

# The Historical Evolution of Khadi

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## ABSTRACT

The pre-independence symbolism of khadi was firmly intertwined with home rule and self-sufficiency, or Swaraj and Swadeshi. This paper traces the evolution of Khadi from its ancient predecessors in the form of coarse hand spun cloth that existed in India during the Vedic periods and after to the Mughal era and thereafter during the British colonial period and post-independence. It examines the various factors that linked khadi to the freedom movement and Mahatma Gandhi and then the reasons for its decline in the post-independence era and then its present revival. For this purpose, an extensive review of literature and an interview with textile expert Sabita Radhakrishna was conducted. This paper will highlight the advantages of using khadi and the various impediments that the khadi sector faced to create awareness and boost sales of the fabric and the khadi readymade garment. It also examines the evolution of khadi from a “Freedom Fabric” to a “Fashionable Fabric” and why present-day designers are using khadi in their new collections and gives recommendations on how to create an awareness of khadi as the answer to sustainable fashion.

## 1.0 Introduction

In a world that is shrinking with the advent of the digital age, fashions, social outlooks, education, food and lifestyle are fast losing a national identity and acquiring a global one. A khadi kurta-pyjama and a saree are no longer the stereotypical Indian costume as seen today. Then how is a national identity seen in clothing in a country that was once unified with that very symbolism by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi or Gandhiji as he was respectfully referred to by the millions in India who looked up to him as the “Father of the Nation”? *“Like Swaraj, Khadi is our birthright, and it is our lifelong duty to use that only. Anyone who does not fulfil that duty is totally ignorant of what swaraj is.”* (“Importance of Khadi | Gandhiji on KHADI | Swadeshi - Khadi,” n.d.). Gandhi’s famous quote is fairly self-explanatory. He equated the spinning and dawning of the khadi garb to being free and enjoying home rule or swaraj. As the Indian birth right was closely associated with freedom from colonial oppression, spinning and wearing khadi was constructed to become the Indian duty. According to Gandhi these two identities could not be separated. The transition from pre-colonial India to post-colonial nation witnessed the shifts in khadi movement in accordance with the developing socioeconomic scenarios and subsequent fashion trends.

This paper attempts to trace the historical evolution of Khadi and investigate its survival in postcolonial India through the lens of literature reviews from its early association with nationalism to its present-day designer reincarnation. It also discusses the revival strategies that have helped catapult khadi sales in the past few years and discusses how the perception of khadi has evolved from pre-independence to post independence which has impacted its production and sales. An email interview was conducted with handloom and textile expert and spokesperson, Sabita Radhakrishna whose quotes have been used throughout this paper to help augment the research on what khadi’s place is today in the new Indian’s psyche and whether it still exists as a symbol of national identity.

## 2.0 Review of Literature

The Khadi movement in India has been discussed about by several, social historians and economic historians alike. Nagorao Zapate states that, *“Gandhi promoted khadi as both a commodity and a symbol of the swadeshi movement*

which sought to establish India's economic self-sufficiency from Britain as the basis of self-government." (Zapate, 2017). Gandhi's aim was the resurrection of the spinning and weaving of khadi to empower rural India in order to become self-reliant by hand spinning for their own needs and then selling their produce to affect economic growth among villages. Gandhi's use of khadi as a national identity symbol was to expand its scope as an attire adorned by the nation rather than a village alone. It can be inferred that owing to India's vast cultural, social, religious and economic diversity, a nationalistic symbol was essential to present a united front to the British. Hence, khadi became an essential product of Gandhi's vision for austere living, aiming for a society which would spin their cloth and feed their families in an attempt to achieve self-sufficiency and create a unified national identity through a national fabric and cloth.

English cloth was symbolic of its colonial supremacy and hence of exploitation through its flooding of Indian markets with cloth from Manchester. Indians began appropriating English-styled clothing while others used Manchester Mill cloth for their traditional Indian garment of choice. (Bean, 2014). This is why the Swadeshi movement became essential to the freedom struggle. Some sections of Indian society believed that if they dressed like the British gentlemen that they would be treated like British and given all that the British government would give its own people. Hence Bean concluded with the statement, "*Thus a fascinating paradox was generated from the semiotic and economic characteristics of cloth*" (Bean, 2014). Thereby, inferring that that a nationalistic Indian could not promote the Indian handloom industry without donning the khadi garb to promote self-sufficiency through economic growth by hand spinning khadi cloth. Once this was achieved the nationalistic Indian could never be considered as an Englishman or an Indian pretending to be one.

