

“From Sheep to Chic” For Wellbeing & Livelihood of Life & Environment

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Abstract: The paper exposes an unrevealed Textile from the rural parts of India- “Ghongadi”- a handspun, hand woven pure woolen blanket. Ghongadi is one of the most vital part of dressing as well as source of income of the nomadic community of Shepherds. Beside its natural aspects of being eco-friendly & sustainable from process to product, the additive values involve minimal usage of water, no use of energy, medicinal properties & mythological mentions; that makes this woolen blanket truly “Holistic”. Despite of being holistic in nature, Ghongadi has still remained undiscovered from Fashion scenario because of its typical stance of being just a blanket. The research aims at discovering the craft of “Ghongadi” & its scope in fashion context by proposing its ecofriendly, sustainable & holistic facet which has never been considered earlier & provide an opportunity to bring its worth to the conscious fashion world. To overcome the typical stance of “Ghongadi” by keeping its traditional as well as cultural significance intact; was a challenge in the product development specifically for the Fashion market. The exploration needed a strong base & apt methodology for understanding how the current market accept the changes done to the existing craft. Due to the extremely limited resources & data unavailability on the Craft; the methodology comprises extensive Interaction, Communication, Observation & Field work with the Artisans through a comprehensive Exploratory Research. The Data Collection through the market analysis in terms of Consumer scan & Fashion scan using a survey was essential in order to find the scope for “Ghongadi” if launched as a Fashion Product. This was conducted with a stratified sample consisting a mix of Fashion & Craft conscious people from Education, Design, Craft & Industry. The research is an initiative to highlight the craft into fashion context that answers the current needs & demands of global fashion agenda from eco & sustainable prospect. This also focuses “Economical, ethical, sustainable, holistic wellbeing & livelihood of Life & Environment” by promoting the

craft & community with a paradigm shift through a well thought Design/Fashion Product.

Index Terms: Holistic & Sustainable Craft, Life and Environment. Product Exploration, Woolen Blanket, Wellbeing & Livelihood,

I. INTRODUCTION

“It is time to slow down and consider the true cost of choosing quantity over quality.”(Kate Fletcher, an “eco-textile” consultant & author) The Indian Craft sector has been the pivotal in boosting the Economy of the country as they cater to the most authentic, original and pure products and processes in Traditional Crafts. The Textile crafts from India are known for its exceptional handmade and hand-crafted manner right from the use of Raw Material, the Manual Processes and the ultimate Product, which are the reflections of purity and identity of almost every state of India. The oldest techniques, the knacks of making and the authenticity of the process requires time, energy and man force to accomplish the Craft and hence are extremely tedious and time consuming. Despite of slow production speed, the Crafted products are known for its Quality, Durability and Sustainability for its lasting character. The communities from various states of India strive hard to retain these processes that create a plunged economy for themselves with a safe environment & surroundings for the future generations. These communities of “Craft Persons” indulge in variety of platforms that promote not only the “Sustainable Craft” but are also meant to provide source of income to the people who are involved in the production. According to Alison Gwilt (2014) Such source of income preserves the well-being & livelihood of the people and surroundings.

Such speciality of almost each Indian Textile, has always been a reason behind why they have always remained in the common

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taste of the consumers acceptance, how globally they have made their mark to be most authentically hand-crafted products and have always been considered as “Classics” when it comes to the Craft conscious Consumers wardrobe.

India’s rich craft heritage has also been utilized and exposed through Fashion initiatives as Designers, Retail Brands, Education Institutes have promoted and exercised them for creating products as per Global taste & demand. Cole Mellino (2013) mentions that such exposure in Fashion field has leashed tremendous opportunities for the Craft as it churned the economy within that particular community by bringing in Business and Trade Openings.

As mentioned by Alison Gwilt & Timo Rissanen, (2011) the worth of such crafts has been portrayed in the very known “Sustainable Practices” because of the Nature of Production. Hence these Indian Textile Crafts have now become the most desired resources when it comes to Green & Sustainable Products as a global requirement. Which indeed has established an incredible response towards Indian Textile Craft sector as well as the Community who produce the craft.

