



# Issues and challenges of an unexplored craft of “Ghongadi” (A Khadi woolen Blanket) through SWOT Analysis

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**Abstract:** “Sustainability” for the Global Fashion agenda is about utilizing Natural & Eco-friendly products & processes and “Creating value for Life and Sustenance” by carefully employing raw materials & resources. It is also about bringing minds together and consists of brands, designers, eco-activists, GOs, NGOs, & Institutions, and communities equally active in practicing Sustainability from process to product. “The communities that create Fashion by keeping the well-being, livelihood of the people & surroundings in their mind, heart & soul.”

India, a place of rich cultural & craft heritage, embraces the most authentic & original Crafts practices. One unexplored craft from the states of India is known for the regional Woolen Blanket called “Ghongadi.” This unexplored Khadi woolen Blanket, “Ghongadi,” is hand-spun, naturally processed, & handwoven in the rural parts of Maharashtra by the nomadic community of shepherds. More than any other craft, “Ghongadi” has survived the onslaught of Industrialization due to absolutely zero involvement of energy, machines & use of very little water, making it undoubtedly Eco-friendly, Natural, Handmade & thus Sustainable. To make this sustainable quotient of Ghongadi accessible, analyzing its strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities (SWOT) is imperative to consider it a promising textile for the sustainable fashion future.

The research paper discusses the analysis of the craft of Ghongadi, which not only brings a new facet & identity as a Fashion Product but also promotes the craft that connects to the Global Fashion agenda, involving a qualitative study. This rare uniqueness combined with Fashion will not only cover a wide array of Sustainability, Eco-friendliness & fair practices but will also introduce a further aspect of sustainability known as “Holistic Sustainability- well-being & livelihood of Life & Environment through the craft.”

**Index Terms – Ghongadi, Sustainability, Eco-Friendly, Natural, Holistic Textile**

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Global warming has exploded in environmental impact on every level of living beings, which is worrisome. The key to sustainability was indeed vital which could have started long back. However, we kept relishing the benefits of globalization & industrialization that changed rather than modified our lives using technology, new products, new habitats, new psyche & new “us”. Apparently, our changed lifestyle is a witness to it. The “change” brought by the “Industrial Revolution” significantly expanded the Fashion industry. On the other hand, it has also left some worst sides such as “mishap at Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, Rana Plaza collapse, working & sanitary conditions for workers, effects of chemicals, 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 an integral part of this industry.

According to the survey, the Fashion industry worldwide is now actively practicing “Sustainability” by using natural & sustainable raw materials & processes. Recently, brands such as Marks and Spencer’s, Patagonia, Adidas, H & M Conscious collection, Levis, and Puma to name a few, have taken a pledge to abandon unsafe, unethical processes & practices to bring a safe, fair & ethical sustainable environment for the workers & also to provide such products to the consumers.

Thankfully, globalization & technological connectivity worldwide have brought sensitivity & sensibility in consumers to cautiously select their products for their authenticity, make & natural content. This has made all of us knowingly buy Fashion products that are safe for the environment & society as well. Apparently, the “Sustainable approach” has encouraged products & practices using Natural, eco-friendly, and Handmade using fairly paid labor & production processes, having a limited impact on life and the environment.

Till now, this was the only facet that all of us knew. The other facet of being sustainable and ethical conveniently ignored was the need for such fashion that demanded the overconsumption & overproduction of the raw material & the life involved in producing these products. In addition, increased demand for Fashion products led to the concept of “Fast Fashion,” which is rapidly mass-produced using cheap materials, cheaply priced & cheaper labor to ensure market prices that customers will not complain about.

The study by Singh G. (2016) describes that the apparel market is growing faster than the global economy at a 4.78% yearly rate & projected to experience 5.91% yearly growth). Simply saying, this rapid growth means the average consumer in the world is now buying more than 1.5 to 2 times the amount of apparel they did just six years ago, resulting in unnecessary overproduction of fashion goods. According to the Center for Environmental Health, it is proven that the Fashion Industry is the second largest polluting industry, causing damage to water, soil, and air. This has not been taken care of so far and needs strong attention.

The prime root of “Fast Fashion” also involves unnecessary use of energy, deposition of waste & labor at a cheaper cost. It is now damaging life & environment to the core for future use and should be seriously considered.

This requires a “sustainable & ethical” solution and concentrates more on “Creating a value for Life & Environment through its Sustenance” by carefully employing raw materials & resources. The solution is about bringing the minds- of “Stakeholders” together that consists of Brands, Designers, Eco activists, GOs, NGOs, and Institutions & also involve the communities that are equally active in practicing “Sustainability” from process to product by providing “value” to life & surroundings at every level. These communities have practiced “sustainability” for many generations, using their authentic & pure handmade processes in making the products.

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

India's varied traditions & cultures are believed to be its soul, which can be found in almost every corner. Indian Crafts & Textiles is one of them, having the affluent & oldest past.