It was this symbolism that Gandhi used throughout his freedom movement with the words Swaraj and Swadeshi. "*Whilst khadi represented a powerful symbolic challenge to British imperialism, Gandhi's dream that it would become the everyday dress of Indians after Independence was never realised*" (Khadi Emma Tarlo "this is sacred cloth." M. K. Gandhi). One can observe the symbolism of khadi and Gandhi's dreams for clothing Indians with khadi in this quotation, however, post freedom it did not manifest into reality. While India struggled for freedom, the goal for each nationalistic Indian was home rule or Swaraj which went hand in hand with Khadi. Once freedom was achieved, the need to portray a unified front through the spinning and wearing of home-spun fabric probably ceased. Other contributing factors for this phenomenon include the difference between the post-independence symbolism of the khadi garb with the satirical view of the khadi clad corrupt politician seen often in newspapers as presented by cartoonists which was in direct contrast to Gandhi's view of simple living and high thinking. The advent of India's liberalisation witnessed the influence of western cultures on social norms (Khadi Emma Tarlo "this is sacred cloth." M. K. Gandhi).

To improve the situation, the government set up the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in 1956 to develop and promote Khadi production in rural India. It was faced with the tedious task of selling its products that no longer were associated with the upholding of nationalistic values. They were saddled with large quantities of unsold stock and the Herculean task of finding artisans who were motivated to preserve the art, tradition and nationalism rather than profit motivated individuals. It can therefore be understood that the KVIC needed a strategy to boost production and sales. It is probably for this reason that in the past decade, KVIC has focussed on transformations and innovations in the khadi sector and heralded the start of great interest in khadi by the new league of high fashion designers. Prominent designers like Ritu Kumar, Anita Dongre and Sabyasachi have launched khadi collections breathing new air into a fabric that now needs a transition from one that established an austere and simplistic national identity to one that represents a fashionable, sustainable and global identity especially among the youth who are deeply influenced by pop culture. Thus, a review of the extensive literature on the historical evolution of khadi from its origins and its intrinsic association with Swaraj to its present state and future will inform and elaborate upon where the khadi movement began and where it is headed in order to preserve it and create new innovations to make it a part of the new Indian wardrobe and sensibility.

### 3.0 Tracing the Roots of Khadi

#### 3.0.1 The Ancient History of Hand Spun Fabric in India to Colonial Era

The history of ancient Indian weaving right from the Vedic period and explains how from consequent and significant periods of ancient Indian history references are made to the weaver, the implements used and the cloth. Buddhist Literature refers to weaving and mentions subsequent texts from the Jaina period that talk of cotton thread (Pandey, 2005). Indian grammarian, Panini, also talked of weaving in his texts. <sup>1</sup>Panini's grammar texts can be traced to between the 4 th and 6 th century BCE. Hence, the existence of a weaving sector dates back to a very ancient period. Proof of India's ancient weaving history is also seen in references by historians like Herodotus who talks of ancient Indians of the time wearing clothes woven from cotton. The Mauryan period in Indian history<sup>2</sup> saw the textile sector show great development according to Kautilya or Chanakya. Both men and women are seen to have been part of the spinning and weaving industry in the Mauryan period as seen earlier in ancient Indian Vedic periods (Pandey, 2005).<sup>3</sup>

Patanjali, the ancient sage famous for his "Yoga Sutras" has mentioned about the quality of cloth woven in India at the time<sup>4</sup>. This points to the fact that as early as 200 BCE which is when the Yoga Sutra is said to have been written, the cotton weaving industry was in existence and was thriving in India (Pandey, 2005).

