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Khadi: A sustainable handicraft

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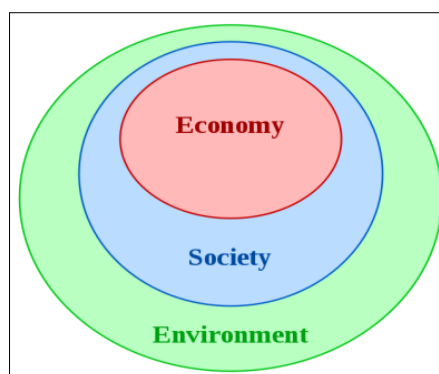
Abstract

Sustainability is the essential property of any system to remain diverse and productive. There are three pillars of sustainability namely, economics, social and environment. Among these, both economy and society are constrained by environmental limits. Khadi fulfils this definition of sustainability and is reflected in its sustenance since antiquity through civilization in Indian Territory. The great historical background makes it sustainable. This fabric is alive from the ancient times to this modern era. It became a powerful weapon in the freedom movements. As it is one of the employments providing sectors of India and having a share in Indian economy, it shows economical aspect of sustainability. Due to low energy consumption, chemical waste is minimum and low carbon footprint, so Khadi has less harmful impact on environment. Khadi is hand spun and hand-woven fabric from India. The cloth is woven from cotton, silk, or wool, which are all spun into yarn on a spinning wheel called a *charkha*. Thus, Khadi is a versatile fabric, cool in summer and warm in winter. Khadi and Village Industries Commission is promoting and developing Khadi and village industries for providing employment opportunities in the rural areas. Khadi is becoming the choice of designers. Many Indian and international designers have launched their collection of Khadi. Many retail outlets and online shopping sites are offering the Khadi products. Khadi and handloom mark created identity of Khadi products in domestic as well as in international market.

Keywords: Khadi, economics, Indian territory

Introduction

In ecology, sustainability (from *sustain* and *ability*) is the property of biological systems to remain diverse and productive indefinitely. There are three pillars of sustainability, in which both economy and society are constrained by environmental limits.



Source: (Anonymous, 2018) ^[1]

Fig 1: Three pillars of sustainability Sustainability

Khadi fulfils this definition of sustainability and is reflected in its sustenance since antiquity through civilization in Indian Territory. The great historical background makes it sustainable. This fabric is alive from the ancient times to this modern era. It became a powerful weapon in the freedom movements. As it is one of the employment providing sectors of India and having a share in Indian economy, it shows economical aspect of sustainability. Due to low energy consumption, chemical waste is minimum and low carbon footprint, so Khadi has less impact on environment. Khadi can be defined as-

- a) Khadi, which means the Indian handspun and hand woven cloth which is made on a machine used by hand to weave cloth for people living in the villages (Kumar, 2016) ^[8].

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- b) An Indian homespun cotton cloth (Concise Oxford English Dictionary).
- c) A cotton cloth of plain weave, produced in India (Collins Dictionary).
- d) Khadi or Khaddar is a term for handspun and hand-woven cloth from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan primarily made out of cotton. The raw materials may sometimes also include silk, or wool, which are all spun into yarn on a spinning wheel called a charkha. It is a versatile fabric, cool in summer i.e. cotton Khadi and wool Khadi warm in winter. In order to improve the look, Khadi/khaddar is sometimes starched to give it a stiffer feel. It is widely accepted in fashion circles (Anonymous, 2018)^[2].

History of Khadi (Social Aspect)

The great historical background makes Khadi sustainable. This fabric is alive from the ancient times to this modern era. The charm and richness of Khadi can be seen in the history of Khadi. From the earliest times the spinning wheel or Charkha had been plied in Indian homes, the excavation at Harappa and Mohan-jo-daro reveal that the charkha was a part of the Indian household. The Vedic Aryan also used the charkha. The Buddhist age also the charkha continued to be plied. During the region of Mauryas, there existed a large organization to deal with matters connected with spinning and weaving. Foreign travelers like ‘Marco Polo’ (1288) and ‘Tavernier’ (1660) wrote in details about the excellence of Indian cotton fabrics. In the Mughal period, hand spinning and weaving continued to be an important occupation. The fabrics were known for their exquisite beauty (Anonymous, 2018)^[3].

