

# “A Conceptual Study on Journey of Khadi: From a Freedom Fabric to Fashion Fabric”

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**Abstract:** Around a century ago, khadi products sprung into the Independence movement and proved to the entire world that India possessed the potency of “Swadeshi” character and does not depend on the products of west for its industrial revolution and which was possible because of our resources and strength. As India transitioned into a new phase of being an independent nation, the khadi spirit stood persistent as a core industry, keeping villages fervently at the heart of our expanding body of economic being. By the end of the century, khadi reached a stage, where it had entered into lives of that generation which was born post-independence and was being experimented to that array of products that possessed a sense of modernity and fashion. It had transformed itself to the changing context, it had transformed the life of consumer through a unique dual character of modernity and heritage, it had transformed India through increasing sustainability & rural productivity and it had transformed the life of those producing it and striving for self-reliance. Khadi has been thus proved as a transformational product and fabric.

**Keywords:** Khadi, Fabric, Fashion, Swaraj, Swadeshi, Economic Development

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Khadi, the word is derived from the Hindi word ‘Khad’ or ‘Pit’. Khadi also known as ‘Khaddar’ is a hand spun and hand woven fabric originated from India. Khadi is also popular in Bangladesh and Pakistan as these countries were a part of India pre-independence (Pal, 2017); (Ramagundam, 2008). Natural resources used to manufacture khadi material could be Wool, Cotton and Silk (Mondaq, 2018); (Sinha & Sinha, 1984); (Bajpai & Gahlot, 2011). It is a fabric created by the intertwinement of the yarn, spinning with hands, in to filaments on revolving wheel known as charkha (Rajasthan Khadi and Village Industries Board, n.d). The use of Khadi as a cloth incorporates a distinct character. It is crisp like cotton material or supple like its silk counterpart. It accommodates print and embroidery in its own distinctive vogue, giving varied decisions to designers to choose between blends and elaborations that complement their sensibilities. The changes, innovations and diversifications of material within the last decade have breathed new life into the material. Thus, creating material most fashionable, denoting the fabric as a fashion fabric (Singh, 2018).

### Research Objectives

- To review the literature with respect to the genesis of khadi, role of khadi in swadeshi movement, Gandhiji’s view on khadi, journey of khadi in fashion industry and role of khadi in economic development.
- To identify the gap based on the literature reviewed.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is Exploratory in nature. For the present study, a detailed review of existing literature is carried out on the genesis of khadi, role of khadi in Swadeshi movement, Gandhiji’s view on khadi, journey of khadi in fashion industry, preference of khadi in apparels and role of khadi in economic development. Papers published in the research articles, journals, newspaper articles, theses, reports, conference proceedings and various data and articles available in online search engines were reviewed. For the present paper, 62 empirical and conceptual papers were

reviewed. On the basis of literature reviews the gap was identified and the future recommendation is provided.

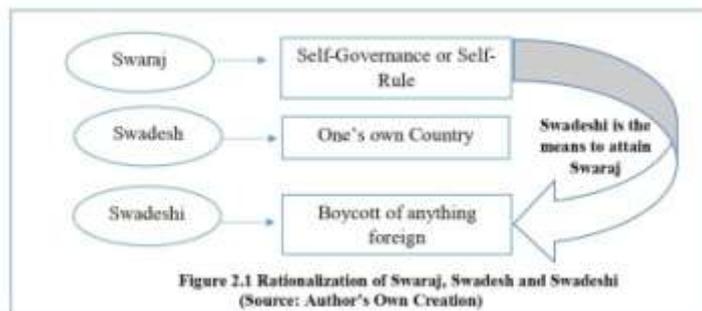
**III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Genesis of Khadi**

