spinning wheel (known as Charkha). The yarn goes to loom to give texture and all these are hand-woven. It is unique due to its conformability, unique texture and breathability. It's a

tool for reviving the village economy with self-reliance supplementing the call for **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.

Khadi Effect on Indian Economy:

Khadi does play an important role in the Indian Economy. Going by reports of Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in the FY 2023-24 the Khadi business has touched a turnover of ₹1.55 crore and aspires to a target of the tune of ₹1.75 crore in the FY 2024-25. In addition to that Khadi along with its allied sector generated employment opportunities for 1.87 crore people.

At present, about 3,000 khadi institutions are working in the country, giving direct employment to about five lakh khadi artisans — 80 percent of whom are women (The Hindu, August 24, 2024 02:21 am IST).

Khadi as a Sustainable Fabric:

In addition to economic gain, Khadi is one of the environmentally friendly fabrics, uses natural dye with traditional methods and avoids mass production by encouraging production by mass. With Hon'ble PM

Narendra Modi's appeal to make Khadi as a symbol of national pride, it has embarked upon as a new paradigm of fashion. As Khadi uses natural resources and follows traditional pattern of production; this directly and indirectly helps in generating employment for rural household thereby arresting urban migration.

The Future of Khadi:

In the view of designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee, "Khadi is the language of identity." It is the epitome of symbolizing pride of the nation, sustainability and inclusive growth. It is a comfortable wear with positive health benefits. With the use of natural ingredients, low energy, and no polluting effluent it is the answer to the cause of sustainable development. Due to this inherent positive aspect, khadi had survived many onslaughts from different fabrics and still going strong with innovation. Modern time clothes use extensive chemicals, huge power, and its supply chain system uses plastic for packaging and long transport system as the production is mass and concentrated.

The spinning of Khadi yarn (i.e. cotton, silk and wool) and subsequent weaving to prepare different products are purely manmade and neither uses fossil fuel nor electricity. With dyeing by natural colour Khadi

becomes a green fabric, thereby supporting the environment with reduced carbon footprints. In addition to this going by further back-end activities some states like Maharashtra, UP and Madhya Pradesh are avoiding the use of any chemical/fertilizer for cotton farming leading to the production of organic Khadi fabric.

As an innovative tool, KVIC developed *Ambar charkha* in 1960 which enhanced the volume of spinning of yarns thereby boosting the efficiency of cottage industries involved in Khadi. It (KVIC) went further in the year 2007 and developed *e-charkha* which not only spins yarn but also capable of generating power sufficient to light up a home and activate a transistor for listening to nearby radio programmes.

The government of India also started playing a pivotal role in popularising Khadi. As a result, there is all-around growth in khadi as reported by KVIC (Figure 1). KVIC the body responsible for spearheading the Khadi culture not only a platform for marketing handmade products, but also it extends financial, technical, and logistical assistance to rural artisans involved in MSMEs.

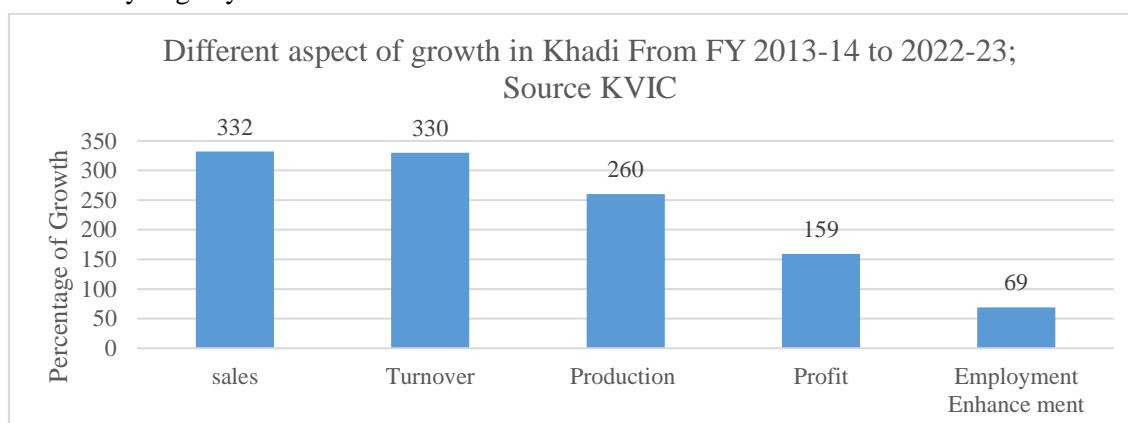


Figure 1

In addition to that there is active campaign for swadeshi and sort of record has been created connecting youth in this endeavour under the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP); the khadi and village industries were prime beneficiaries of that. Moreover, the PMEGP program are mainly concentrated in rural areas and 50 percent of them are owned by SC/ST and women entrepreneurs (Figure 2 and 3).

