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Khadi: A proud choice of Indian youth

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Abstract

Khadi is a hand-spun and hand-woven fabric that has a rich cultural history in India. The history of Khadi dates back to pre-colonial India, where it was used as a symbol of resistance against British rule and as a tool to promote self-reliance. During the Indian independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi encouraged the use of Khadi as a way to break the monopoly of British textiles and promote the idea of self-sufficiency. Today, Khadi continues to be a symbol of Indian heritage, but it is also becoming increasingly popular among young people who are seeking eco-friendly and culturally conscious fashion choices. This paper explores Khadi not only as a textile but also as a fabric of historical significance, a fabric that provides employment to the rural population and a fabric that is sustainable and eco-friendly fashion option for youth.

Keywords: Khadi, Indian youth, hand-spun, hand-woven fabric

Introduction

Khadi is made by spinning cotton, silk, or wool fibers into yarn on a spinning wheel known as a charkha. The yarn is then woven into fabric on a handloom, resulting in a fabric that is strong, durable, and has a unique texture. The hand-spinning and hand-weaving processes give Khadi its characteristic roughness and unevenness, which are prized by many people for their natural beauty and authenticity. One of the key features of Khadi is its versatility. It can be woven into a variety of weights and textures, making it suitable for a range of clothing and home furnishings, including shirts, dresses, jackets, saris, dhotis, bed covers, and towels. It is also breathable and absorbent, making it ideal for use in hot and humid climates. Additionally, Khadi can be easily dyed, allowing for a wide range of colors and designs to be incorporated into the fabric.

What is Khadi fabric?

Khadi is hand-spun and handwoven fabric using a spinning wheel called a *charkha*. Khadi fabric is also known as Khaddar. The cloth is usually handwoven using cotton, silk, and wool. It is produced in various states of India, and all of them make a unique type of Khadi fabric.

Khadi yarn is commonly around a thicker 20 counts and is great for upholstery or homeware. For apparels, yarn is finer, with 60-80 counts being perfect for shirts and dresses that need some structure and crispness. Whereas an even finer variety of 100 and 120 counts or even higher are suitable for summer wears like dresses and tunics.

The 500 or 1000 count Khadi is a variety that was once renowned as the finest Khadi and was of very superior quality. Today, it is very rare to find. It is very difficult to spin and weave due to how delicate and fine the yarns. It requires the right temperature, humidity and a very skilled weaver to be produced.

Firstly, the fibre is converted into yarn using *charkha*. Yarn is then weaved into fibre using looms. There are various other steps, such as dyeing and strengthening. Traditionally, Khadi fabric is manufactured without using any natural resources or energy. But with time, the manufacturer has changed. All the processes can be mechanised.

Manufacturing process of Khadi

1. Raw cotton: Raw cotton is collected for manufacturing Khadi fabric.

2. **Ginning:** Cotton is separated from lint and seeds. The moisture content is also removed.
3. **Carding:** Carding produces continuous web by detangling, cleaning, and intermixing fibres.
4. **Spinning:** Cotton is spun to make a workable cotton thread.
5. **Warping:** Warping is the process of preparing cotton for weaving.
6. **Weaving:** The yarns are taken from the bobbins and placed on the looms.
7. **Dyeing:** It is the process of adding colours to fabrics. Natural dyes are used for dyeing.
8. **Printing:** An opaque white pigment is used to print on Khadi fabric.

Types of Khadi

There is a misconception that Khadi is made of cotton only. But Khadi is made out of silk and wool as well. The different states in India are producing various types of Khadi fabric. Each one of them is popular for its unique Khadi fabric.

Khadi Cotton - As the name suggests, the Khadi cotton fabric is handwoven using cotton. It is also famously known as muslin. It is a perfect choice for Indian climate conditions. The Khadi cotton fabric is light, breathable, and dry. West Bengal produces a large quantity of muslin in India. Mysore Karnataka is famous for silk, primarily producing Khadi cotton. Ponduru, Andhra Pradesh, is known as Khadi village because they produce completely handwoven Khadi cotton.

Khadi Silk - Khadi silk fabric is made by spinning pure silk or blending other yarns. Matka silk or Ahimsa silk is the most popular type of Khadi silk. It is made with the waste of mulberry silk which is obtained mainly from Karnataka and Kashmir. Another type of Khadi silk is tussar silk. It is mainly found in the eastern parts of India. It is lighter and cooler compared to other types of Khadi silk. Bhagalpur, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Malda are famous for producing tussar silk. Chanderi silk is also one of the famous Khadi silk in India. It is mainly produced in Chanderi, Madhya Pradesh.

