

RE-IMAGINING KHADI IN A UPCYCLING-WAY: A CASE STUDY OF 'RE-CHARKHA - THE ECOSOCIAL TRIBE - A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE'

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Abstract:

Derived from the term 'khaddar', khadi is a handspun and hand-woven cotton cloth, which became one of the symbols of India's freedom struggle. Khadi is spun using a charkha or an Indian spinning wheel. So like the khadi, the charkha also became a prominent icon on the Indian national flag designed in the 1930s.

In recent times, the Khadi industry has faced several challenges, including competition from cheaper, machine-made textiles and a lack of innovation. To address these challenges, a new wave of entrepreneurs is reimagining Khadi, infusing it with contemporary design and sustainable practices. One such pioneering initiative is 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe', a social enterprise that is revolutionizing the Khadi industry through upcycling.

Present research paper is an attempt to understand the uniqueness of the initiatives of 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a social enterprise and explore potential philosophical traits of the khadi movement.

Key Words: Mahatma Gandhi, Khadi, Charkha, 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a social enterprise.

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Introduction:

Khadi was introduced to the people of undivided India in 1918 in order to achieve self-sufficiency and independence from British textiles. Khadi movement, a socio-cultural narrative, was launched by Gandhiji from the Satyagraha Ashram in May 1915, popularly known as the Sabarmati Ashram, in the Ahmedabad district, Gujarat.

Derived from the term khaddar, khadi is a handspun and hand-woven cotton cloth, which became one of the symbols of India's freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi is said to have coined the term khadi for these fabrics owing to their coarse texture. Khadi is spun using a charkha or an Indian spinning wheel. The charkha also became a prominent icon on the Indian national flag designed in the 1930s.



Gandhiji promoted the use of Swadeshi products and urged boycotting foreign goods. Very soon, khadi became popular as the fabric of nationalism, and was said to be woven with 'the threads of Swaraj'. As the idea of spinning khadi spread across India, Mahatma Gandhi hoped for unity among all classes through this common occupation by diluting the gap which existed between the people. Thus, the khadi movement was established for social and economic reasons. The

essence of this movement lies in Gandhiji's understanding of the fabric as something that could uplift the masses.

Khadi, therefore, became the national fabric of India and a central icon of India's freedom struggle.

Present research paper is an attempt to understand the uniqueness of the initiatives of 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a social enterprise and explore potential philosophical traits of the khadi movement.

Research Objectives:

The study is carried out with following objectives in mind:

1. To understand the concept of upcycling with the models adopted by 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'
2. To understand how the features and principles behind the khadi movement are depicted by 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a Social Enterprise.

Research Methodology:

1. *A. Description of Sample:* For the analysis, the 'upcycling' model implemented by 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a Social Enterprise in the state of Maharashtra is considered.
2. *B. Data Collection:* The secondary sources of data collection, pertaining to implementation of the 'upcycling' model implemented by 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a Social Enterprise is aggregated from website of 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a Social Enterprise, various research articles, newspaper articles and so on.
3. *C. Analysis:* The data collected and analyzed is gauged around basic features and importance of 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a Social Enterprise in the states of Maharashtra.
4. *D. Limitations:* The study is limited to the case study of 're-Charkha - The Ecosocial Tribe'-a Social Enterprise only and therefore, other models and enterprises are excluded.

Conceptual Idea:

1. Khadi and its Significance:

Khadi has deep roots in Indian history, symbolizing self-reliance and resistance to colonial rule. It has been associated with Mahatma Gandhi's movement for Indian independence. However, in the post-independence era, the Khadi industry has faced challenges in maintaining its relevance in the face of globalization and changing consumer preferences.

2. **Upcycling: A Sustainable Approach** Upcycling is a creative process that involves transforming discarded materials into new products of higher quality and value. It is a sustainable alternative to traditional recycling, as it reduces waste and minimizes the consumption of new resources. In recent years, upcycling has gained significant popularity in the fashion industry, with designers and brands exploring innovative ways to repurpose materials.

Upcycling, a sustainable design strategy, seeks to minimize waste by creatively reusing materials. In recent years, upcycling has gained traction in the fashion industry as a response to environmental concerns, particularly the detrimental effects of fast fashion. By reimagining existing materials, upcycling fosters creativity, reduces waste, and supports sustainable production methods.

3. The Role of Social Enterprises:

Social enterprises are businesses that aim to solve social and environmental problems. They prioritize social and environmental impact over profit maximization. By combining business principles with social responsibility, social enterprises can create sustainable solutions to pressing issues.

