

## A RESEARCH ON REPOSITIONING KHADI AS A SUSTAINABLE FASHION TEXTILE

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**Abstract** - The concept of 'Sustainability' is gaining popularity all over the world. The producers as well as consumers are thinking consciously about their lifestyle and the choices they make. Lot of new opportunities are sprouting aligning to this, and the world is vowing to the same. Along with the rising consumer consciousness all over the globe the consumers have started giving importance to Sustainability. They have realised their responsibility towards the environment, and they need to give back what they take from it. The focus of the masses has shifted towards conscious living and demand for sustainable products. Business have started catering to these demands in a n equally proactive manner by involving methods and processes which can fulfil the future demands of the consumers. Despite of the growing demand towards Sustainable product differing is the situation of one of the ancient textile 'Khadi'. It is very important for India to not to forget its legacy and rather make efforts to present this high up to the world. This research will identify the position of 'Khadi', and its image in the consumer's mind. The purpose of the research is to strengthen 'Khadi' as a Sustainable Fashion textile merchandise so that it fits in the urban life of the modern Indian masses

**Keywords:** *Khadi; Sustainable Textile; Fashion; Repositioning; Modern Consumer*

### Introduction:

The world economy is growing at a very fast pace due to the increased consumption of consumers. eMarketer, a research organization published that sales across the world are growing at a faster pace than ever, including retail and online purchases the same had reached around \$22.492 trillion by 2014 and were expected to be at \$28.300 trillion by 2018, indicating a 5.5% of growth year by year (eMarketer, 2014). The increased consumption and economic growth results in the increase of production to fulfill the needs and wants of the consumer. Economic growth adds to a very progressive mood but the constant production to feed the grown consumption also has a negative face to it. Depleting resources, spread of high pollution, weakened ecosystems, and overall threat to the planet's huge climatic imbalance, all this has been on the altar of high consumptions for humanity. Endless economic growth has all been rampantly achieved under the cover of modern religion. Fast fashion ignites the demand for huge quantities by luring customers, leading to sellers to be able to make profits by producing at low costs. Never have been thought about the cost which the environment has been paying for it, as all attention has been paid to producing and consuming products rigorously. Only a few of these can be discarded fairly, rather

these items that use valuable energy and materials and that should be well sustained and created for lifelong durations. (McKibben, 2004).

In conjunction with the rise in consumption, which is both a trend as well as an economic concept, consumers have started giving importance to Sustainability. Consumers have realized their responsibility towards nature, and they need to give back what they take from it. According to a recent Nielsen Global Survey 2014, More than half of the online consumers across the globe in sixty countries are ready to pay high costs for products sold by sellers paying attention towards positive social and environmental effect.

"Consumers globally are showing keen interests to a brand's social intent, and it is amongst the considerations that impact their purchase decisions," as said by Amy Fenton, global leader of public development and sustainability. "This behavior is rising, and it brings prospects for substantial effect in our society, adding to facilitating to raise portion for brands (Taylor, 2014)." Hence Sustainability in eatables, fashion and lifestyle products or any other services is the way forward. India is not far behind to appreciate the concept for sustainability. Many of the Indian Designers have been showcasing their Green Collections or sustainable concepts in India and globally as well. For the designers Green has become the new Black. Consumer demand trends have been moving more towards ethically produced clothing, the movement is still slow, but it has been surely picking up in India. A pure indicator towards this is the growing sales of brands like Mother Earth-selling ethical fashion and home products, which has already crossed One Billion turnover. LVMH, a globally renowned luxury group has also invested a stake in Indian brand Fabindia. (Newsdesk, 2012). The Brands have realized that being sustainable or eco-friendly just does not add a Unique Selling Point to the Product but an opportunity to fulfill their social responsibility as well.

### Research Objective:

The objective of this research is to explore and study the potential of repositioning Khadi as a sustainable fashion textile product that fits into a modern urban lifestyle of the Indian consumer. In the process the study will also evaluate the growth of sustainability in fashion whilst looking into varied concepts of fashion movements like slow fashion, textile craft revival movements and the modern fashion consumer lifestyle choices. The output of this research will suggest strategies that may help in repositioning Khadi as a Fashion Commodity.

**About Khadi:** Khadi- the existence of which is sustainability, and which Mahatma Gandhi referred as the 'Fabric of Liberalization' doesn't seem to be gaining as much popularity. As said by Devendra Desai who was also the chairman of Khadi Village Industries Commission (KVIC) Saurashtra Rachanatmak Samiti (SRS), with so much stimulus towards Sustainability, contradictory to it is the situation of 'Khadi'. (Dave, 2014).

There has been a growing demand for Khadi in the last few years, with innovations with respect to Khadi fabric and the designer's intervention, it does has helped in strengthening the sales in the sector. But the growth appears to be very sluggish but seems to be soaring high in the forthcoming years. Industry experts have ascribed the surge to the availability of designer Khadi, which is attracting youth towards a better perception of this fabric. There is, therefore, a need for repositioning Khadi. Exploring the consumer mindset while looking at the Marketing concepts to bring Khadi into a fashion and lifestyle product concept and making it the textile for future.