Woollen Khadi - Fine quality wool is hand spun and hand woven to produce woollen Khadi fabric. Pashmina, the most loved woollen Khadi, is the purest form of cashmere. It is found in Kashmir.

History of Khadi

Khadi is a hand-spun and hand-woven fabric that has a rich cultural and historical significance in India. It is made from cotton, silk, or wool and is known for its unique texture, durability, and versatility. The word 'Khadi' comes from the Sanskrit word 'khaddar', which means 'to weave'.

The origins of Khadi can be traced back to the early 19th century when India was under British colonial rule. During this time, India was forced to import cloth from Britain, leading to the decline of the indigenous textile industry and an increase in poverty. In response to this, the Indian nationalist and freedom fighter, Mahatma Gandhi, launched the Swadeshi movement, which advocated for the boycott of British goods and the promotion of Indian-made products. One of the key components of this movement was the production and promotion of Khadi.

Gandhi believed that the production of Khadi would not only provide employment and improve the economic condition of the rural population, but also help in the revival of the indigenous textile industry and inculcate a sense of national pride and self-reliance. He encouraged people to spin their own cloth and wear it as a symbol of their commitment to the

independence movement. Today, Khadi continues to be a symbol of national pride and is widely used for traditional and modern garments, home furnishings, and accessories.

Challenges

Weaving Khadi fabric is challenging due to certain properties characteristic of handspun yarn. Since the yarn is irregular in thickness, dyeing is inconsistent. Khadi is also prone to shrinking after wash. It also tends to be expensive compared to mill spun & power loom woven fabric due to the competition in the market from the latter. However, the benefits of Khadi definitely outweigh the challenges of its production. With experienced weavers, it is possible to produce more uniform yarns.

Benefits in wearing Khadi

1. Indian Khadi clothes can be worn in any weather. It's warm in the winters and cool in the summers.
2. Khadi material is a body-friendly fabric that does not cause any allergies or irritations, unlike other synthetic fabrics.
3. Khadi dyes and weaves are done by hand. Each Khadi pure product is different and has a very peculiar style and unique finish.
4. The loom used in making Khadi handspun cotton fabric combines the threads to allow maximum air to permeate, which is very soothing, especially in summers.
5. Khadi products are highly durable and long-lasting
6. Due to the nature of the craft where the charkha and looms can be easily set up in small space, it can provide employment and hence food to the rural population
7. The making of Khadi is eco-friendly, as it does not rely on any electric unit and manufacturing processes and thus has a low carbon footprint.
8. The characteristic feature of a Khadi handmade cloth is its imperfections and irregularities.
9. Khadi fabric is quite easy to maintain as it needs to be hand washed and ironed for a fresh, refined look. It is prone to shrinking to some extent even in the case of pre-shrunk fabrics but this can be easily fixed by ironing later. For washing, it is advised that strong chemical detergents are not used.

Khadi in Present Times

Today, Khadi continues to be a symbol of Indian heritage, but it is also becoming increasingly popular among young people who are seeking eco-friendly and culturally conscious fashion choices.

One of the main appeals of Khadi is its sustainability. The production process of Khadi is highly eco-friendly, as it does not rely on mass production techniques or synthetic dyes, and therefore has a lower environmental impact compared to other forms of textile production. The fabric is produced using traditional techniques that are free from the use of machines and electricity, which reduces the carbon footprint of production. Additionally, the use of natural dyes made from leaves, roots, and bark reduces the harmful chemicals that are commonly used in the production of other fabrics.

The production of Khadi also provides employment to many rural communities in India, which helps to preserve traditional hand-spinning and weaving techniques, and also supports the economic development of rural areas. This provides a unique opportunity for young people to support sustainable and fair trade practices through their fashion choices.

In terms of fashion, Khadi has a unique texture and feel that sets it apart from other fabrics. The texture of the fabric gives it a natural and organic feel, making it ideal for casual and bohemian styles. The fabric is also incredibly versatile, and can be transformed into a wide variety of styles, including dresses, skirts, shirts, pants, and even jackets. It is available in a range of natural colors, which can be dyed to produce a variety of other colors, making it possible to create a range of different outfits.