As documented history moved towards the Mughal period, Varanasi, which was the capital of Kasi and a religious city became the capital of the brocade and silk weaving industry. In the ancient Jatakas of the Buddhist period, Kasi is mentioned as the centre for cotton and silk weaving. During the Mughal period which lasted until approximately 1720, textiles were considered to be significantly important. Emperor Akbar gave great prominence to the textiles, their designing, weaving, printing and embroidery as seen in this statement, "*Akbar set up royal workshops (karkhanas) patterned on the workshops of the Safavid Persian court, over much of his empire*" (Dey, 1970). Through the entire Mughal period great innovations were made to the industry and intricate weaves that were highly sought after by the nobility were produced<sup>5</sup>. During this period two types of weaving industries were seen to develop. One that was independent and was owned and financed by the weaver or artisan and the other was the "Karkhana" as mentioned earlier. The Karkhanas were controlled by the rulers. Large Karkhanas were spread all over Mughal controlled India and hence when the Mughal empire's control over India waned so did the Karkhanas and so did the weaving industry (Dey, 1970).

### 4.0 Condition of the Handloom Industry in the Colonial Era- a Chronological View

The East India Company (EIC) came into existence in 1600. The EIC secured exclusive rights to trade with India which led to the establishment of a trading post in Surat in 1613(Abelow, n.d.). The Company was actively involved in the trading of handloom textiles<sup>6</sup> which were much sought after for their fine and rich textures. The company

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<sup>1</sup> "*Panini refers to the tantra as loom, avaya is the place where the weaver plied his loom and pravani is shuttle.*" Panini's grammar texts can be traced to between the 4 th and 6 th century BCE.

<sup>2</sup> The Maurya period which was established around 321 BCE)

<sup>3</sup> Emperor Chandragupta Maurya's advisor# who was known for his famous text "Arthashastra", which dealt with economic, military and political policies.

<sup>4</sup> seen in the quote, "*Patanjali describes that the spinner spun the cotton in three categories - very thin, medium and coarse.*"

<sup>5</sup> "*Some of the most complex textiles ever made were produced during a fifty year period from the late seventeenth century into the early eighteenth century during the reign of Aurangzeb*" (Dey, 1970)

<sup>6</sup> (Among other products like indigo and spices, but the focus of this paper will remain textiles)

purchased goods from India for gold (Van & Singh, 2020) and since Indian goods were far more sought after in Europe but not European goods in India, the EIC would have made staggering profits from this arrangement. Soon the EIC by 1717 secured exemptions from the Mughal Emperor from paying custom duties which greatly increased their profit margins from the trade of Indian textiles and other goods substantially. (Abelow, n.d.)

The battle of Plassey in 1757 which was fought under Robert Clive's leadership paved the way for greater profits as the EIC assumed control of three districts as seen to be stated in the paper, "*However in 1757, after the battle of Plassey, the flow of money increased significantly since they came into possession of three districts from Midnapore, Burdwan, Bengal as well as Chittagong. Along with these districts they also got hold of the Calcutta Zemindary*" (Van & Singh, 2020). Hence, their territorial dominance provided the EIC the authority to control the market and procure taxes on behalf of the Emperor. Such control ensured that they had a complete monopoly allowing them to utilise the market advantageously. Large stocks of precious handlooms were purchased at very low prices and sold in Europe for a high cost.

The whole environment of trade of Indian goods saw a shift in 1760 with the advent of the Industrial revolution (IR) in England. The Industrial Revolution which created a shift from human and animal driven labour to the use of machinery and manufacturing processes created an increased use of steam to generate energy to drive machinery. A myriad of tools entered the production arena during these years. The Industrial revolution signalled a significant phase in Colonialism as it led to the takeover of the Indian markets by machine-made British cloth, destroying the Indian handloom sector. In 1773 a Governor General and a supervising council were appointed to monitor the actions of the EIC. By 1784 with the passing of the "India Act", the powers of the EIC would have been restricted, giving most of the power over India to the Governor General, thus signalling the decline of the EIC and the rise of colonial supremacy over India (Abelow,n.d.).

Between the Industrial Revolution and Colonial supremacy over India, England began using India as an easy market for machine-made cloth from Lancashire's Mills, leading to the decline of the Indian handloom industry (Van & Singh, 2020). Owing to the risk of succumbing to poverty many uncompensated weavers switched to agriculture and other low paying professions. The loss of income predestined their inability to invest in advancing technology or other resources to boost production. Thereby initiating a major decline in the Indian handloom industry. The decline of Mughal patronage and consequent shutting down of Karkhanas are a contributing factor to the decline of hand spun and handloom textiles.

