

“Woven Blessings” of a Woolen Blanket “Ghongadi” of India for “Holistic Social Design”

Mallika Dabhade-Samant,
Assistant Professor, Art and Design,
School of Fashion Technology,
Pune, India

Anshu Sharma,
Guide and Head of the Department,
SNDT Women's University,
Mumbai, India

ABSTRACT

The current scenario of garbage piles rising continuously around us, scarce resources like water, over consumption of energy, use of chemicals, carbon footprints, pollution, and so on; has created a huge demand for ecofriendly and sustainable options in textiles and clothing. In the recent years, Global warming has exploded in environmental impact on every level of living beings, which is worrisome. The key of sustainability was indeed vital which could have started long back. However, we kept relishing the benefits of globalization & industrialization that changed rather modified our lives with the use of technology, new products, new habitats, new psyche & new “us”. Apparently, our changed lifestyle is a witness for it. The “change” brought by “Industrial revolution” played a significant role in expanding Fashion industry. On the other hand, it has also left some worst side such as “mishap at Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, Rana Plaza collapse, working & sanitary conditions for workers, effects of chemical, tools & technologies that affect workers, violation of working hours, exploitation of women & child labor etc.” all of these have been exposed & publicized that created a sensitivity amongst the industry & in the consumers who are the integral part of this industry.

Keywords: Sustainability, global warming, globalization, Eco- friendly

Background

According to the survey, the Fashion industry worldwide is now active in practicing “Sustainability” with the use of natural & sustainable raw materials & processes. Recently, brands such as Marks and Spencer’s, Patagonia, Adidas, H & M Conscious collection, Levis, Puma to name a few, have taken a pledge to abandon unsafe, unethical processes & practices to bring a

safe, fair & ethically sustainable environment for the workers & also to provide such products to the consumers.

Thankfully, due to globalization & technological connectivity throughout the world, brought the sensitivity & sensibility in the consumers by cautiously selecting their products for its authenticity, its make & natural contents. This has made all of us to knowingly buy the Fashion product which is

safe towards environment & society as well. Apparently, the applicability of such “Sustainable approach” has encouraged products & practices that are Natural, Eco-friendly, Handmade using fairly paid labor & production processes also having limited impact on life as well as environment.

India, having a rich culture of Crafts resources, its optimization, waste management and sustainable material usage has been greatly interconnected with the entities such as economy, community, social and their exceptional hand crafted manner; all together; for its Sustainable Design.

At present, this unorganized & informal sector of ingenious crafts of India, is pushed by loss of markets for few home-grown crafts due to ignorance, declining skills & difficulty to cater to new market for which many of them now struggling for their sustenance. Unfortunately, due to this, some crafts are not only facing a tremendous damage to its identity as a “Sustainable Product” but are also awaiting for the opportunities where they will be perceived as the most “Sustainable & Eco Friendly crafts” on the global platform.

The research is an initiative to offer a solution that not only is “Sustainable & Ethical” but also concentrates more upon “Creating a value for Life & Environment through its Sustenance” by carefully employing raw materials & resources- which as a whole can be a sensible yet sensitive solution of being a “Holistic Social Design”.

The communities of Crafts Persons involved in crafts; strive hard to retain these processes to create a plunged economy for themselves with a safe environment & surroundings for the future generations. These communities of “Craft Persons” need a platform that promotes not only the “Sustainable Craft” but are also meant to “Preserve the well-being & livelihood of the people and surroundings to create the craft that utilizes their mind, heart and soul.”

The objective of this research is to bring into attention one of such unnoticed crafts- “Ghongadi” (A hand spun, hand woven woolen blanket) which is absolutely unexplored & can be rediscovered in context with Fashion Industry. With an aim to create a multifunctional yet innovative product range, to meet the current global demand by keeping craft’s authentic essence intact; this research is a sensible yet sensitive solution towards introducing a “Holistic Social Design” not only for craft but for craft person and the community as a whole.