Khadi is also a durable and long-lasting fabric, which makes it a smart investment for young people who are looking for clothing that will last for years to come. Unlike synthetic fabrics, which can lose their shape and quality over time, Khadi only improves with age, developing a soft, comfortable feel that is perfect for everyday wear.

The versatility of Khadi also makes it ideal for various occasions and seasons. Lightweight Khadi can be worn as summer wear, while heavier varieties can be used for winter clothing. The fabric is also breathable, making it suitable for warmer climates, and is easy to care for, as it can be hand-washed or machine-washed.

In recent years, there has been a growing trend of designers and brands incorporating Khadi into their collections, which has helped to increase its popularity among young people. High-end fashion houses, as well as affordable and sustainable fashion brands, are using Khadi to create contemporary and stylish pieces that appeal to a wider audience. The use of Khadi has also helped to revive traditional techniques and designs, which are being incorporated into modern clothing. This has given rise to a new generation of designers who are taking inspiration from traditional techniques and incorporating them into contemporary fashion.

One of the ways in which Khadi is being incorporated into contemporary fashion is through the use of different techniques, such as block printing, tie-dye, and embroidery. These techniques are used to create unique and interesting designs, which are then incorporated into modern clothing.

Khadi and Indian Youth

Khadi has a special significance for Indian youth, as it represents a combination of tradition, sustainability, and cultural consciousness. For young people who are seeking environmentally friendly and socially responsible fashion choices, Khadi offers an attractive option.

The use of Khadi by Indian youth is not only about making a fashion statement, but also about making a political and cultural statement. By wearing Khadi, young people are expressing their commitment to preserving traditional hand-spinning and weaving techniques, supporting rural communities, and promoting sustainable production practices. In addition, Khadi is also seen as a way to connect with India's rich cultural heritage. By wearing clothing that has been made using techniques that have been passed down for generations, young people are able to feel a sense of connection to their cultural roots, and to the cultural and political struggles of their forebears.

As the popularity of Khadi among Indian youth continues to grow, it is becoming an increasingly important part of the Indian fashion landscape. With its combination of tradition, sustainability, and cultural consciousness, Khadi is becoming a symbol of Indian heritage and of a new generation of socially responsible consumers.

The Role of Indian Youth in Promoting Khadi

The Indian youth has a crucial role to play in promoting and

popularizing Khadi. They can help spread awareness about the benefits of Khadi and encourage others to support the production of this fabric. There are several ways in which the Indian youth can contribute to the promotion of Khadi:

1. **Wearing Khadi:** The most straightforward way to promote Khadi is to wear it. By wearing Khadi, the youth can demonstrate their commitment to sustainable fashion and show their support for local industries and crafts.
2. **Supporting local Khadi producers:** The youth can support local Khadi producers by purchasing their products and spreading the word about their work. This can help to create a demand for Khadi and provide a source of livelihood for rural communities.
3. **Organizing events and campaigns:** The youth can organize events and campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of Khadi and the importance of supporting local industries. These events can include fashion shows, exhibitions, and workshops on the production of Khadi.
4. **Using social media:** Social media platforms are powerful tools for promoting causes and spreading awareness. The youth can use social media to share their experiences with Khadi and encourage others to support this fabric.

Conclusion

Khadi has come a long way since its inception during the independence movement. Today, it is a popular fabric among fashion designers and is used to create a range of garments, including sarees, shirts, and trousers. Despite its popularity, Khadi remains an important symbol of India's independence movement and is still associated with the ideals of simplicity, honesty, and self-reliance. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in Khadi among the Indian youth. This is due in part to the growing awareness of sustainable fashion and the desire to support local industries and crafts. The youth of India are becoming increasingly conscious of the impact of their purchases on the environment and are looking for alternatives to fast fashion. Khadi offers a solution to these concerns, as it is made from natural fibers and is produced using traditional handlooms, which are environmentally friendly. In addition, the production of Khadi provides a source of livelihood for rural communities and helps to preserve India's rich cultural heritage. By supporting the production of Khadi, the Indian youth are not only promoting sustainable fashion, but they are also helping to create a fairer and more equitable society. As young people continue to seek environmentally friendly and socially responsible fashion options, it is likely that the popularity of Khadi will continue to grow, and that it will continue to play an important role in the cultural and economic landscape of India.

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