In 1885 the Indian National Congress (INC) was formed; the organisation's early aim was not to revolt but to ask for certain reforms. W Travis Hanes 111 states that western educated Indians wished for a place in accordance with their rights under British rule in the colonial government. (Hanes, 1993) Hence, it is seen that the INC's aim was to establish a sort of amalgamation of the two cultures that they were part of. It was when Gandhi began gaining prominence in the Congress that the freedom struggle gained high momentum and became a movement that needed to encompass the country as a whole.

Therefore, it was necessary to unify the country against the British and for this Gandhi needed a unifying factor which would symbolically bring the country together. Khadi was then strategically utilised and projected as this unifying factor. (Khadi Emma Tarlo "this is sacred cloth." M. K. Gandhi).

#### 4.0.1 The Relevance of Khadi in Colonial India

To examine the role Khadi played in the nationalist struggle a study of its association with Gandhi must be made. Gandhi played a pivotal role in the rise of Khadi to becoming a national identity which could be equated to being sacred. (Khadi Emma Tarlo "this is sacred cloth." M. K. Gandhi). Gandhi embodied his own ideals, by changing his own style of dressing and stressing on the "*symbolism of cloth*" (Khadi Emma Tarlo "this is sacred cloth." M. K. Gandhi). Gandhi set an example and practised what he preached, thus effectively making Khadi a symbol of freedom and self- sufficiency. But this change was not adopted by Gandhi from the advent of his political life. His own experiences led him to make this decision. His autobiography, "*My Experiments with Truth*" describes his various

experiences as a young man who was drawn towards western culture. One can observe its function in portraying his oneness “*with the values of modernity, civilization and progress.*” (Khadi Emma Tarlo “this is sacred cloth.” M. K. Gandhi).

But this western form of dressing did not save him from openly racist attacks while in South Africa where he was a lawyer and activist between the years of 1893 and 1914. According to Bean it was this realisation that changed Gandhi by 1908 when he stated in the “Hind Swaraj” that just by adopting the English style of clothing instead of the traditional garb that is suited to home environments it could not be considered as a benchmark of civilisation and that the lack of it in an Indian did not prove an Indian to be uncivilised or savage (Bean, 2014). Gandhi then began talking about the significance of the “*Economics of Cloth*” (Bean, 2014). One can observe that its role was fundamental for each Indian to understand how the British had systematically destroyed the Indian economy and that was the sole cause of poverty and famine in the country.

## 5.0 Swaraj and Swadeshi

Swaraj or “Home rule” was not just freedom from the British but as B.S.R. Anjaneyulu says in his paper, “*The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means.*” (Anjaneyulu, 2003). For Gandhi true freedom stemmed from full control over the senses. This contributed to his staunch belief in non-violent revolt, which arose from controlling anger and retaliation through violence. Swadeshi is defined as, the use of resources both material and human in order to make society economically self-sufficient and self-governed. (Anjaneyulu, 2003).

Hence it is inferred that for Gandhi, khadi which symbolised nationalistic fervour and economic independence was the only means by which both swaraj and swadeshi could be achieved. But Khadi needed a revival after the post IR decline to make it a national movement so as to unite India’s diverse population. Khadi had to be hand spun locally and then cloth had to be woven from it to qualify as Swadeshi. It could not be Indian produced cloth in mills. The mills had succeeded in cleaning out the practice of hand spinning with the charkha and hence it can be inferred that Gandhi needed to revive that practice to revive rural India. (Khadi Emma Tarlo “this is sacred cloth.” M. K. Gandhi).