But since every coin has two sides, there is other side for this scenario too. The numerous crafts and communities are flourished due to various initiatives and exposures, there still remains a cluster of Craft, that still have been ignored and never been explored.

Hence this research paper exposes one of such Textile from the rural parts of Maharashtra called “Ghongadi”.

II. WHAT IS “GHONGADI”

The “Ghongadi” is a regional name given to a khadi Blanket which is hand spun, hand woven in pure Desi wool. Produced by the Sub Community of Shepherds from rural parts of Maharashtra (One of the prime states of India) (Fig.1.1). The woolen Blanket- “Ghongadi” is known by various other names such as “Kambal & Kambli” in various regions of India for quite a few degrees of coarseness & softness of the surface. Vinutha Mallya (2017) says that the any Community dealing with Wool related supplies are believed to be the nomadic community of the shepherds, who breed, herd, posse and maintain the sheep and this maintenance involved timely cutting their hair. The Shepherd then sell these hairs to the Sub- Community who could make yarns out of those hairs, which are hand spun, naturally processed enabling them to weave together using a basic floor loom into the fabric- known to be as “Ghongadi”.

This Textile is an important piece of accessory used by both communities for their nomadic lifestyle as they required to walk long distances to provender the herd of sheep. This Ghongadi caters to all the needs of each seasonal changes comprising heat, cold and Monsoon which helps the shepherd to use it as a cape to protect from monsoon, cool for heat of summer and warm for the cold winter.

Dorina O, (2006) the natural coating of cellulose, crimp texture and heat absorbing property makes this textile a multi seasonal textile. Since the actual use of the textile was in the form of long piece- a Blanket, it was also used to cover the body, as a bed spread to sleep on and as a cape in the extreme seasons which were the most fundamental requirement of the nomads that were

fulfilled by Ghongadi.

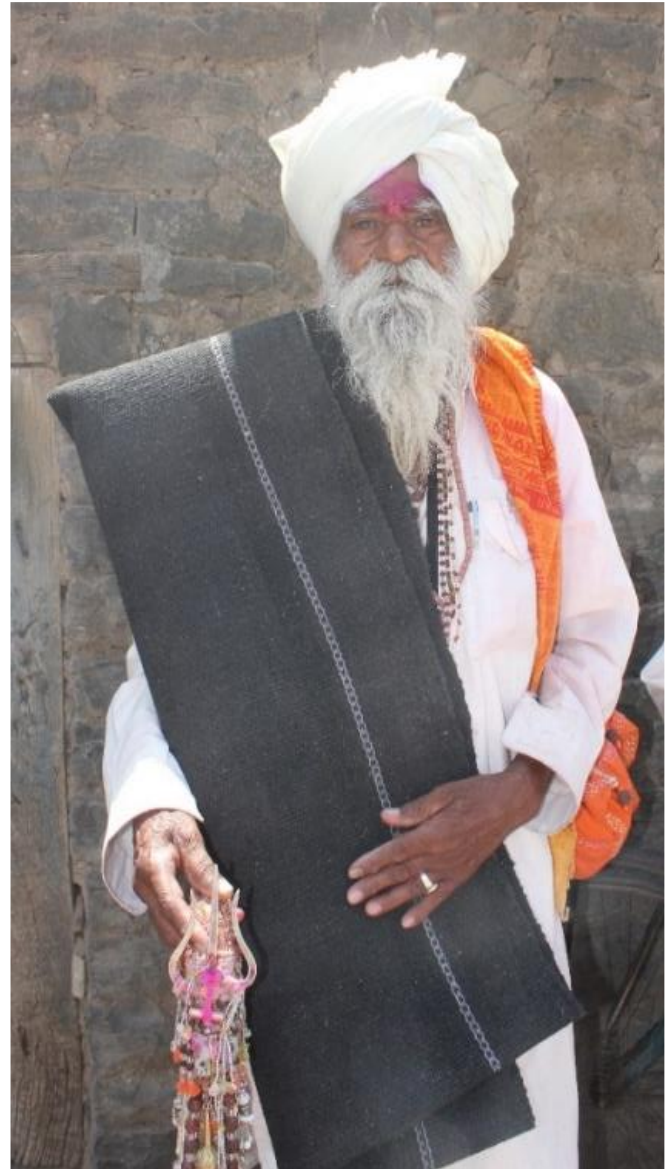


Fig. 1.1 “Ghongadi”- The Khadi Woolen Blanket of Rural Maharashtra

A. Characteristics of Ghongadi

Moman. H. (2018) specifies the characteristics that depend on the location and the sheep breed. The characteristics of wool fiber to withstand the extreme heat, cold and water repellent nature has reflected in the strong character of the textile made from it. Since it complies all these aspects in the textile- Ghongadi, it has been the most vital part of any Shepherds life style which even reflected in their clothing.(Fig.1.2)