‘Swaraj’ will mean typically self-governance or self-rule, and was used similar with home-rule in India (Sarswati, 1878). However the word typically refers to Indian independence from foreign domination. Swaraj lays stress on governance not by a gradable government, however self-governance through people and community building. The main focus was on political decentralization, discarding British political, economic, official, legal, military, and academic establishments (Gandhi, 1938). The concept was popularised by Swami Dayanand Saraswati and later by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Vedic Press, 2015). The word Swadesh had been developed from Sanskrit and is a combination of two Sanskrit words. Swa implies self or possess and desh implies nation. So Swadesh implies ‘own nation’. Swadeshi, in the descriptive structure, means for one’s own nation, yet can be approximately deciphered in most of the context as ‘Independence’(Hingorani, 1967). The term ‘Swadesh’ in the literal terms means ‘of one’s own country’. In the constructive manner it is termed as self-reliance, self-strenghtning, self-help, self-sustainance and in the contemporary vernacular, sustainability. ‘Swadeshi’ is that spirit within us that restricts us the use of goods and services that are made by the foreign body. In the exclusivist sense it refers to the boycott of anything foreign, which increases the dependence on superfluous power. It is the preference of indigenous against foreign items(Gonsalves, 2015).

Thus, the term Swadesh can be concluded as one’s own country and ‘Swadeshi’ as the means to attain “Swaraj - the independence”, the spirit in an individual which restricts to use the goods of foreign origin, i.e; boycott of foreign goods and services and an individual’s attachment to his own country.

**Figure1.0 Rationalization of Swaraj, Swadesh and Swadeshi**



**Swadeshi and Khadi Movement in Indian History**

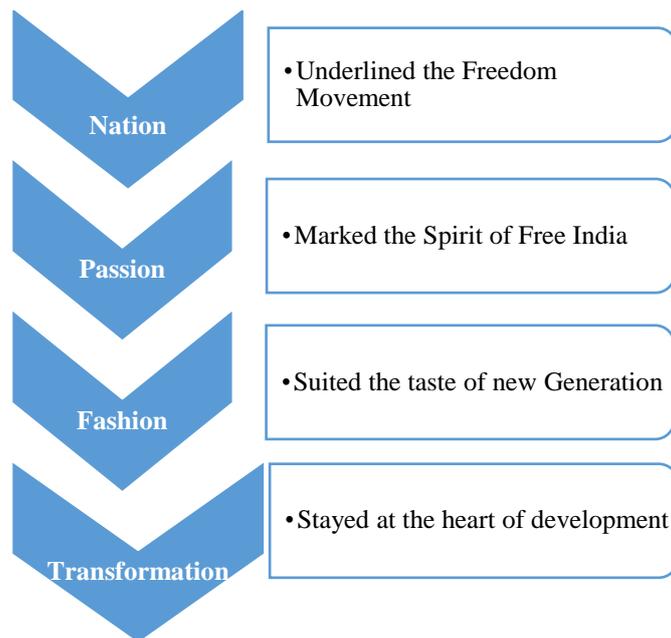
Gandhiji described ‘Swadeshi’ as the soul and Khadi as its body(Parashar, 1996). Swadeshi Movement’ is considered as a very important event in the history of Indian freedom struggle against the Britishers (Swaraj). The concepts like boycotting the foreign goods, using the slogans of Swaraj, spirit of Swadeshi, use of national products and imparting national education became very popular at that time (Meshram, 2012); (Manjapra,2012) ; (Nair,1985); (Raju, 2014);(Paul, 2015);(Roy, 2011).Khadi is very meticulously linked to the ‘Swadeshi’ movement of India and it is a matter of pride for every Indian. The Khadi movement aimed at boycotting the foreign clothes including cotton and promoting Indian clothes. Mahatma Gandhi promoted the Khadi Movement for rural self-employment and self-reliance in 1920’s, thus making the fabric an integral part and the portrait of Swadeshi Movement. Thus, the fabric is associated as a fabric for freedom (Brown & Elizabeth, 2008) ;(Ambre and Lad, 2017). The creation and wearing of natively constructed fabric was a unique method for dismissing foreign rule and it was at that time khadi movement got activated (Trivedi, 2003). Khadi, according to Gandhiji was more than a fabric, indeed a fabric of Indian Independence (Jain, 2015). Gandhiji influenced people to believe in their clothing as a social or personal belief and they adopted khadi as a result of same. Khadi brought the rich and poor under its shelter and this was the intention of the father of the nation. (Jain & Pant, 2014), pronounces that the trends that have influenced contemporary fashion are independence, technology and social identities. Khadi, thus serves as an appropriate example for the above three parameters.(Joshi, 2002)compiles the views of our Father of the Nation on Khadi as:

