

FABRIC SPEAK

# Khadi Calling

India's original fabric khadi is getting a chic makeover courtesy a slew of designers who are creating contemporary garments. **Bindu Gopal Rao** delves

"I would ask you to come in khadi, for khadi links you with fallen and down-trodden."

—Mahatma Gandhi

Khadi plays an important role in shaping the growth of the country, as it provides employment to weavers. And while it's taken some time to get here, it is today making inroads into wardrobes as well.

## DISTINCT FEEL

Khadi represents India's ancient handmade textile traditions that goes back to 400 BC according to the Greek historian, Herodotus. Khadi, also known as khaddar, is a versatile fabric and may be starched to give a stiff texture. Gandhi not only elevated the idea of handwoven clothes but also encouraged the idea of minimalism, by wearing the dhoti. Seema Kalavadia, Founder, Sims Designer Studio explains, "Khadi has been the





heart of my every creation. This fabric is skin-friendly and woven with the utmost respect to the environment that make it fascinating. It can be used in summer as well as winter. When I work on my collections, I look up different varieties of khadi that are available for fabric weights and qualities. Khadi adds a distinctive element to any garment. My khadi collections comprise many varieties in terms of design and that is what appeals to all age groups.”

**KHADI CUES**

As khadi is made of cotton, farmers can earn from it, and it is eco-friendly and sustainable as well. It is porous, austere, simple and hence helps the wearer make a statement about their lifestyle and values. In India, it has a deeper meaning as it connects you to the freedom movement, to Gandhi and to all those who believe in his values. Dipna Daryanani, Co-founder, 'Love the World Today', a conscious clothing brand for children, says, “Khadi is basically handspun and handwoven cotton. The entire process of making the fabric must be manual. We use handspun and handwoven cotton in some of our collections for children to create everyday breathable garments, including sleepwear. Since it is entirely handmade, it will always have weave variations. That can become a challenge sometimes in educating customers about weave variations which are perceived as defects. But that’s what lends the human quality to it. The beauty of the fabric is how it feels on the skin.”

Khadi is being revolutionised and relooked at by the fashion circles. It has had long-standing associations with its image, but people are now beginning to accept it even at luxury fashion spaces and particularly for its versatility. Sanya Suri and Resham Karmchandani, Co-



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founders, The Pot Plant, work with khadi across categories from dresses to tops to bottoms and as silhouettes explain, “For us, khadi has always worked well. We primarily work with Bandhani craft and it works with khadi. The fabric strengthens with time. It is breathable, sustainable and soft on the skin.”

### TRENDING TALES

Sustainability is the way forward for the textile industry and khadi is a fabric that naturally fits into this narrative. Increasingly, people are also looking at making organic choices for their clothing and this has augured well for khadi. People want to look fashionable and trendy but simultaneously remain culturally connected and that is best possible with khadi outfits. “Presently innovations in khadi wear are in terms style. Khadi is being used by the present generation from everyday wear and into evening wear,” says Kalavadia. The other issue that manufacturers face is that mostly they need to refrain from using the term 'Khadi' unless they have a KVIC mark. “However, we do work with handwoven textiles extensively and mention that clearly to our buyers but there



is definitely a lack of awareness in customers regarding differences between khadi and handloom fabrics. Not all handwoven fabrics are khadi,” explains Daryanani.

### CHALLENGES

Khadi is making its space steadily into the fast moving textile and apparel market. When it comes to marketing, some challenges faced are in terms of sourcing fabric as inconsistent demand and supply chain, lack of awareness for considering khadi wear for high-end bridal and similar outfits, less productive and competitiveness in fabric upgradation due



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to lack of R&D at the manufacturing level. In Melukote, a town in Karnataka, Janapada Khadi is an organisation that works to improve human personality with a transparent value chain that supports a about a dozen craftsmen, in a dozen varied crafts. Sumanas Koulagi of Janapada Khadi, explains, "We mainly produce non-stitched textiles such as sarees, towels, stoles, lungis and the like. Since it is labour intensive work, the fabric always becomes expensive. So, competing with the cheap mill and handloom fabrics in the market is a challenge."

**GOING GREEN**

Khadi is highly sustainable, and thus, has a very low carbon footprint. The fashion industry plays a big role in pollution. Due to dynamic trends and rapid production of clothes 'fast fashion' is being promoted. Fast fashion, however, has the dubious distinction of being responsible for apparel consumption in large numbers as well as using cheaper fibers in the production cycle; resulting in a switch from natural fibers to inexpensive synthetic textiles like polyester. It is of prime importance to take a step towards eco-friendly fashion and to promote sustainable

ways of producing clothes. The younger lot particularly who have concerns about the environment are the ones that are purchasing khadi today which augurs well for the industry. The possibilities with the fabric are endless.

There was a perception that sustainable clothing or khadi cannot be young. "But with more people gravitating towards khadi, we have seen so much design innovation. The fabric is available in different counts and weaves. From supple stoles to skin friendly towels and yardages in different thread counts, there have been so many variations. Khadi needs to be marketed for its versatility. That is a message that we still must try and spread to a wider," opine Suri. As the chimes for 'vocal for local' get louder and amplified, it is indeed time to give khadi a chance that it always deserved. ■