According to the community, the Ghongadi also has certain therapeutic Properties. The course texture and crimp formation of the wool fiber gives a coarse uneven surface that creates a compression on acupressure points giving relief to person sleeping on it.



Fig. 1.2 Shepherds of Maharashtra- (Image courtesy-
www.Ghongadi.com)

They also believe that such pressure points are also good to reduce Blood pressure, relief from back aches and even good to sleep on post-delivery as a floor covering or Carpet. (Fig.1.3) Komppa J.(2017)

The community also mentions that the smell of the wool fiber which is little pungent, keeps away the moth and reptiles making it very safe for putting on the floor and use it for the variety of the purpose.

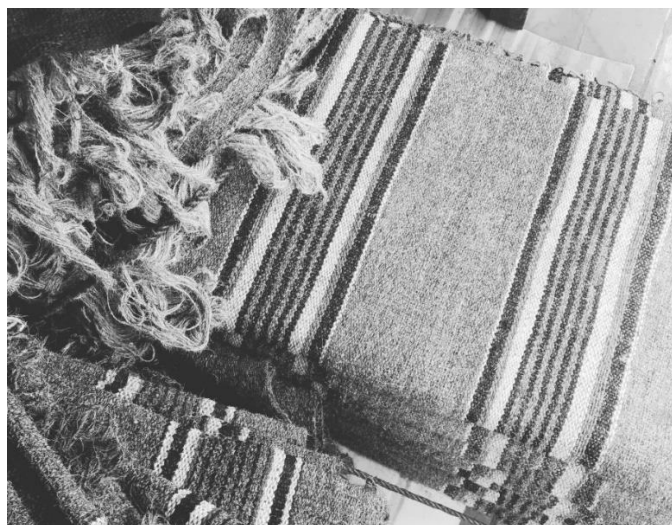


Fig. 1.3 The Multi-purpose Ghongadi

B. Community Beliefs

The community and Ghongadi together also had a great participation in the history of Maharashtra. The Great Emperor-Maharaja Shiv Chatrapati who ruled the state; had a special context of the community as they were the important community as a part of Shivaji army as well as the spies who used to wander

and get the newscast from different areas of the kingdom to the king.

Geetha Rao, (2012) Every Indian Community has their own beliefs, faith and set of sumptuary laws. The Shepherds are also not an exception for the same. Having the most pure form of textile as an important part of the lifestyle, the Community also believes in ritualistic standing of the textiles as their belief in deity God & Totem of the community- Khandoba,(Fig.1.4) in the nearest place of Pune called Jejuri to be their Idol who himself was from a Shepherds family. Hence, its believed to offer Ghongadi to the God as a symbol of respect and ritual. Due to the most pure nature, the Ghongadi is offered to the other God such as Vithalla of PandharPur (Fig.1.5) and Kalu Mama who believed to be a heavenly divine saint of the community.(Fig.1.6)



Fig. 1.4 Khandoba of Jejuri



Fig. 1.5 Vithalla of Pandharpur



Fig. 1.6 The Kalumama of Kadgaon
(The Ritualistic context of Ghongadi as offering to Deity.)