**Table 1.0 Views of Gandhiji on Khadi**

Khadi as a symbol of	Contribution
Swaraj	Like Swaraj, khadi is the birth right of every individual and it is the duty of every individual to use it life-long. Swaraj can come only when the tens of millions of Indians hold charkha to spin khadi

Unity	Hindu Muslim Unity will appear only when khadi is spun by all of them.
Untouchability	Universalization of spinning means the automatic solution to the problems like untouchability.
Boycott of foreign cloth	The production of khadi symbolises the abolishment of the use of foreign cloth.
Self-Sufficiency	Khadi eliminates middlemen and increases the income of millions of semi-starved villagers.
Liberty	Spinning of khadi will not remind the spinner of its own needs, but the requirement of Nation.
Women-Empowerment	Women will become self-dependent by the spinning of khadi.
Swadeshi	The use of khadi is the foundation of Swadeshi.
Hand-woven	The only fabric which is made by hand-spinning and weaving.
Patriotism Sentiment	Khadi economics is based on patriotism sentiment and humanity.

(Source: Author's own Creation)



(Source: Khadi Book, 2018)

### Journey of Khadi from a Freedom fabric to Fashion fabric

The word Khadi has always echoed behind the emotions of freedom struggle of India. To attest India's spirit seeking endeavors in the wake of the Independence struggle, Gandhiji brought khadi to the forefront as an icon of cultural indigenesness, freedom and self-sufficiency. Now is the time when the fashion designing industry is projecting every garment model as stylish and innovative statement suiting an individual's style, purpose and personality. The fashion designers had realised the possibility of expansion of khadi as a fashion fabric. Government and the fashion industry is working hand in hand on the emancipation of khadi, Strategizing on the lines of replanting khadi from a symbol of patriotism to a fashion statement (Hamstech, 2017); (Gujarat Rajya Khadi Gramodyog Board, 2016) ;(Nair, 2003). The factor that had helped khadi turn into a fashion fabric is the comfort. Also, khadi comes in tones that are incredibly calming to the eyes. Another particular inspiration behind khadi being most loved among youths is the luxury feel its texture offers (Kuriakose, 2019).

(Sinha, 2018), described Khadi as a fabric before the Independence of India as a tool for 'self-governance'. The father of our nation envisioned every village to plant material for their yarn and every men as well women spin and weave to produce Khadi for 'Swaraj'. Thus Khadi marked the inception of democracy becoming the identity of every Indian, whereas khadi after the freedom of the country has taken a completely new twist. It has turned to be a canvas for the designers coming up with novel and unique designs. Each time the collections come in limelight because of the simplicity, uniqueness, freshness and versatility of the Fabric. The eco-friendliness of the fabric, which is today's mantra, has attracted the users.