Introduction

“Ghongadi” is an age-old & extremely popular piece of woolen textile used & made in rural areas of Maharashtra. The “Ghongadi” is a regional name of the hand spun, hand woven blanket of Maharashtra (One of the historically prime states of India) made in the pure “Desi” wool. The “Ghongadi” is also mentioned in the cultural as well as traditional folklore of Maharashtra that describe a nomadic community called “Dhangars”- (the Shepherds) of the region who breed & posse ‘Desi sheep’ of various rural regions such as Marathwada, Vidarbh & Solapur.



Fig. 1.1: ‘Dhangars’ of Maharashtra- (Image courtesy- Google images)

This community tends to herd, feed, or guard sheep & shred their hair timely. These hair then passed on to the sub community known as “Sangars”- (Weavers) who later hand spin, naturally process & hand weave these yarns using a basic floor loom into a beautiful, rugged rough yet elegant piece of textile

which is known as “Ghongadi”. This multi-seasonal and multipurpose piece of textiles which is considered to be the most important part of the lifestyle of these communities.

Made in pure wool procured from the local breed of sheep and processed purely by hand right from spinning the yarn on “Charkha” (A traditional spinning system introduced by Mahatma Gandhiji during Khadi Movement), finishing treatment using natural ingredients such as Tamarind paste, warping of the hand spun yarns and weaving the yarn on a basic Floor Pitt Loom; involves zero mechanical process, making it the most authentically Hand Crafted woolen blanket.



Fig. 1.2: The traditional “Ghongadi” Hand spun, hand woven woolen blanket from Maharashtra

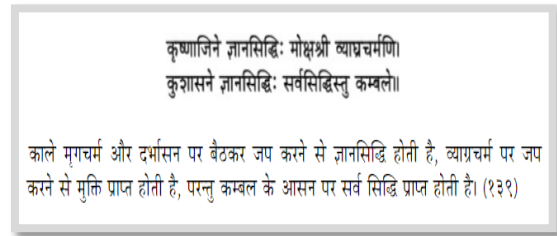
The community also describes that the climatic conditions of the region play a major role in the thickness, color, softness & coarseness of the wool including the overall quality. Currently the users of “Ghongadi” are the older generation who has possessed “Ghongadi” for its benefits & uses. According to the recent article published in *Times of India* newspaper “The generation involved in the production of Ghongadi is older generation as the younger generation has moved to the metro cities for their survival & other job opportunities, since the craft is not getting commercially sold”.

According to all the senior and older master artisans of the community, who are practicing and actively involved in Ghongadi weaving till date; state the significance of this woolen blanket with its special mention in the most

ancient & important work of literature and philosophy of India;

“The Bhagavad Gita”

It is mentioned in the shloka that goes as follows,



Which means,

“The one who meditates by sitting on the Indian antelope’s skin will gain intelligence, the one who meditates on tiger skin will be free and released from sanasara, and the one who sits on the Woolen blanket i.e ‘Kambala’ will gain eternity and will become strong, and unyielding.”

Besides being “*sustainable, eco-friendly and natural*”, this craft has been blessed with its ritualistic background, medicinal assets & multi seasonal use; makes it not only “Sustainable” but also adds a “Holistic” facet to its identity.

This traditionally and culturally significant “Ghongadi” having a typical stance of being a blanket; has never been explored in the fashion context hence, was a challenge to discover an array of product range to suit the Fashion Network.

Despite of having such versatile character, the craft of Ghongadi is still unknown in the Fashion context. Such craft, if exposed in Fashion network with an “Empathetic Concern” (Understanding the feeling and moving ahead with action) will deliver a modern yet holistic range of products to suit every need of sustainable agenda worldwide.

J
T
A
T
M

Methodology

To overcome the typical stance of “Ghongadi” by keeping its traditional as well as cultural significance intact; was a challenge in the product development. It needed a strong base for understanding how the current market grasps the changes made with the craft thus, the market analysis through a survey was essential.

Due to the very limited published data on “*Ghongadi*”, the Primary survey incorporates closed interpersonal interaction conducted with Ghongadi weavers, & other sources consisting a mix of Fashion and Craft conscious people from Education, Design, Craft and Industry gave the insight on how the further exploration of the craft can be carried out.