By the seventeenth century, the English traders set-up the East India Trading Corporation in India with the main object of importing Indian goods including textiles. But the influx of Indian fabrics excited the jealousy of the weavers in England. The British Parliament passed an Act imposing excessive duties on cloth from India. It also imposed heavy penalties on the users of Indian fabrics in England. Afterwards, the British, lowered duties levied on English goods coming to India and imposed heavy duty even on inland transit on Indian products. As a result, India was flooded with cheap cotton goods from England where the adoption of mechanical invention gave the manufacturers an advantage over Indian weavers, which affected seriously the position of the Indian spinners and weavers. To overcome this problem our freedom fighters promoted Khadi. In freedom movement, numerable songs were composed on Khadi. Gandhi Ji did derive out the British with the help of his Charkha. Khadi became a symbol of freedom struggle. “Livery of Freedom” (uniform of India) as Nehru described Khadi (Singh *et al.*, 2014)^[11].

In 1925, an autonomous organization named the All India spinners Association or the Akhil Bharat Charkha Sangh was created. The AISA, till 1935, concentrated its activity on propagation, production and sale of Khadi. After the attainment of independence in 1947, the AISA prepared an ambitious plan for meeting plan for meeting the clothing requirements of the country through hand spinning and hand weaving and at the same time, giving employment to large number of persons in rural areas. Afterwards in 1957, a statutory body called the Khadi and Village Industries Commission was established by the Government of India under an act of Parliament with main objectives which guide its functioning. These are: The Social Objective - Providing

employment in rural areas. The Economic Objective - Providing salvable articles. The Wider Objective - Creating self-reliance amongst people and building up a strong rural community spirit.

The commission seeks to achieve these objectives by implementing and monitoring various schemes and programs. The process of Implementation of schemes and programs starts at the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises which is the administrative head of the programs. The Ministry receives funds from the Central Government of India, and routes these to the Khadi and Village Industries Commission for the implementation of programs and schemes related to Khadi and Village Industries.

Economic aspect of khadi

Khadi has a share in Indian economy. It is directly or indirectly related to economy of India. Khadi sector is one of the employments providing sectors, due to a demand of Khadi product in international level Khadi products are exported. Khadi has becoming the choice of designers. Many designers are working with Khadi and launching their collection. This is indirectly sharing the Indian economy.

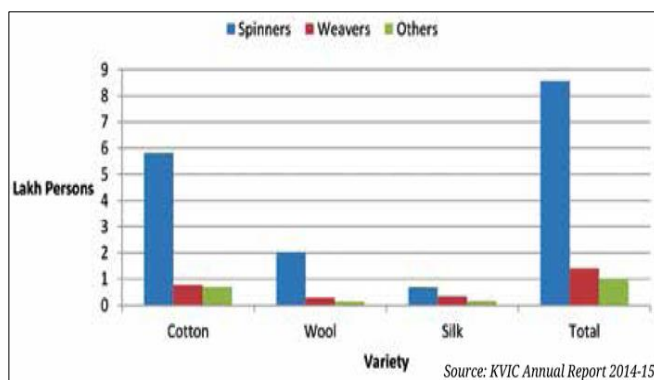
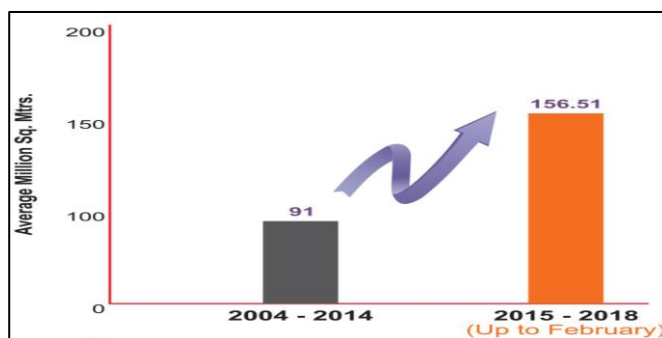


Fig 2: Employment in Khadi sector

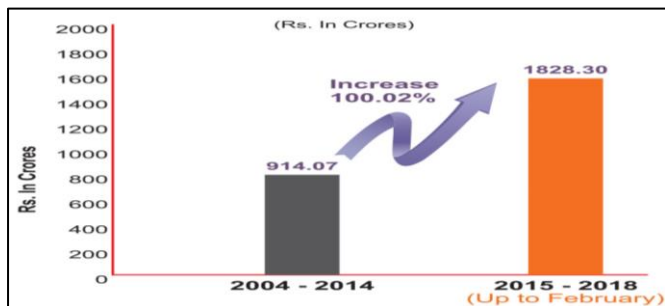
In Khadi sector spinning, weaving and others which includes finishing, packaging and marketing are the major section of employment. In cotton spinning 5.8 lakh persons are employed, followed by wool and spinning and silk spinning. Overall spinning is the major section of employment (Fig:2).