**Status of Khadi:** The Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC), has been recognized under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act, 1956, it is a legislative body engaged in strengthening the growth and development of Rural Indian economy. The KVIC is a decentralized organization of which the major goals are to generate rural employment in the nonfarm field at a very lower per capita investment. It functions to make efforts in for promotion of Khadi and Village industry (Khadi and Village Industries Commission, n.d.).

The total KVI production during 2021-22 is estimated at Rupees 1904.49 crore as against Rupees 2324.24 crore in the previous year of 2020-21. Following are approximate sales of KVI products is Rupees 3527.71 crore in 2021-22 and Rupees 4211.26 in the period of the previous year. The total employment in persons in year has also not grown much as it stands to 497498 in year 2021-22 and 497089 in the corresponding period of the previous year. The overall performance of the sector with respect to production, sales and employment during the last few years has been depicted in the following Table (Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India, 2014-15):

| Financial Year | Number of Khadi Institutions | Number of Artisans | Number of Artisans on Aadhaar | Khadi Production (Rs.in Cr) | Khadi Sales (Rs.in Cr) |
|----------------|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 2020-21        | 2816                         | 497484             | 390332                        | 1904.49                     | 3527.71                |
| 2019-20        | 2737                         | 497089             | 363427                        | 2324.24                     | 4211.26                |
| 2018-19        | 2632                         | 495244             | 325265                        | 1963.3                      | 3215.13                |
| 2017-18        | 2518                         | 465386             | 297703                        | 1626.66                     | 2510.21                |

|         |      |        |        |         |        |
|---------|------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| 2016-17 | 2375 | 455854 | 255225 | 1520.83 | 2146.6 |
|---------|------|--------|--------|---------|--------|

*Table 1 Performance of KVIC (The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium enterprises, Government of India)*

**Reviving Khadi from Freedom Fabric to Fashion Fabric:** Varied designers have contributed to revival of Khadi for say in 1985 designer Devika Bhojwani established the label 'Swadeshi' selling Khadi clothing. These were displayed at nearly around 5000 Khadi emporia for sale, of these she also presented 85 garments at a fashion show in 1989 at Mumbai. Following her, in 1990 designer Ritu Kumar also created a collection called "Tree of Life" to bring Khadi to Fashion circuit. Many other designers have also been using Khadi Since and GOI is making hard efforts to bring life to the freedom fabric. It has also been observed by the designers that the sluggish growth of Khadi is only due to the stringent system it has pass through of red tapism and bureaucracy which has affected its wide distribution system as well involving middlemen, commissions etc.(www.icmrindia.org, 2003).

**Government Support to Khadi:** Government may had soon realized that the system for Khadi has not been working in high favor to get profits. Soon KVIC formed a board and took various initiatives to push it. It collaborated with designers to make designer Khadi; made it feel fashionable yet affordable. It also had set up its first air-conditioned store in Delhi to lure the modern consumers and set example of the new age Khadi they can resonate with. Khadi was registered as a brand name, protecting it legally from infringement and mis use. The aim was to keep up with the other textiles which were gaining popularity now and then and make it more acceptable to the masses. A special cell was also set up by National Institute of Design based on the memorandum of understanding signed to support KVIC in innovation related to Khadi and providing other design and marketing related services (www.icmrindia.org, 2003). Since many years there have been research and development of blending Khadi with other fibers and materials to improve Khadi's quality. In 2002, 'Tencel Khadi' was used by the designer Deepika Kovind to create a collection of ensembles in association with Karnataka Khadi Board. Tencel is a semi-synthetic fiber made of wood pulp, giving a vey comfort and luxury feel. It also offers less shrinkage compared to the Khadi fabric. Government has already been supporting the Khadi sector artisans through billions of grants and subsidies already. Last but not least, efforts have been made to eradicate illegal and malpractices in the sector to keep the genuine intact. It was realized despite many efforts the results were under as expected and more thoughtful efforts were required to let the fabric bear the global challenge. It has indeed become a matter of serious concern.(www.icmrindia.org, 2003).

## Research Findings & Discussions

Khadi is defined as hand spun and hand-woven fabric in India. It is associated with the Indian legacy. It is a very light weight fabric and has properties to stay cool in summers and warm in winters. The fabric lends its exclusivity to the texture that no

two pieces can ever look identical. It appropriately fits into all the criteria of Sustainability from growing of the crop to producing the fiber, to weaving fabric, to generating employment, to the end of the same in the product's life cycle. It enables the equity between the elements of economy, environment and society.