Image:1 'Khadi then' retrieved from <http://www.forbesindia.com>



Image:2 'Khadi now' retrieved from <http://vidm.in/a-unique-khadi-fashion-show>

### Garments Originated out of Khadi

Walia (2012) in a periodical had stated that khadi is used in an innovative way as in the current times it is used not only to make Kameez, Shirts, Jackets, Skirts but also trendy Kaftans. Leading designers had been using khadi for making variety of apparels like Sarees, duppattas, cropped tops, jackets, skirts, kurtas, capris, trousers, wrap-arounds, spaghetti tops, western tops, Shirts, handkerchief, lehengas, blouses etc. (Choudhury & Ramachandran, 2004); (Gujarat Rajya Khadi Gramodyog Board, 2016). Jani & Khosla (2002) had described that the trend of Khadi Kurta and Jeans is back in fashion and youngsters are preferring the style well. On the contrary even government had initiated to supply all its employees of municipal commission, the uniforms made out of khaddar (TOI, 1939).

Besides that the khadi kurta popularly known as 'Modi-Kurta or Modi-Jacket' launched on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2018, the birthday of prime minister Shri Narendra Modi, is a big hit among youngsters in the recent times. It is so popular that around 200 Jackets are sold on daily basis in each of the seven khadi India outlets/stores all over the country marking a remarkable sale of Rs 14.76 Crores in October, 2018 (FRPT Research, n.d).

Denims have been a big hit among youngsters as it is easy to carry and comfortable to wear. Ahmedabad's Arvind Mill had undertaken to produce denim khadi, in order to make the product popular at the global level (Kumar, 2020). Even KVIC had launched a new denim range from Jeans to T-shirts in khadi to make it popular among the youth. Also a new range of ready to wear collection for women and new full trouser series for men is the next targeted collection to be launched (FRPT Research, n.d).

McGowan (2015) described in a research, the non-clothing aspect of khadi. Khadi is used to make swadeshi curtains, bed-sheets, pillow-covers, table-covers etc that are embroidered as well block-printed giving a traditional look to the modern furniture used now a days thereby expressing new ideas of the fabric in the urban western India. Choudhury & Ramachandran (2004), in an article had described the growing demand of khadi bags, mats, upholstery, bed-sheets and curtains in the modern times (IANS, 2020).

A very famous designer Tara Aslam has created an outstanding range of Khadi apparels from Palazzos to Peplum tops, Crop tops to Maxi dresses, all the new range of Khadi outfits is created to make it appealing to the younger generation (Walia, 2012).

One of the most significant things about the khadi fabric is that it is the only fabric in the country with which making of National Flag had been authorised by the Government of India. A KVIC Unit located at Hubli in West Bengal is the only center in India which is authorised to make National Flag using Khadi (Khadi Book, 2018).

### Contribution of fashion Designers in Khadi Transformation

Khadi over a period of time had changed its image from a freedom fighter's fabric to a fashion garment. The Journey of transformation started with efforts of various designers like Devika Bhojwani, who propelled the "Swadeshi label" during the year 1985 and in the year 1989, first fashion show of khadi outfits in Bombay, organized by Khadi and Village Industries Commission, gave a start to khadi in fashion industry. In the year 2002, Bhojwani along with the celebrity Jaya Bachchan demonstrated a fashion show giving a new acceptance to the fabric. Ritu Kumar in the year 1990, presented a wonderful fashion show comprising of eight collections and khadi was noteworthy among them. Subsequently, Tree of Life, Elegance in Khadi, Khubsoorat Khadi were very popular demonstrations by the designer abroad; creating a good demand for the khadi outfits in Britain. Yet another personality working hard with khadi is Kamal Wadkar, who is associated with Gujarat Handicrafts Board and Mumbai Khadi Sang, netting a very big amount to Government through her collections of 4500 different garments in 150 different styles in different colours giving a new twist to the garment (Ahsaan, 2009); (Annuncio, 2002).