“*It was with Gandhi’s spinning experiments, aided by local women in the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, that khadi was reborn as a national cloth.*” (Khadi Emma Tarlo “this is sacred cloth.” M. K. Gandhi). Gandhi’s spinning on the charkha in Sabarmati Ashram and instilled the ideal that to want Swaraj every Indian had to take to spinning on the Charkha and wearing only Khadi. To achieve Swaraj, every Indian had to take the vow of Swadeshi. From 1921 Khadi was the symbol for Gandhi’s political strategy to oust the British from India. Gandhi felt that the only way rural India’s poverty-stricken masses could earn a supplementary income in the months when agricultural activity was not possible was by spinning in the lean months and selling their produce (Hempson, 1970). Gandhi saw the charkha as the key to sustaining these individuals throughout the year. It was this very concept of self-reliance (swadeshi) and freedom (Swaraj) from poverty in an economic sense that was seen in Gandhi’s thoughts on the economic upliftment of rural India through Khadi.

### 5.0.1 Khadi and Village Industries

By 1956, AISA was closed to start the Khadi and Village Industries or the KVIC. The aim of the KVIC was to promote the production of Khadi and the other cottage or village industrial sectors. However, government aid as subsidies, grants and discounts were not sufficient to fully establish the khadi industry as a profitable entity and the liberalisation of the Indian economy from the 1990’s did not help the Khadi industry either. Research revealed the drop in the production of khadi from the year of 1997 to the year 2002. This could also be attributed to the low volume of sales that led to the accumulation of khadi stocks that were never sold. This trend also saw a steep drop in the number of people working in an industry that was very labour driven and needed people who were drawn to work for the sake of

high morals and the preservation of the khadi cloth production. The low returns made by the sector were not attractive either and served as a further deterrent to recruitment (Khadi Emma Tarlo “this is sacred cloth.” M. K. Gandhi).

The KVIC still persevered to expand and try to ensure rural development by increasing rural employment preventing unemployment and reducing the influx of migrant rural population into cities. “The Khadi Gramudyog Bhawans” which dot the country selling fabric and ready-made garments as also other cottage industry products have all been established with the idea of encouraging the urban Indian to buy and wear Khadi more often. Globalisation and liberalisation of India has posed several challenges to KVIC. These challenges also revealed many weaknesses in the system that prevent Khadi from becoming a mainstream fashion choice. The “*low production*” in the khadi sector could be attributed to several reasons like a high dependence on government allotted budgets and an unsureness of rebate policies and their time spans which has a negative effect on production schedules and final output. It was also found that the KVIC could not cut down on production costs and had an inability to adapt and accept current and modern marketing strategies.

This consequently led to an accumulation of unsold stock. Besides this there was a hesitancy in making the products contemporary and modern. (Kethayagounder, 2021). It was also noted that rural businessmen found it tough to adapt to new financing methodology. It also led to gaps in utilising bank loans and subsidies (Kethayagounder, 2021). Despite the thrust put by KVIC on expanding the rural production of Khadi, there were inherent challenges in the systemic implementation of the governmental policies to boost khadi production. The challenges could be attributed partly to the workings of the KVIC and partly to the rural communities that remain unaware of rebates and policies that incentivise khadi production. The gaps in these processes may have led to the poor production and consequent poor sales.

## 6.0 Khadi in Post-Colonial India

After Independence Gandhi’s dream of making Khadi the cloth of choice for every Indian could never be realised. Radhakrishna was of the opinion that the interest in khadi waned post-independence as public memory is always short and initially with the fervour of fighting for independence and khadi being the “freedom fabric”, people thought it was important to flaunt their “Indianism”, this reduced after independence was gained. Post 1947, India began to forge ahead with industrialisation. Large mills and industries for large scale textile production of goods were established by Indian entrepreneurs. These mills mass produced cheaper textiles. Khadi had to compete with Indian machine-made fabric which became the choice of the common man. The reason being attributed to khadi production being extremely labour intensive making it more expensive thus increasing the final price of the product as opposed to a machine-made mass-produced fabric.

Textile sales are directly proportionate to the way it is viewed by its target market. Gandhian Khadi stirred an emotional and patriotic connection, but as mentioned earlier with that connection having ceased to exist, the quality and versatility of the garments worn became vital to the new Indian consumer. Radhakrishna also felt that, “people stopped thinking that khadi was a great fabric to wear not realising how ideal and absorbent it was for Indian weather”. However, Khadi fabric, being hand spun, is delicate and does not withstand many washes like strong machine-made ones and the synthetic fabrics that the burgeoning middle class of Indian consumers began to resort to due to cost effective maintenance and pricing. “*Also, it looks attractive when starched and kept in a showroom, but it does not remain the same after washing. Khadi requires maintenance. Even finer counts and blends of khadi cannot withstand many washes and is thus not conducive for day-to-day purposes*” (Mishra, 2014). Thereby proving that if a starched Khadi garment looks appealing on a mannequin but not after being washed unless starched again, the middle-class consumer who needs a quick, cheap and easily maintained wardrobe option will not choose Khadi. The urban Indian has started looking for options that are stylish, trendy, longer lasting and easy to maintain and to compete Khadi would need a new makeover.