Source: KVIC Report

Fig 3: Production of Khadi fabric

The production of Khadi fabric between years of 2004-14 was around 91 million sq. metre. In the years 2015-18 the production of Khadi fabric was 156.51 million sq. metre (Fig. 3). This may be because of the demand of Khadi fabric at national and international level.



Source: KVIC Report

Fig 4: Average sale of Khadi Sector

Between the years of 2004-14 the sale of Khadi sector was 914.07 crores, which was increased 100.02 percent between the years of 2015-18. This may be due to the continuous promotion of Khadi at national and international level by designers as well as government and leaders. The data shows that Khadi sector is directly contributing in the Indian economy (Fig:4).

Environment aspect of khadi

All textile processes have an impact on the environment. The industry uses large amounts of natural resources such as water, while many operations use chemical sand solvents. All companies use energy, produce solid, discharge effluent and emit dust and toxic gases into the atmosphere. This leads to high carbon footprint (amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere as a result of the activities of a particular individual, organization, or community).

Khadi sector has very low carbon footprint which make it a green fabric. In India, the textile industry is one of the major energy consuming industries and retains a record of the lowest efficiency in energy utilization. About 23% energy is consumed in weaving, 34% in spinning, 38% in chemical processing and another 5% for miscellaneous purposes. In general, energy in the textile industry is mostly used in the form of electricity as a common power. As Khadi is made from cotton, silk and wool and is spun and woven manually, i.e., without any electrical support, it becomes the only activity that is not utilizing fossil fuel. Because of all these reasons Khadi is sustaining within the environment limits.

Khadi mark

Khadi Mark signifies that the Khadi product is made of natural fibre i.e. cotton, wool and silk through the process of hand spinning and hand weaving. In this regard, Khadi Mark Regulations 2013, published in the Gazette of India dated July 22, 2013, No. 3212 GI/2013, empowers KVIC to provide Khadi Mark by laying down standards of assurance and by authorizing the use of Khadi Mark. With the Khadi Mark Regulations 2013, in force, no textile shall be sold or otherwise traded by any person or institution as Khadi or Khadi product in any form or manner without it bearing a Khadi Mark tag or label issued by the Commission under these regulations. Also, no institution or person engaged in the business of sale of Khadi or Khadi products shall procure Khadi or Khadi products unless such Khadi or Khadi product bears a Khadi Mark tag or label issued under these regulations



Fig 5: Khadi mark

New Horizons of Khadi

Khadi is the fabric our nation. It is only fabric which is produced in India only. So government has taken several decisions to promote Khadi. Khadi denim-Union minister of MSME Kalraj Mishra launched Khadi Denim Designer Wears through an exhibition-cum-sale in 2013. KVIC assigned actor Amitabh Bachchan as brand ambassador of Khadi. As per the Indian Flag Code, laws that govern the usage of flags in India, Khadi is the only material. Ritu Beri was appointed advisor to Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC in 2015). Khadi is made up natural fibers cotton, silk and wool mainly but a new concept poly Khadi was launched by KVIC in which fibre is made of 67 per cent cotton and 33 per cent polyester so that it can reach to the rural people. Many designers are working on Khadi and promoting this classic fabric in international level also.

Conclusion

Decades ago, when our country and its men were struggling for independence, Khadi was more than just cloth. It represented a movement for self-reliance, for economic empowerment, and for Indian pride. Khadi became the icon of the Swadeshi movement in the 1920s. It has a great historical background which make is socially sustainable. Less hazardous impact on environment make it more eco-friendly. It is empowering rural poor because many Designers choice is Khadi. Govt. and many designers are promoting Khadi so that it can reach to the every Indian. Khadi as a concept and reality has a mind, body and soul. Khadi is the fabric that has a lot of character and is an inseparable part of the Indian culture. This is the fabric of our nation. So the citizen of this country it is our responsibility to make our legacy alive and promote Khadi by using products of Khadi in our day to day life.

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