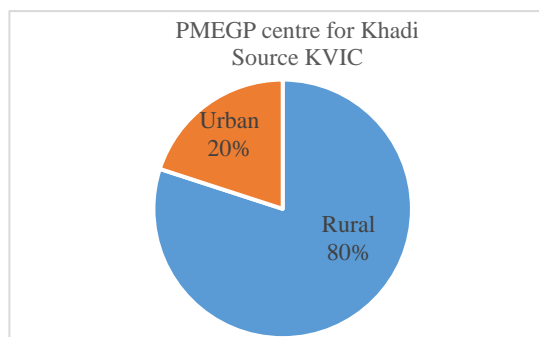


Figure 2

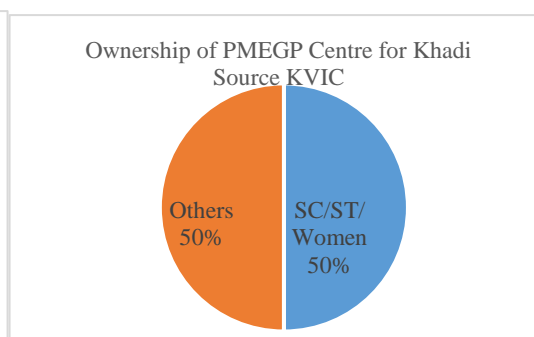


Figure 3

This is a clear indication that PMEGP by encouraging Khadi has given a positive impact on rural entrepreneurship and growth of unprivileged section.

Reason for Decline of Khadi:

Post independence as per economic requirement India encouraged large scale industries leading to mass production of textile at relatively cheap rate and therefore khadi lost its market to other fabrics like silk, denim, leather and fur.

The khadi lacks in variety as compared to mechanised mill woven synthetic cloth. Furthermore, the attractiveness of khadi reduces after washing. Regular starching and pressing is a regular requirement to make khadi presentable. Hence it (Khadi) is never preferred as an attire for day-to-day use. This prevents a large-scale middle-class consumer market to prefer mill woven / stitched cloth over khadi.

The making process of khadi is purely handmade and time-consuming. Hence the volume of producing Khadi clothes fall far below to that of mill oven clothes. Therefore, a cloth is produced with so much manmade labour going to be costlier. Unfortunately, this is becoming an impediment in popularising khadi among the masses.

But designer Wendell Rodricks has a different perception on Khadi. According to him “Wearing *khadi* is not just about being fashionable and trendy; it is about having a conscience and living that belief. As long as people are conscious about the environment, khadi will always have a market, and price won't be a

factor.” (<https://sustainabilityzero.com/tag/wendell-rodricks/>)

The issue of middlemen:

As discussed, the process of Khadi is fully handmade, and the skill is percolated from generation to generation. It is otherwise the bread and butter for the family's survival. Hence unless a person could generate adequate revenue from this it would be very difficult to survive. With the advent of mechanized textiles, the price of khadi could not be justified on a buyer's perspective. To add to this constraint the middlemen play the spoilsport; they extract higher prices from customers with high margins whereas payment transferred to the weavers is much less than what they deserve. All these drifted away from artisans to other professions signalling the decline of Khadi.

Valuing Our Legacy:

Being colonised for a pretty long time by different foreign rulers majority of Indians are brainwashed accept their indigenous product as inferior to that of foreign origin. Looking always west for innovation and inspiration our products like khadi has been relegated to the second tier as far as fashion is concerned.

The typical Indian mindset of anything being western is better pulls back in taking pride in our indigenous product and design. So also, in fashion we want western endorsement for innovations and suffer from comparison with west. Due to this Indian garment

despite being rich with intricate embroideries, with enormous varieties replicating different cultural ethos of India could get the recognition it deserves from the designers. With propagation of khadi this uniqueness can be positively showcased. Vocals for locals to change the face of India's Khadi industry. Khadi for nation, Khadi for fashion and Khadi for transformation.