In the political arena the use of Khadi dominated and this can be attributed to the need to present a picture of “honour and humility” (Khadi Emma Tarlo “this is sacred cloth.” M. K. Gandhi). Tarlo refers to Chakrabarty’s opinion on why Indian politicians choose to wear khadi. She says, “*They do so, he suggests, because even if Indians no longer hold Gandhian ideals, they have retained the desire for an alternative modernity and it is this desire that khadi continues to represent even as people’s lives are increasingly informed by capitalism*” (Mishra, P. (2014, October 16). Though Khadi had slowly lost its synonymous nature with a unified national identity, the politicians needed to portray it as a present-day alternative thereby connecting them to Gandhian ideals.

It is through such a strategic portrayal that Khadi still maintains a presence in present-day Indian. But it is not only the male politicians wearing the Khadi garment in the form of white or beige coarse kurta pyjamas and a waistcoat popularised by Jawaharlal Nehru as his Khadi garb. Female politicians are often seen in the plain white or cream coarse Khadi sarees. When khadi is dawned by the community of fashionable artists the same fabric is coloured and is seen to be paired with innovative combinations. The fabric is also a favourite among academics and those who are involved with social activism. The symbolism with Khadi is especially associated with a style that represents a modern “Indianness” replete with a picture of style and a new sense of, “old wine, new bottle” not the hypocrisy of politics.

### 6.0.1 Khadi – Choice of the Elite and Sustainability

As khadi undergoes a revival and collaborations with big fashion names and houses get forged, the burgeoning middle classes in India do not seem to choose Khadi as a favourite. This can be attributed to several reasons, Radhakrishna who was interviewed for this research paper was also part of an interview reviewed by this paper. She stated that high prices forbade the common man from choosing khadi and found a “*disconnect*” between what is easily sellable and what has an elitist tag to it (Kabilan, 2021). On the other hand, some consumers felt that basic shirts that retail elsewhere in the thousands are cheaper at the khadi Emporiums. But this opinion is not voiced by female consumers who find the designs not flattering. Radhakrishna also felt the same way about the menswear but felt that the womenswear was “shabbily designed” (Kabilan, 2021).

Hence it can be inferred that the designs are not attractive for the average working woman or housewife. The middle-class woman who is not in the market for a Sabyasachi creation will look for other non-khadi alternatives if the design and cut of the cheaper khadi emporium alternative is not up to mark.

Nalini Sriram, a designer, talks of the difficulty of maintaining khadi which encourages the middle-class consumer to choose synthetics instead of cottons (Kabilan, 2021). Thereby reiterating the same point touched upon earlier about how khadi needs to be starched to look new and pristine after a few washes, which is not the case with synthetics. Synthetics are also stronger and hence longer lasting. This probably makes the process of maintenance expensive for the average man or woman. Bessie Cecil, another expert, brought in a new angle in the khadi making process. She claimed that the new khadi on sale is not like the completely handmade version that was Gandhian. Apparently only Ponduru, a town in Andhra Pradesh, follows the traditional handmade procedure entirely. She claims that some processes are mechanised and only “Fab India ” follows the original entirely hand-made process, completely causing their prices to be escalated and unaffordable to the common man (Kabilan, 2021). For the common man a discerning eye on authenticity may not be as important as a cost factor hence the genuine khadi that is available in more expensive stores like Fab-India may be preferred only by the elite. Sabita Radhakrishna also claimed that there were other reasons why khadi is not a favourite among the middle classes. She felt that the common man does not feel the need to invest in khadi as his tastes have changed. khadi being coarse in nature is found to be “oppressive” by the middle classes and though it is an absorbent fabric and well suited to the Indian climate many prefer softer textures like mulmuls, thus resulting in khadi becoming a choice of the elite (Kabilan, 2021). Another aspect of the unavailability of genuine khadi is normal retail stores. Sriram talked of this issue claiming that retail stores do not carry khadi garments and it is only the khadi Emporiums that sell khadi which makes it difficult for the masses to find khadi

garments easily (Kabilan, 2021). Hence it can be concluded that if khadi needs to permeate through the masses, stocks being easily available to them becomes vital as does pricing for them to choose khadi over synthetic garments.