Chart no.1 (Question- Where have you come across the product of Ghongadi?)

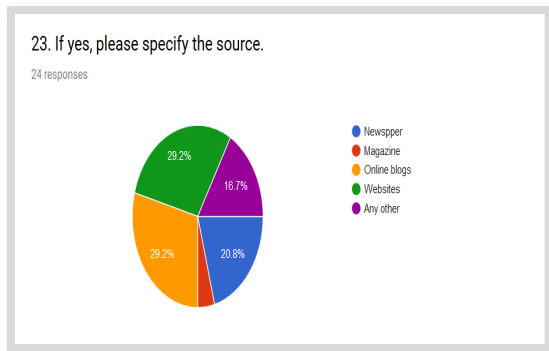


Fig. 1.3: Response through the secondary survey

A primary survey conducted to understand the need of the Research for which the stratified sample was selected which consists of Fashion and Non Fashion professionals, Craft Lovers, store owners, artisans, Designers, NGO Owners and organizations. The data was collected in the form of the reviews, feedbacks, forms, questionnaire & suggestions, that furnished the idea about the further product development which is the outcome of this research paper. The reviews indicated following facts.

Chart no.2 (Question- What kind of change would you expect in the existing product of Ghongadi?)

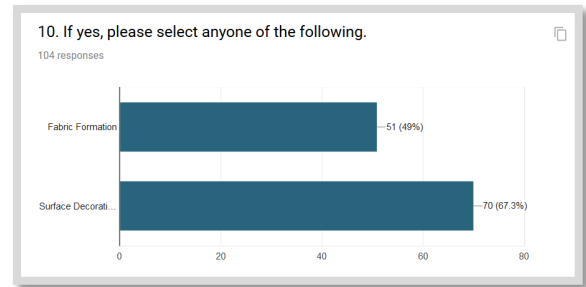


Fig. 1.4: Response through the secondary survey

The simplicity of the surface having a rugged & coarse feel provided the possibility of utilizing various surface exploration techniques. Based on the survey; various other techniques for Surface exploration of “Ghongadi” were suggested as follows.

- Natural dyeing techniques of woolen yarns of Bhuj, Gujarat
- Pitt Loom weaving of Bhuj, Gujarat
- Rabari Mirror work of Bidar, Karnataka

Based on to the survey & considering the identities of above techniques as the pure “*Handmade and Hand crafted*” utilizing sustainable raw materials that are practiced in the various communities from the various rural parts of India, were selected. It was made sure that every single detail that’s the part of the further *Product Intervention* is procured from the various other Craft communities that strive to uplift their own craft for their survival.

Surface and Product Exploration

Chart no.3 (Question- Specify which technique would suit the best as Value Addition on the product of Ghongadi?)

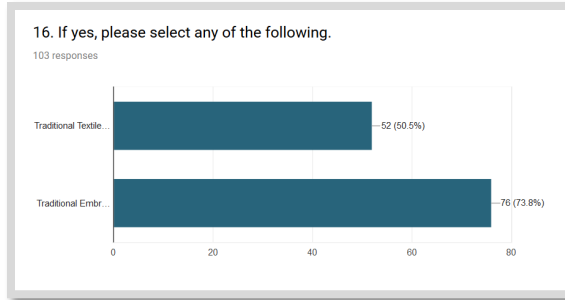


Fig. 1.5: Response through the secondary survey

The survey also gave an insight on other options that can be creatively used with “Ghongadi” in the following chart.

Chart no.4 (Question- What kind of technique according to you is most suitable for the product of Ghongadi?)