From Designer's Perspective:

To survive profitably in the market Khadi needs to look at the aspect of arresting the soaring price. But the fashion designer's perspective the perception is different. Noted fashion designer Rahul Mishra believes that khadi has its uniqueness due to soft material, and excellent texture and these features are possible as the total process is hand spun and hand oven. And according to him inculcating these features is not possible in mechanized production. According to him, khadi is cent percent couture and nothing less than a luxury attire. For luxury items you need to spend money, then why not for khadi; he emphasized. The same was resonated by another top fashion designer Sunaina Suneja. In her opinion, as khadi is hand made completely, taking into consideration the hard work goes in its production, it cannot be termed expensive.

Khadi: A Sustainable Industry:

Khadi is unique as an environmentally sustainable product and capable of generating employment. But adopting khadi as a garment has lot of impediments as discussed. But if we understand the aspect of environment and satisfying the need khadi has a answer. Large scale degradation of environment by industries directly or indirectly affects the livelihood of a large economically backward population other than the fact that future generation will be adversely affected.

Khadi is a decentralised activity with local population having the control on its production and distribution. There is no claim that Khadi can impact in dealing the clothing requirement of world. The reason being it is

completely manual operation. But even if Khadi can meet twenty five percent of clothing requirement its impact on environment will be huge. Since it uses low-cost green energy, it would slow down global warming. And probably that would be one of the greatest contributions of India in protecting the environment.

Brand Khadi:

The market now is globalised, competitive and every player is coming with innovative product and marketing strategies. The challenge to sustain a brand lies in penetrate and sustain in this competitive environment with continuous upgradation of product and strategies; at the same time preserving the products uniqueness and originality.

With information dissipation becoming very easy due to digital medium and people are becoming more conscious on environment, traditional form of art, craft and attire are becoming more popular. Khadi hence has an edge over other garments in this aspect. What is needed is sustained marketing strategies backed by innovative design to position Khadi as a brand in India and abroad. With artistic nature of Khadi products and being environment friendly it has all potential to be placed effectively in international market too.

The USP of khadi lies in its softness and uniqueness of giving cooling effect in summer and vice versa in winter. Its further uniqueness lies in enhancement of brightness on washing. The khadi has a comfortable life span of not less than 4 years and excellent variety of product can be prepared with meticulous hand work.

Jayashree Venkatesh* and G. Deekshitha (2019) in their study emphasized on pragmatic approach rather than emotional appeal to market the khadi products.

The fashion industry today is driven by customers' acceptance and customers prefer a product which is relatively known and its positive impact or influence on them (i.e the customer). With media exposure and red-carpet events, a customer is aware of all the latest brands of clothes and garments. The red-carpet events

are basically to showcase the latest brand of clothes/garments which includes fabrics, prints, colours and silhouettes etc. Hence to popularize Khadi, rapid development of traditional art form is essential. This further needs to be implemented in cotemporary garments to make it more appealing as per customers' expectation. To achieve this sustained research is inevitable towards product development. This is to be followed by an impactful promotional method in the form of advertising, sales through e-commerce platform and wide publicity through different media. For example, innovation in designing and value addition to Khadi fabrics could be possible by using traditional art forms like Warli painting of Maharashtra and Patta Chitra of Odisha. This would be cost effective too as these wonderful art forms are purely indigenous. This would also contribute to product development and sustainability with uniqueness where traditional cultural ethos is not compromised.

There is no escape from adopting new and innovative marketing with effective product development as we are in the world of digital marketing and huge potential of international market is to be tapped with all seriousness.

Brand Positioning of Khadi:

'Positioning refers to arrangements to occupy clear, distinctive, desirable places in the market and in the minds of targeted customer' (Kotler 2003). Crevens (2003) sees the brand positioning as a formulation of the essence of the product, indicating the ability of the product to meet the needs and preferences of consumers. 'Repositioning is defined as altering position of a brand or products in the minds of consumer relative to the offering of competitive product' (Jayashree Venkatesh et.al.2019).