Furthermore, it is also important to create an awareness about sustainability of the khadi industry among the masses. Sustainability is an important factor for the educated consumer who places emphasis on sound environmentally efficient and sustainable choices but this does not resonate with the middle classes as much. Designers who deal with sustainable garment production like Mannat Sethi who is the brain behind the brand, “Graine”, Yadvi Agarwal who runs “Yavi” and the brand “Integument” run by Deepak Pathak, all use khadi in their fashion collections. Mannat Sethi states how the current generation places sustainability as a priority when choosing brands to use. (Khanna, 2019). The designer has won recognition for her designs used by “Khadi Gram Udyog” and she specialises in resurrecting the past by making it current with her innovations. The biggest advantage of the khadi production process which pushes designers such as these to use the fabric in order to attract the environmentally conscious consumers can be outlined with the following salient features; No carbon footprint as the whole process is manual and uses no machinery or energy. The amount of water used by the khadi sector to produce one meter of fabric is only 3 litres as against the industrialised mill that uses 55 litres to produce the same. (Mishra, P. (2014, October 16). Thus, with fast reducing water supplies globally, khadi stands out in sustainability. The employment opportunities for the vast rural economy by creating and maintaining khadi clusters that sustain themselves on a full khadi driven economy is also huge. Hence to bring khadi out of the glass cage of being elitist in choice, an all-round perspective of its advantages both environmentally and socioeconomically for the cause of rural development must be stressed upon in the awareness programmes to incentivise the middle classes to buy khadi.

## 7.0 Conclusion

This paper has traced the origins of khadi from the Indian Vedic period to the present day and has spanned over the deep association between khadi and the rise of nationalism in India. The dissociation of khadi with nationalism, post colonialism had made it difficult for the KVIC to promote and sell the fabric as liberalism and globalisation spread over India at a fast pace. This signalled a cause for concern as the preservation of khadi was vital, being a symbol of India’s ancient heritage.

Post freedom in 1947, the strategies of media portrayal were seen to be changed to encourage sales with a steadily declining Khadi sector both in production and sales. This was found to be due to the vast and growing middle class that was tasting affluence and western culture that had permeated through the social structure. Several impediments to the propagation of khadi which was viewed as a “stone age” fashion had emerged as well as problems faced by the rural khadi production sectors that were found to be unaware of subsidies and grants that led to an accumulation of unsold stock. Hence with a view of reinventing the khadi sector, the KVIC led the khadi revival movement. Thereafter the media began portraying khadi less as a nationalistic symbol and diverted its focus on khadi as the choice of new age designers for creating fashionable garments.

In the past five years the thrust by the KVIC to collaborate with new age designers and high fashion moguls has succeeded in revamping the khadi image but it was found that this strategy was aimed at the elite who look for sustainability and trends in fashion. What is important is to address the choices of the burgeoning middle class that represent an extremely large cross section of Indian urban society. The target must be to sell khadi to this class and for the KVIC to portray the benefits of khadi as a garment choice by concentrating on moderate pricing that is competitive so that they may choose khadi over a ready-made garment from a factory. By interviewing handloom spokesperson and textile expert Sabita Radhakrishna it was clear that media hype and strategy played a vital role in sustaining interest in what she called a “sustained legacy”. She also felt that sustainable fashion and carbon footprint did not seem to be the vital factor for the middle classes and in the interview reviewed as part of the literature studied, she felt that it was easy accessibility, good designs, low cost and low upkeep with long lasting wear that has stood out as a priority for them. This paper hence concludes with this strategy as the focus going forward in addition to creating awareness about sustaining the planet through the simple choice of khadi while keeping in trend with fashion



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