Introduction To 'reCharkha - The EcoSocial Tribe - A Social Enterprise':

As per the official website description-

'reCharkha - The EcoSocial Tribe' is a Social

Enterprise, founded by Amita Deshpande on the belief that development can only be sustainable if it is bottom-up! This means, sustainable development is possible only when it begins at the grassroots; be it the Communities that we work with for Enabling Livelihoods, or Citizens that we work with for Participative Behavior Change. Only when this is combined, will EcoSocial Development be achieved.



Our three core areas of work are geared to achieve this very model-

These are:

- 1) Conserving our Environment and Heritage,
- 2) Enabling Rural and Tribal Livelihoods and
- 3) Creating Conscious Consumers'

The Model of 'reCharkha – The EcoSocial Tribe'

Amita Deshpande restructured her organization as reCharkha – The Eco Social Tribe in 2020. She believes in recycling of plastic waste where she creates hand spun yarn using traditional charkha by upcycling plastic bags, polythenes, multi-layered wrappers of gifts, wrappers of biscuits, cookies, old audio and video cassette tapes, and a lot other household packaging material and detergent packets. The yarns are woven on looms into fabric. This upcycled waste is sewn into totes, cushion covers, table sprinters and yoga mat carriers.

Thus, re-Charkha has pioneered a unique upcycling model that involves transforming discarded plastic waste into yarn, which is then handwoven into various products, including bags, accessories, and home decor items. This innovative approach not only addresses the issue of plastic pollution but also creates sustainable livelihoods for rural artisans.

Enterprise Components:

'reCharkha – The EcoSocial Tribe' has been engaged in mainly two form of activities-

1. Producing the products by upcycling the waste and market the same through their website- <https://www.recharkha.org/collections/designer-collection> and store.



2. Arrange for the Workshop and guided tour to the village Village Weaving and Tailoring Unit for Schools, Colleges, Universities, Corporates and Family groups.

Principles and features of khadi movement incorporated by ‘reCharkha – The EcoSocial Tribe’ :

Following underlying principle and features of khadi movement are found to be woven in ‘reCharkha – The EcoSocial Tribe’ enterprise-

| Underlying Principle and Features of khadi Movement | Way of incorporation by ‘reCharkha’ |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Handspinning and Handweaving: The core of the movement was the promotion of Khadi as a fabric made through traditional methods. The spinning wheel (charkha) became a symbol of the movement. | Weaving fabric from waste plastic using a traditional charkha and handloom. |
| Self-Reliance (Swadeshi): Emphasized the importance of self-sufficiency and self-reliance by encouraging the use of local resources and products. | Locally sourced raw materials like- upcycling plastic bags, polythenes, multi-layered wrappers of gifts, wrappers of biscuits, cookies, old audio and video cassette tapes, and a lot other household packaging material and detergent packets and completely made in India products |
| Empowerment of Artisans: Aimed to uplift rural artisans and craftspeople by providing them with sustainable livelihoods. The movement focused on reviving traditional skills and crafts. | Majority of the team members of the reCharkha team have artisans who use their traditional skills and crafts in designing products. reCharkha has created a source of revenue opportunities to tribal women and youth. Further, by providing fair wages and sustainable employment opportunities, re-Charkha enhances the livelihoods of artisans. |
| Environmental Sustainability: Advocated for eco-friendly practices, with Khadi being made from natural fibers, thus reducing dependence on synthetic textiles and promoting sustainable agriculture. | By upcycling discarded plastic and other wastes, re-Charkha minimizes waste and promotes a circular economy. The use of locally sourced materials and traditional production methods reduces the carbon emissions associated with textile manufacturing. |
| Educational Initiatives: Included efforts to educate the masses about the importance of Khadi, not just as a fabric but as a means of economic and social change. | Through its outreach programs, re-Charkha raises awareness about sustainable practices and the importance of preserving traditional crafts. Workshops and training programs equip artisans and other general public with knowledge about upcycling and design, fostering innovation and creativity. |
| Promotion of Khadi as a Fashion Statement: Over time, Khadi evolved into a fashion statement, appealing to a broader audience beyond just the independence movement, emphasizing its versatility and aesthetic appeal. | upcycled waste is sewn into totes, cushion covers, table sprinters, yoga-mat carriers and other innovative products to serve the needs of current fashion-pro generation. reCharkha customizes products to fit the customer's budget and fashion requirements. |

Conclusion:

The case study of re-Charkha demonstrates how creatively imbibed principles and features of khadi movement can be woven in as per the needs of the modern generation. The potential of upcycling to breathe new life into Khadi and promote sustainable practices in the textile industry. By reimagining traditional crafts and addressing pressing environmental concerns, re-Charkha is not only creating beautiful and functional products but also inspiring a new generation of conscious consumers.

By combining traditional craftsmanship with innovative design approaches, re-Charkha not only empowers artisans but also contributes to environmental sustainability. This model serves as an inspiration for other enterprises seeking to harmonize cultural heritage with contemporary ecological needs.

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