C. The Mythological Significance of Ghongadi

The making of Ghongadi, the Process incorporates a full attention of the weaver. Steps involved in process such as yarn winding on Charkha or applying starch and Dye to yarns or weaving requires complete attention and hence known to be a craft that requires coordination of senses, and connection to Body, Mind and Soul. With such metaphor the community also sings certain Shlokas and Abhangas (Mythological poems) which are written in the epic Literatures of Maharashtra like Dyaneshwari by Saint Dyneshwar. (Fig 1.7) These Shlokas have got mentions of Ghongadi. The significance of this blanket can also be traced back for its special mention in the most ancient & important work of literature and philosophy of India; “The Bhagavad Gita” (Fig. 1.7). The great piece of Mythological Literature in India mentions about the Blanket in one of the Adhyayas. (Mythological stories told by Lord Krishna)

Which means, Dhammapada (1993)

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

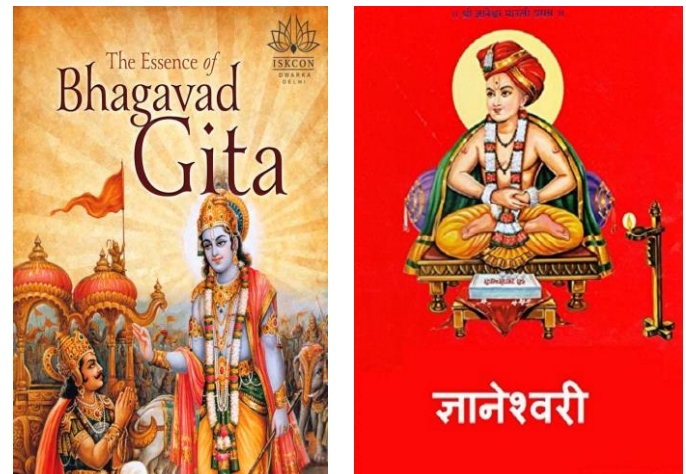


Fig. 1.7 The Great Mythological Literatures of India mentioning about the blanket.

Besides the physical properties, Historic, Literature connect, natural and handmade process and ritualistic background, fetches a very pure, sustainable and holistic approach to the Ghongadi; which none of the textiles in India have it together in one Textile Craft which is impeccable amongst a very few Sustainable textile globally. Kirsi Niinimaki (2018). But unfortunately, Ghongadi was never been explored out of its typical stance as a Blanket. The Primary research was conducted in order to analyze the loopholes and reasons behind Ghongadi being unexplored.

D. Research Aim

This Research hence discovers the reasons behind being unexplored and further to find out its scope and opportunity if explored as a most sustainable textile in the fashion context using a fashion product.

E. Relevance of the study

To explore Ghongadi, a detailed and informal connect was essential which started from visiting agricultural exhibits where the Rural participation can be witnessed. Such exhibitions led to the first contact of a Ghongadi weaver Mr. Datta Chalke (Fig.1.8) who is in Ghongadi production for more than 5 decades as his father used to weave Ghongadi and belongs to the community of shepherds.



Fig. 1.8 Mr. Datta Chalke Master artisan from Rural Part of Maharashtra near Aurangabad region.

According to the artisan Mr. Datta Chalke, the only young generation belongs to the Master artisan’s family & the owner of NGO “Ahilyabai Ghongadi Utpadan Kendra”, at Aurangabad (One of the growing cities of Maharashtra) According to him, the climatic conditions of the region play a major role in the thickness, color, softness & coarseness of the wool including the overall quality. The sheep that are raised in the warmer region tend to have darker wool mostly grey and blacks. The diet of the sheep also plays an important role in the color as well as quality of the wool.

The artisan also mentioned the current users of “Ghongadi” are the older generation who has possessed “Ghongadi” for its benefits & uses. The use of Ghongadi as simple Blanket or cape or just a bed spread as it was only considered to be the utilitarian textiles and was never explored for further possibilities for making any other sort of Products.

According to the recent article published in Times of India newspaper “The generation involved in the production of Ghongadi are also the older generation as the younger generation have moved to the metro cities for their survival & other job

opportunities, since the craft is not getting commercially sold”. (Fig.1.9)