Repositioning of Khadi is the need of the hour. And this is possible if we understand and positively percolate the following facts to potential customer. Khadi is no more a single entity; it can be blended with other fibres to

bring out varieties like *Khadi Silk*, *Tussar Silk*, *Matka Khadi*, *Poly Khadi* etc. With softness, uniqueness of giving appropriate comfort in all seasons and washing enhancing the brightness it stands apart in the garment segmentation. For Indians it is not only a piece of cloth, it is emotion and symbol of identity & self-reliance.

Khadi till recently was synonymous with garment. But it has broadened its scope with the inclusion of body care products, cosmetics, beauty products like comb, medicinal items like honey and many herbal-based products, leather items, and even items like paints. The consumable Khadi products are produced using herbal products extracted from plants cultivated using organic manure. All the produce are made under the supervision of qualified Ayurvedic doctors. No doubt all Khadi Natural products adhere to WHO, GMP, and ISO guidelines, and they instill preservative formulation ideologies for everyday use.

In addition to that eminent designers are depicting khadi in different facets of fashion. All these are making khadi an item catering to need of simple wear to high-end fashion and broadening its horizon and market too.

There were instances where the Khadi brand was misused. To tackle this government of India has intervened and initiated the following measures.

1. 'Khadi' has been registered as a trademark with an aim to popularize this famed fabric worldwide.
2. Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) was set up to promote Indian handloom worldwide.
3. The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) helps to impart skill training and financing rural entrepreneur in Khadi and assist in promoting khadi products globally.
4. This resulted in enhancing Khadi production to the tune of 133 percent from FY 2020-21 to FY 2023-24. Khadi attire is also being flaunted up the global ramp by top models.

Ref: <https://indbiz.gov.in/indian-govt-aims-to-position-khadi-as-a-global-brand/>

Challenges Facing the Khadi Industry/Brand (<https://pwnlyias.com/>):

Problem Areas	Description	Instances
Competition from Synthetic Fabrics	The rise of machine-made synthetic fabrics like polyester, often cheaper and mass-produced, has overshadowed Khadi	For instance: The Flag Code of India (2022) allowing polyester flags has led to a decline in Khadi's symbolic and commercial value.
Decline in Government Procurement	Government procurement of Khadi has reduced, with many departments opting for cheaper alternatives	The Karnataka Khadi Gramodyoga Samyukta Sangha faced severe losses due to declining government orders, leading to protests in 2022.
GST and Economic Pressures	The imposition of GST on Khadi products has increased production costs, making them less competitive	Despite demands, the government has not exempted Khadi from GST, placing additional financial burdens on small-scale weavers.
Lack of Market Access	Khadi products often struggle to find markets, especially in urban and global markets.	The KVIC has reported a decline in sales, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to reduced market access and lack of marketing support.
Technological Gaps	The Khadi industry lags in adopting modern technology, leading to lower productivity and quality issues.	Many Khadi units still rely on traditional hand-spinning methods, which cannot compete with modern textile technologies.

Steps to Revitalize the Khadi Industry(<https://pwnlyias.com/>):

Steps	Elaboration	Instances
Government Support and Policy Reforms	Strengthening government policies to prioritize Khadi procurement in public departments can boost the industry.	Introducing mandates for government uniforms and official flags to be made exclusively from Khadi can create consistent demand.
Tax Exemptions and Subsidies	Providing GST exemptions and subsidies for Khadi production can reduce costs and enhance competitiveness.	Implementing a zero GST policy on Khadi products can make them more affordable and appealing to consumers.
Global Marketing and Branding	Promoting Khadi as a global brand through international fairs and e-commerce platforms can expand its market reach.	KVIC's collaboration with platforms like Amazon and Flipkart has already shown positive results, indicating a path forward.
Technological Upgradation	Integrating modern technology in the Khadi production process can improve quality and efficiency.	Introducing solar-powered charkhas and automated looms in Khadi units can boost production while maintaining the fabric's traditional essence.
Skill Development and Training	Offering skill development programs to Khadi artisans can enhance their craft and productivity.	The government's Skill India initiative can be tailored to include training programs specifically for Khadi weavers and spinners.

Conclusion:

Revitalizing the Khadi industry requires a multifaceted approach that combines government support, technological advancement, and market expansion. As a symbol of India's heritage and resilience, Khadi's revival is essential not only for preserving cultural identity but also for empowering rural artisans and promoting sustainable development. The future of Khadi lies in innovation, cooperation, and global outreach, ensuring it remains a fabric of pride and progress for generations to come.

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