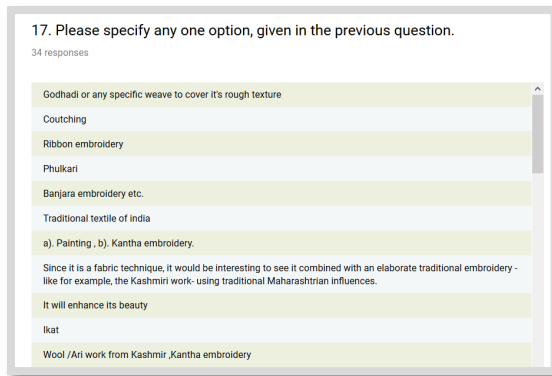


Fig. 1.6: Response through the secondary survey

Based on the survey the surface of the typical Ghongadi was explored using basic hand embroidery stitches in a creative manner.



Fig. 1.7: Exploration using free hand embroidery

The above experimentation has decreased the coarse surface of the craft & uplifted its aesthetic appeal through the use of combination of surface techniques.

Results

The consideration for “Ghongadi” as a fashion product could be popularized by exploring it in regards with design attributes such as its patterns, addition of colors, smoothness and diversified products such as Fashion outerwear, Fashion accessories and Home Fashion and Lifestyle products.

Chart no.5 (Question- Specify which Product Range you would like to accept the Ghongadi in?)

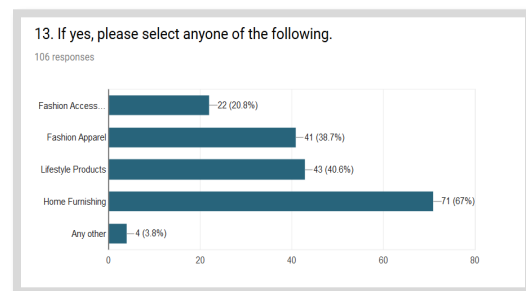


Fig. 1.8: Response through the secondary survey

The product development is a result of the detailed study of the craft in terms of its functions, characteristics & surface feel by keeping its holistic approach unbroken. The Fashion product (Apparel and Accessories) was selected based on the purpose of using “Ghongadi”.

The Fashion product- Apparel- Convertible Poncho that was designed in multi-functional manner so that it can be used as an outer wear, converted into a bag & used as the blanket, if required. Providing the warmth when worn as an outerwear & can be converted into a “Tote” when not required.

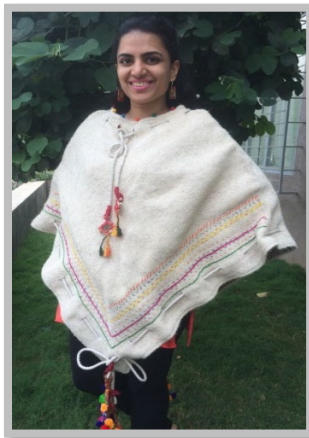


Fig. 1.9: Product exploration in Convertible Fashion Product- Apparel (Poncho)



Fig. 1.10: Product exploration in Convertible Fashion Product- Apparel (Poncho) converted into a Tote bag.



Fig. 1.11- Surface enhancement and exploration using hand embroidery



Fig. 1.12: Handcrafted Surface details and Trims

J
T
A
T
M



Fig. 1.13: Product exploration in Fashion Product- Accessories (Women’s Handbags)

Keeping in mind the 100% pure natural, ethical & sustainable aspect of “Ghongadi”; every single detail that has been added to make this product; such as interlining, strings, threads, stylish trims etc. are either natural or procured from various other craft communities who practice handmade products that are also striving for the craft’s survival as “Ghongadi” does.

The results of the product development show the major acceptance of “Ghongadi” in the above form, considering fashion context & was extremely appreciated by the young generation. This has liberated the opportunities of young generation to embrace “Ghongadi” with a different dimension that is not only fashionable but functional as well. With its “Holistically sustainable approach”; “Ghongadi” has definite chances to not only bring the identity to itself but also to the other crafts that are amalgamated with it & can be proven to mean literally!