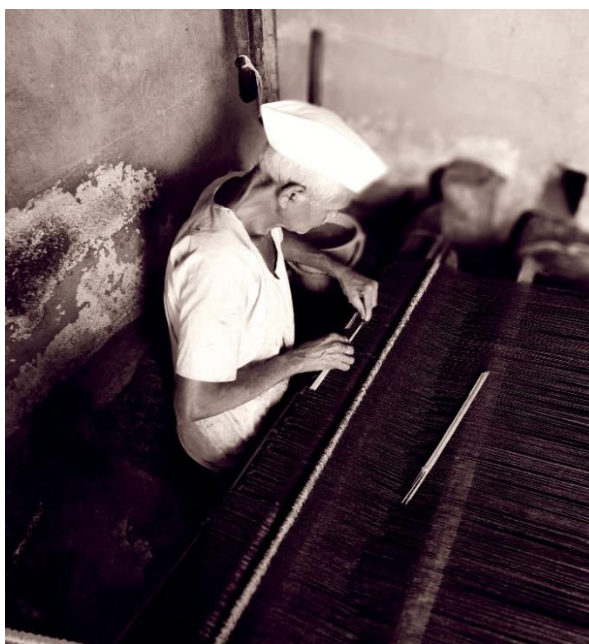


Fig. 1.8 & Fig. 1.9 The older generation- the senior most weavers of Ghongadi in the areas near Solapur and Kolhapur region.

F. Primary Research

There are many rural areas of Maharashtra state; where Ghongadi used to be practiced but are closed down due to the low demand & non-availability of the weavers.

The interaction and visit to the artisans place revealed that the lack interest by younger generation, lack of variety in products, lack of market linkages, lack of newness are the reasons why Ghongadi never received a recognition of a CRAFT and hence,

was never explored out of its typical stance of being blanket. Besides its “sustainable, eco-friendly, natural, historic, therapeutic, traditional, multi seasonal, most durable, zero maintenance features”, this craft is exceptionally blessed to be known as most “Holistic Textile”.

After the first interaction and interview with the above artisan and his family was conducted, the need to expose the craft for having such incredible Holistic aspect was extremely essential. It was really important to emphasize Ghongadi, as the contributor to Sustainable Goals for having such green and most ethical significance behind.

Fashion being one of the most polluting industries globally, are promoting ideas to introduce Sustainable Products and Processes in order to reduce the carbon footprints such as water pollution, use of unnatural products, exploitation of labour, excessive use of natural resources, garbage piles, excessive use of electricity and many more adverse effects that have caused on Environment as well as on the life

The Primary research was conducted with various people associated with Ghongadi for understanding the core process that involved the detailed, interpersonal interaction with senior citizens of rural areas around Pune & Aurangabad, (Fig. 1.10, 1.11, 1.12) Ghongadi weavers, owners of the shops and few government and non-government organizations.

Fig. 1.10 Primary Research conducted with Ghongadi Artisan from Kadgaon.



Fig. 1.11 Primary Research conducted with Ghongadi Artisan- The Yarn Spinner from Sangola.



Fig. 1.12 The Primary Research conducted with numerous people associated with Ghongadi at Pandharpur Market.

The Organizations that are studied to conduct the Primary Research are as follows.

- NGO's (Ahilyadevi Ghongadi Utpadan Kendra at Aurangabad and Solapur)
- Khadi Gramodyog Stores (Aurangabad, Pune & Mumbai)
- Industry such as WRA (Wool Research Association of India, Mumbai)

-WSC (Weavers' Service Center) Maharashtra
 -Govt. of Maharashtra initiative (Punyashlok Ahilyabai medhi va sheli vikas Kendra, Maharashtra)

III. THE PROCESS OF GHONGADI

The "Ghongadi" of Maharashtra is made using "Desi- Deccan or Usmanabadi" sheep having a coarser & crimpier texture depends on the climatic conditions of the region. The color of the wool depends upon the area where the sheep belongs, such as those belong to central and Vidarbh Maharashtra will have darker and blacker hair due to extremely hot weather whereas sheep that belongs to Solapur area may have lighter colors such as muddy white or beige and grey due to comparatively cold weather.