Khadi has become *haut* in the recent times as various designers like Rohit Bal, Malini Ramani, Jatin Kochchar and Pranavi Kapur use khadi in their own unique style to invent and create a variety of khadi apparels giving them a modern and contemporary appearance (Srivastava, 2019). With the involvement of various leading designers like Manish Arora, Sandeep Khosla, Asha Sarabhai, Ritu Kumar, Abu Jani, Abraham and Thakore, Satya Paul, Rajesh Singh and Raghendra Rathod, the revival of khadi has become a possible phenomenon with very good support of its marketing in the exhibitions in which khadi produced in different parts of country is displayed. A very famous designer Tara Aslam has created an outstanding range of Khadi apparels from Palazzos to Peplum tops, Crop tops to Maxi dresses, all the new range of Khadi outfits were created to make it appealing to the younger generation (Walia, 2012).

Sabyasachi Mukherjee, a leading fashion designer's work had gone undercurrent with the revival of khadi in different forms in his collections. He had designed khadi outfits for the leading actresses like Aishwarya Rai Bachchan in the movie 'Ravana' and 'Guzarish', Vidya Balan in the movie Paa (Vasudev, 2009). On the other hand, performing artist Kangana Ranaut who had played title role in the film 'Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi' had been witnessed wearing the legacy texture Khadi in the Indian epic anecdotal film (Bose, 2019); (IANS, 2019). In the year 2016, the famous fashion designer Ritu Beri had been appointed as an advisor to KVIC for the promotion of khadi in India and abroad, presenting multi-fashion styles and designs of khadi, owing to her twenty five years enormous

experience in fashion industry (PTI, 2016); (Kumar, 2016); (Srivastava, 2016). In the year 2017, Arvind mills had signed a contract with KVIC the official owners of the brand 'Khadi' to promote the Denims made out of Khadi. In its new form, khadi still holds to be the most flexible fabric in the world (Shivdasani, 2018).

### Preference of Khadi in Apparel Section by Consumers

Choudhury and Ramachandran (2004); Ahsaan (2009) described the views as youth wear khadi for two reasons, first one being its national significance, the quality of fabric making the population self-reliant and the second reason being the unique features of khadi suiting the Indian climate and due to the availability of different variants of khadi. On the other hand, according to Chaudary and Ojha (2015), social influence plays a vital role for the youth in purchasing khadi garments. The quality of khadi and status symbol of national significance are two main key factors for the youth in buying the khadi products. Also a large number of youth prefer khadi because of its chemical-free characteristic. (Talwar, 2018), described the point of view of college youth about their view on preferring khadi. Some students find it hip and happening, a fashion statement and an alternative of cotton in winters. On the other hand, some students find it boring and are totally unaware about the history of khadi in this modern times. (Purkayastha, 2018), in her report to Times of India has referenced on the idea khadi preference by the youth as it has been advancing as a style statement in the recent times. In the report she had concentrated on the assortments of khadi garments, their use by the youth and the special measures taken so as to refurbish them by emphasizing the different contributories. Also, The innovation of khadi denim has led to a good appeal to the youth for buying khadi (Shivdasani, 2018).

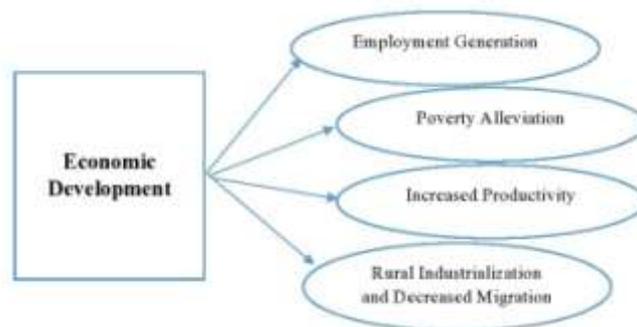
On the other hand, Bhardwaj (2011) described that khadi is not preferred by the youth and it should be more stylish, accessible and well-priced enough to cater to the taste of metropolitan India and to catch the imagination of youth with cultural reverberation in the form of pride in the same way as the world has now perceived our monetary strength due to strong domestic markets in present and in the past had discovered their way in the Gandhian qualities. On the other hand, Upadhyay & Deodiya (2013) described that majority of youth connect khadi with the 'Swadeshi' movement of India and the reasons for its low acceptability could be higher cost of purchase and maintenance and lack of user friendly attitude. The youth who actually use khadi reported lack of its colour fastness. Also, the fabric is too costly for the common men to afford. Khadi doesn't wrap well and one need to, for the most part, launder it; the individuals who couldn't bear the cost of khadi, buy the other materials (Shinde, 2009). On another note, Anusuya & Banurekha (2016) elucidated that there is lack of awareness among youth regarding khadi, so khadi education should be inculcated in the education system of the country. Also by