Conclusion/ Discussion-

This “Sustainable & Holistic craft of Ghongadi” not just deals in associating the craft communities but is also engages in the beliefs of the communities who produce & use it from generations. Ghongadi which; once upon a time considered to be the vital part of every family of Maharashtra; faces a sad fact of getting diminished. The research is an initiative to bring back its market, interest of the weavers & awareness through such Product Intervention that has a value – “commercially, ethically, sustainably and holistically to bring well-being & livelihood of Life & Environment”. Through this Research for Product and Surface exploration of Ghongadi, the special characteristics of “Ghongadi” will reach consumer and generate opportunities to gain recognition as well as importance as the most pure “Holistically Sustainable Craft” providing a livelihood that can be preserved for the future generations, Current life and future environment.

The Practice based, qualitative research is an initiative to bring into attention “**Ghongadi**” with such other crafts & communities which have an incredible potential to stand in the Global Fashion agenda as the most “**sustainable as well as holistic crafts**” from India. The research intends on the craft that is not only concerned about the environment but are also sensitive towards the importance of the life that is involved in producing it.

References-

1. Dorina O. (2006), “Analysis of the tensile strength of 100% wool yarns from different climatic areas”, Annals of University of Oreden, Romania, 20 (63-68), [https://textile.webhost.uoreden.roannels \(DOAJ\)](https://textile.webhost.uoreden.roannels (DOAJ))
2. Djordjevic D., Smelcerovic M., Amin G., Micic D. (2016), “Coloring properties of wool fabric colored by new dyestuffs- Azomethines”, Annals of University of Oreden, Romania, 20 (41-46), [https://textile.webhost.uoreden.roannels \(DOAJ\)](https://textile.webhost.uoreden.roannels (DOAJ))
3. Erkan G., Yilmaz D. (2016) “Dyeing of wool yarns with Lauras Nobilis Berries”, Annals of University of Oreden, Romania, 20 (53-58), [https://textile.webhost.uoreden.roannels \(DOAJ\)](https://textile.webhost.uoreden.roannels (DOAJ))
4. Orfinskaya O., (2014) Institute of Archeology, Russian Federation 2 (8), (70-91), ISSN- 2500-2856, <https://doaj.org/article/4dcboec5ed>
5. Felin M. (2012) “New methods of applying microcapsules in the spinning process”, Annals of the University of Oreden: Fascicles of Textiles, XII (1), (98-102), ISSN- 2457-4880, <https://doaj.org/article>
6. Komppa J. (2017) “Early carpets and tapestries on the eastern silk road”, Asian highlands perspectives, 45: (159-171) ISSN- 1925-6329 (Print) <https://doaj.org/article/08874>
7. A Practical guide to Sustainable Fashion, Alison Gwilt, Bloomsbury publication.

J
T
A
T
M

8. Shaping Sustainable Fashion, Alison Gwilt & Timo Rissanen, Earthscan Publication.
9. THE BLOG 11/09/2016 03:13 pm ET “A Brief History Of ‘Sustainability’ By Lance Hosey
10. <https://www.ghongadi.com>
11. <https://www.nap.edu/read/13152/chapter/4> - History of Sustainability
12. <http://www.triplepundit.com/special/sustainable-fashion-2014/brief-history-sustainable-fashion/> A Brief History of Sustainable Fashion by Nayelli Gonzalez on Thursday, Feb 19th, 2015
13. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tom-hoskin/sustainablefashion_b_12750082.html
THE BLOG- The Importance Of Sustainable Fashion
02/11/2016 16:20 GMT | Updated
02/11/2016 16:20 GMT
14. <http://www.craftingluxurylifestyle.com/indian-artisans-building-sustainability-through-crafts-and-art-of-india/> Indian Artisans: Building Sustainability through crafts and art of India
15. <https://www.futurescape.in/crafts-and-sustainable-livelihoods-in-india/> Crafts & Sustainable Livelihoods in India March 23, 2010 by Namrata Rana in CSR and Sustainability
16. <https://www.ecowatch.com/7-reasons-you-should-hate-fast-fashion1882119908.html> Cole Mellino Nov. 17, 2015 10:13AM EST
17. Article published in Times of India, Mirror, On “Ghongadi” by Vinutha Mallya dated 12th November 2017.

J
T
A
T
M