As per Djordjevic D., SmelcerovicM., Amin G.,Micic D.(2016) The hair of the sheep is generally shredded twice a year; and after the sheep become 3 months old. The quality of the hair depends upon the age of the sheep; Smaller the age of the sheep, softer the quality of the wool, hence sold at relatively high prices & called as "Jawalachi Ghongadi".(Fig. 1.13) (First hair of the baby sheep)



Fig.1.13 "Jawalachi Ghongadi"

The "Ghongadi" is woven using 'Plain weave', due to which the Acupressure points are created from the coarse texture of the yarns that gives comfort to the body & the skin of the wearer. The surface texture of "Ghongadi" is very coarse & colors such as off white, grey & black colors are only found. (Fig. 1.14)

The additional feature is added with a lengthwise, pink colored band either chemically died or in acrylic wool is used. Sometimes the combination of off white, grey & black colors are used to create some patterns in checks & stripes to add variety.

The traditional size of "Ghongadi" is 10' by 4' to be used as a Blanket, shawl and the spread. The length of the Ghongadi for being so long is that it is turned into half by wrapping the body

from front and back; and became the prime reason why the older generation used a single piece to slip on the floor.



Fig. 1.14 The variety of Ghongadi available at Pandharpur region.

The fibers are converted into the yarn with the help of a Traditional way of spinning onto "Charkha", which is a symbol of self-reliance & freedom initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. This process of hand spinning of the yarn involves the concentration of senses that is only possible through the right coordination dedication of mind, body and soul at a time. Which is why this process of spinning is generally carried out by women of the family and further process of making "Ghongadi" is carried out by the men of the family.

The "Ghongadi" is woven using plain weave on a flat floor loom by the "Sangar" community. To add more aesthetic appeal; a band of contrasting color mainly of Pink, is added length wise at the time of warping. The production process from shredding of sheep hair, scouring i.e. cleaning of the fiber, sorting of the hair from various body parts, carding of fibers, spinning to convert the staple fiber into yarn and then into weaving is all done manually by hand with a very limited usage of water.

During the exploration of the process it was strongly observed that not only men of the family are involved in making a Ghongadi but it's the women of the family too contribute in certain steps of the process (besides spinning of yarns), which makes it an inclusive process. The inclusive nature helps in carrying out the production with a right speed and timely sell of the product. Since Ghongadi is seasonal production due to the shredding of wool, the timing of its production and selling needs to match. This in turn brings livelihood of the community as they are part of Rural Craft and hence Ghongadi is sold in many of the agriculturally based exhibitions organized at rural levels. It is one of the most famous and durable textiles that any person from the Rural or agricultural background opts for. Hence a very important source of earning and livelihood of the community.

Rugged yet smart, Basic but unique, Simple yet Chic, are some of the keywords that describe the textile. And these keywords

itself define the further exploration of Ghongadi to break its typical stance as a blanket and reintroduce it in a form of a smart, chic Fashion Product having a holistic Sustainable approach towards environment.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To redefine the typical character of “Ghongadi” from a Blanket to something new; by keeping its traditional as well as cultural significance intact; was a challenge in the product development. It needed a strong base for knowing how the current market grasps the changes done with the craft; the market analysis through a survey, was essential.

According to Mallika D.S. & Anshu S.(2020) Due to the unavailability and rare data published on “Ghongadi”, the Primary survey incorporates an interpersonal interaction conducted with Ghongadi weavers, Old people from the Community & other sources mentioned above, who gave the insight and ideas that lead to the further exploration of the craft.

A secondary survey was conducted to understand the need of the Research for which the sample was selected, that consists of Fashion and Non-Fashion professionals, Craft Lovers, store owners, artisans, Designers, NGO Owners and organizations. The data collected in the form of the reviews, feedbacks, forms, questionnaire & suggestions, furnished the idea about the further product development which is the outcome of the research paper. This provided an opportunity for the Consumer Scan and Fashion Scan in order to realize the Fashion choices and preferences for Ghongadi which further reflected in the product exploration. The method included collecting data using questionnaire method from the Fashion-conscious consumers. (Fig.1.15 to Fig.1.18 for Consumer Responses)

The reviews indicated following facts.

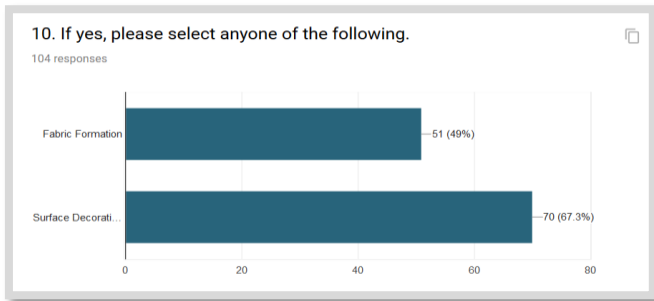


Fig. 1.15 Response through the secondary survey (Question- Specify which technique would suit the best as Value Addition on the product of Ghongadi?)