attractive marketing techniques, youth could be attracted towards the khadi products and Gandhian ideology could be kept alive.

### Khadi and Economic Development

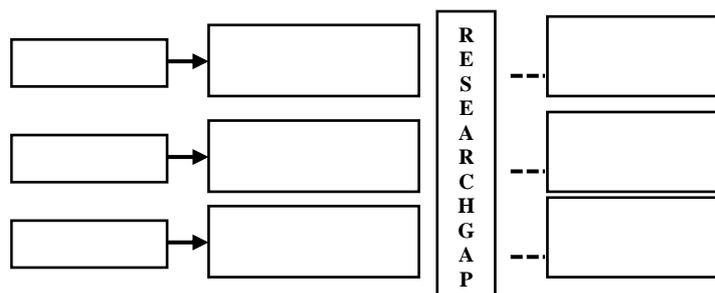
The Khadi production involves not just production of cloth, but self-sustained growth. It creates employment as well as purchasing power for the community (Koulagi, 2015). The production of khadi was meant to provide employment to the rural people and which continues to some extent even in current times. Also khadi production industry is suitable to a country where capital is scarce (Lewis, 1954) equally because there is a positive relationship between productivity of labor, employment and output (Keynes, 1936). The synonym for khadi industries is "People's Industry". This industry ought to be participative in nature with equity and benefits shared among producers who use local and renewable natural resources and industry is labour intensive in nature (Uzamma & Prasad, 1998). Khadi stands for all that is local and sustainable in the economy, society and environment (Bhatt, 2015); (Ahamad & Pandey, 2015).

Figure 2.0 Khadi and Economic Development



## IV. RESEARCH GAP

The literature reviewed in the research has focused on Khadi from its journey of Freedom Fabric to Fashion Fabric, but the studies depicting the reason for its un-acceptability in the apparel industry is lacking to a major extent. The literature on Khadi being the mode for 'Swaraj' and 'Swadeshi' is extensively covered but its linkages with the apparel industry are missing. Studies have highlighted that Khadi has turned into a fashion fabric due to the contribution of various leading fashion designers. In spite of the conversion into a fashion fabric, studies depicting the reasons for people not preferring khadi are missing to a major extent. Khadi has contributed towards the Economic Development in the form of Poverty alleviation, Employment, Productivity and Rural Industrialization, still studies highlighting its acceptance in the textile industry and its linkages to professionalism are missing. The literature is too historic in nature.



**Figure 3.0 Research Gap**

(Source: Author's Own Compilation)

## V. CONCLUSION

The research was conducted with an aim to study the literature related to khadi Pre and Post-Independence. It could be concluded that the literature is too historic in nature. It is conceptual and lacks empirical evidence. Khadi took birth as a fabric for self-sustenance, weapon for alleviating poverty, a light to ignite the light for freedom, which gradually has turned its status from a freedom fabric to fashion fabric, but still it lacks professionalism of apparel Industry. It has not been given due weightage as an Industrial Product. There is a lot of scope of empirical studies for deducing reasons for lack of its acceptance among consumers. None of the studies have been conducted in Gujarat targeting the reasons for consumers not preferring khadi apparels. So, it could be suggested that more number of empirical studies in this field should be undertaken which would enable Khadi to stand up in the arena of Professional Industrial Product and promote its acceptance among consumers.

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