Khadi is a Sustainable Product; we can put all the aspects of it in Model for Sustainable Products by Green Strategy:

- Khadi is made by the weavers and skilled artisans with naturally grown cotton, satisfying 1 & 5 factor
- Khadi can be made in superior qualities and custom designs, satisfying 6 & 7 factor
- Khadi can be Remade, Recycled and Up cycled to make a new product or a secondhand product, satisfying 2 & 4 factor
- It can be rented, loaned, swapped by the consumers

**The Sales of Khadi in the past years have shown a very slow growth:** Between the financial years 2016-17 and 2020-21, the Khadi sector experienced notable growth. The number of Khadi institutions increased by 18.6%, rising from 2,375 in 2016-17 to 2,816 in 2020-21. The artisan base grew by 9.1%, from 455,854 to 497,484 artisans. The proportion of artisans with Aadhaar also rose significantly by 52.9%, from 255,225 to 390,332.

However, Khadi production and sales saw contrasting trends. Production fell by 25.1%, decreasing from ₹1,520.83 crore in 2016-17 to ₹1,904.49 crore in 2020-21. Sales similarly dropped by 64.1%, from ₹2,146.60 crore to ₹3,527.71 crore. Notably, the decrease in production was preceded by higher figures in the earlier years, with production reaching a peak in 2019-20 before falling in the subsequent years. There is a very sluggish growth in the times when Demand for Sustainability is rising globally as well as in India. Industry experts have attributed this increase to availability of designer or fashion Khadi, which is changing thinking of the youth and attracting them towards it. The Sales of Khadi is generally high in the third quarter which is when the Rebate period starts.

**Reasons for Decline in the Sales of Khadi:** Khadi, has always been portrayed as a fabric of freedom since the independence era, it was a way of self-reliance. Fabric lost its status after the Industrial Revolution, when the mill made fabric became much accessible to the masses at a lower price. Khadi has not progressed over time and lost it to these poly mill made fabrics. The sale of any product depends upon its performance and unique selling properties. The two factors i.e. The obsolete performance and loss of market demand of 'Khadi' lead to its decline.

**Demand for Sustainable Products is on Rise:** A survey was conducted to evaluate the growing demand of sustainability in fashion amongst 200 respondents within the Delhi region to understand the Demand for Sustainable Products in India. The data was collected through Closed Ended Questionnaire circulated through Online as well as Off-line medium. The same showed high demand for sustainable products.

**Understanding the Brand Image of Khadi on Indian Consumers and their Expectations** In-depth interviews were

conducted amongst the purposely chosen Khadi consumers in India. The outcome of the interviews reveals that Khadi is a Natural and Organic Fabric which is Handmade, Handspun, Hand-woven, cool fabric and the characteristics are well known to all. Khadi as a philosophy related to Gandhi Era and self-reliance. The launch of the new Khadi mark and logo has changed Khadi's image from a fabric to a Brand as consumers could remember the Orange colored Khadi Logo. The first preference of consumers amongst Cotton, Silk, Khadi and Poly Fabrics for their everyday use, consumers preferred Khadi. Also, the consumers mentioned that the Stores other than Connaught stores does not have a very attractive atmosphere. Regarding pricing consumers felt Khadi is affordable and fits their pocket. Consumers felt that Khadi only caters to the older Age group and does not have designs and collections suitable for younger age group. Most of them had no idea about the availability of Khadi Blended Fabrics like Polyvastra, Embellished Khadi, and Khadi-Silk. In context of Promotions each one could only relate to the Rebate period which starts after Gandhi Jayanti, no promotion anyone could recall for Khadi.

## Conclusion

Repositioning is the process of changing the current image of a goods or services sold by a brand or altering the market in which these are sold. The brand needs to deliver value differentiating its product from the competitors at a suitable price to its target market.(Proteus Marketing, n.d.). Repositioning involves changing target markets or the differential advantage or both. There are four generic repositioning strategies.

Khadi needs Repositioning in two ways based on the findings of the Interviews of the Khadi consumer. The chart below depicts the possible Repositioning of Khadi.

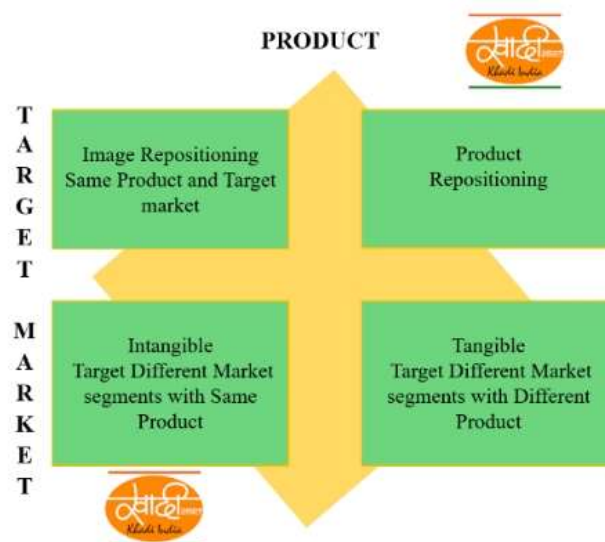


Figure 1 Repositioning of Khadi

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