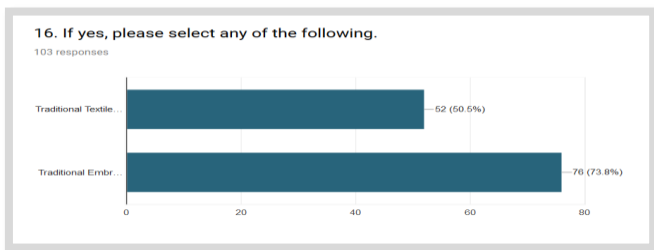


Fig 1.16- Response through the secondary survey (Question- What kind of technique according to you is most suitable for the product of Ghongadi?)

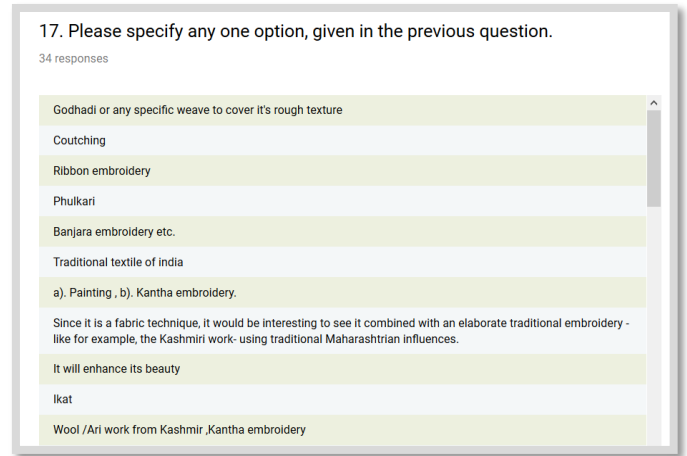


Fig. 1.17- Response through the secondary survey (Question- Specify which Product Range you would like to accept the Ghongadi in?)

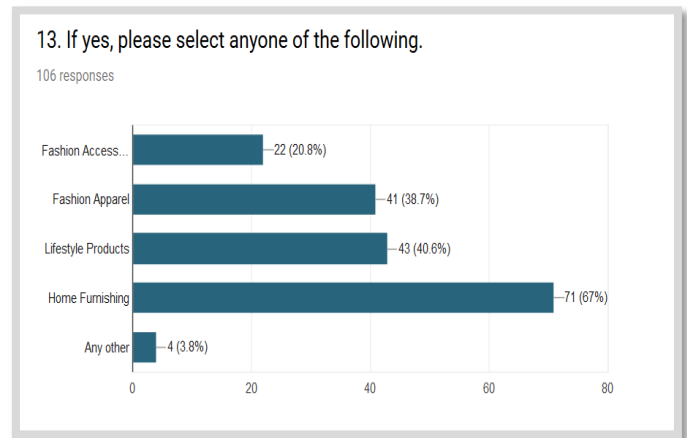


Fig. 1.18 Response through the secondary survey

The survey provided a scope of utilizing various surface exploration techniques that brings a change & newness to the simplicity as specified by Kovac.S. (2016) of the surface of Ghongadi having a rugged & coarse feel providing 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 “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.

V. RESULTS

Based on the secondary survey, the further Value Additions to overcome the coarse texture of “Ghongadi”; technique such as weaving techniques using pit loom of Gujarat have been explored. The above technique has worked wonders by providing supplementary surface through the weaving patterns using additional threads or extra weft, that facilitate in creating a more comfort feel of the surface reducing its coarser feel.

The variety of motifs that used in the traditional pit loom weaving of woolen shawls from Gujrat, have been utilized with Ghongadi in contrast colors. (Fig.1.19 & Fig.1.20) The special mention by Erkan G., Yilmaz D. (2016) specifies the variety of dyes used on wool, the exploration in this research has created a smart surface having a value addition that is not only aesthetic but functional too; that it reduced its rough feel and by using natural dyes using natural resources.



Fig. 1.19 Surface exploration and Value addition on Ghongadi using pit loom weaving from Gujarat



Fig. 1.20 Surface exploration and Value addition on Ghongadi using pit loom weaving from Gujarat.

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 that compliments its original use as specified in the upcoming Trend forecast by David Shah (2020)

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 (Women’s Outerwear) was selected based on the purpose of using “Ghongadi”. Since the use of “Ghongadi” is so versatile to be multi seasonal; the product development is a trial to make a product that too has the same characteristics.

The Fashion product that is designed is also multi-functional as it can be used as an outer wear, converted into a bag & used as the blanket, if required. The women’s outerwear- “Poncho” is designed (Fig.1.21 and Fig. 1.22) in such a way that it provides warmth when worn as an outerwear & can be converted into a “Tote” when not required. (Fig.1.23)



Fig. 1.21 The Hand Embroidered Edges with Hand Crafted tassels as a detail on surface of Cape/ Poncho.



Fig.1.22 The Hand Crafted details in the form of Tassels on Poncho

Keeping in mind the 100% pure natural, ethical & sustainable aspect of “Ghongadi”; every single detail that is added to make this product such as interlining, strings, threads, stylish trims etc. are either natural or procured from various communities who are involved in keeping their own crafts alive through livelihood & probably are also striving for the craft’s survival as “Ghongadi” does.



Fig. 1.23 Product exploration in Convertible Fashion Accessory- Outerwear (Poncho) converted into a Tote bag.

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. Namrata Rana (2010) as it’s the need of the hour to fulfill the market demand using Sustainable Products.

This has released 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

At present, when people are realizing the damage by industrial & commercial mode of fashion production to the environment; they are moving towards the Sustainable solutions in clothing. Such Sustainable solutions can be found in the versatile Textile Crafts of India, especially Ghongadi- the blanket from rural Maharashtra. The most sustainable, ecofriendly, ethical, fair and holistic nature of Ghongadi has a tremendous opportunity to regain & revive its importance from a Sustainable context. The immense scope for innovations using Fashion as a most accepted

tool in the society, Ghongadi has definitely become one of the most important resource to produce Sustainable Fashion Products.

With such Holistic Sustainable Characteristics of Ghongadi if further utilized in the field of Fashion can; not only deliver a livelihood to the community, but also gives it a recognition as Sustainable craft, that can be preserved for the future generations, and can be introduced in a form of more smart, chic sustainable Fashion Product line for Current life and future environment. Nayelli Gonzalez (2014)

This Practice based; exploratory research is an initiative to bring into attention the “Ghongadi” which has an incredible potential to stand in the Global Fashion agenda as the most “sustainable as well as holistic craft” from India. Tom Hoskin (2016) mentions such potential of the Sustainable Craft which can be brought back its market, interest of the weavers, awareness for Product Intervention and can bring a shift towards more – “commercial, ethical, sustainable and holistic paradigm to serve wellbeing & livelihood to Life & Environment” which can be conceivable for future “from sheep to being a Chic & Holistically sustainable Fashion product for the wellbeing and livelihood of life as well as Environment.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am thankful to my work Organization- MKSS's School of Fashion Technology, Pune and the S.N.D.T.Women's University, Mumbai, where I am pursuing PhD; for allowing me to explore one of the rare craft of Ghongadi with all their support. I sincerely thank the Artisans of Ambad, Kadgaon and Sangola for giving me an opportunity to witness the exceptional Craft with its impeccable process of making with active interaction with weavers and the community. I am also greatly thankful to prestigious Organizations of KVIC- Khadi Bhandar at Aurangabad for sparing their valuable time to throw the light on Ghongadi's supply chain and Market Linkage. I am also thankful to the Artisans of Bhuj, Pitloom weavers who helped me to creatively explore the surface of Ghongadi to give it a different dimension aesthetically by sharing their treasured technique of woolen shawl weaving. And last but not the least My family members, without whom reaching & travelling to the remote interior places wouldn't be possible, hence greatly thankful and appreciate their efforts to make this Research possible.

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