The Crafts reminds the special contribution by Ms. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Ms. Judy Frater & Ms. Jaya Jaitley, who were the driving force behind the renaissance of Indian handicrafts and handlooms in India for the upliftment of the socio-economic standard of Indian crafts. These eminent contributors promoted crafts and made them Globalized by keeping them alive. The observations by Jaitley J. (2012) portray that the preservation of crafts matters because, for many people, this is their livelihood. It is their respect and dignity, so preserving the people & their lives means preserving their crafts & heritage.” Such efforts & hard work of the people have brought recognition not only to the craft but also to the community that was noticed for their exceptional contribution towards creating a sustainable surrounding.

At present, this unorganized & informal sector of ingenious crafts in India is pushed by the loss of markets due to ignorance, declining skills & difficulty in catering to new markets, due to which many of them are now struggling for their sustenance. Unfortunately, due to this, some crafts face tremendous damage despite having an identity as a “Sustainable Product” and are also awaiting opportunities where they will be perceived as the most “Sustainable & Eco-Friendly crafts” on the global platform.

#### WHAT IS GHONGADI:

The “Ghongadi” is a regional name for the hand-spun, hand-woven blanket of Maharashtra (One of the prime states of India) made in pure “Desi” wool. Besides being “sustainable, eco-friendly and natural,” this craft is blessed by its ritualistic background, medicinal assets & multi-seasonal use, making it not only “Sustainable” but also adding the “Holistic” facet to its identity.



“Ghongadi”- Hand spun, hand woven woolen blanket from Maharashtra

The origin of this woolen blanket can be traced to Maharashtra culture from the ages. The “Ghongadi” is also mentioned in the traditions 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, Vidarbha & Solapur. This community tends to herd, feed, or guard sheep & shred their hair timely. This hair is then passed on to the sub-community known as “Sangars,” who later hand spin, naturally process & hand weave these yarns using a basic floor loom into the fabric, known as “Ghongadi.”

“Ghongadi” is an age-old & extremely popular textile in rural areas of Maharashtra used majorly in the winter & rainy seasons.

## NEED OF THE STUDY.

The overpowering “Industrialization & Fast Fashion” are responsible factors that have neglected such crafts. Such crafts, if translated, developed, and promoted, can result in providing Economic opportunities & environmental benefits, which may boost millions of rural-based communities in their well-being & livelihoods to uplift the socioeconomic condition of the community. The objective of this research is to bring to attention one of such crafts- “Ghongadi,” which is absolutely unexplored & can be rediscovered in the context of the Fashion Industry.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on a qualitative research study focused on the ethnography of the rare and unexplored textile craft of Ghongadi from Maharashtra and involves careful consideration of various elements to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Here's a proposed research design:

The methods used in conducting the study are as follows.

1. Ethnographic study: Immersion in the culture and community of Ghongadi artisans to understand their practices, traditions, and the context in which they produce the craft.
2. Interviews: Conducted unstructured interviews with Ghongadi artisans to gather insights into their experiences, challenges, and perspectives on craft.
3. Observation: Spending time with Ghongadi artisans while they perform, observing their techniques and materials, and initiating interactions to gain a deeper understanding of the craft.
4. Focus Groups: Bringing together groups of artisans and people from communities to facilitate group interactions and share experiences.

### 3.1 Population and Sample

The study was conducted in the rural areas around Aurangabad city in Maharashtra. The location for artisans and the community of the shepherds was in the rural village called Ambad.

### 3.2 Data and Sources of Data

The primary data with first-hand information was collected from the community of shepherds and the artisans who have manufactured the Ghongadi craft for over thirty years from the village of Ambad.

### 3.3 Theoretical framework

The textile involved in the paper concentrates on the study of an unexplored and rare craft of Ghongadi, practiced in the rural areas of Maharashtra. Hence, an in-depth conversation with its stakeholders is essential to find out more information about such a rare craft. Studying such crafts often brings with it some important facets that need to be enhanced, explored, and made visible in the relevant field. Hence, the study follows the theoretical framework of SWOT Analysis to understand the crafts' dynamics, which may lead to its emergence as a promising craft in textiles. Performing a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of such a rare craft can provide valuable insights and strategic direction for various stakeholders involved in its preservation, promotion, and sustainability.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Results of Study

According to the artisan Mr. Datta Chalke, the only young generation belonging to the Master artisans family & the owner of NGO “Ahilyabai Ghongadi Utpadan Kendra”, at Aurangabad (One of the growing cities of Maharashtra), This woolen Blanket-“Ghongadi” is known with various other names such as “Kambal & Kambli” in various regions of India with various degrees of coarseness & softness of the surface.



Mr. Datta Chalke (Ghongadi Artisan)

According to him, the region's climatic conditions play a major role in the wool's thickness, color, softness & coarseness, and overall quality. Currently, the users of “Ghongadi” are the older generation who have possessed “Ghongadi” for its benefits & uses. According to a recent article published in the 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.”

## 4.2 Results from Sample

The primary survey conducted with weavers of “Ghongadi” & the interaction between various people associated with Ghongadi provided extraordinary aspects to the originality & versatility of the craft. The sources are mentioned below.

- Artisans and master weavers
- More than 60 years oldest shops & their owners
- More than 50 years old local senior citizens
- 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 mendhi va sheli vikas Kendra, Maharashtra)

The primary survey also involved detailed, interpersonal interaction with senior citizens of rural areas around Pune & Aurangabad who believe & rely on the following features of “Ghongadi.”

- Generally, “Ghongadi” is used only in winter, but due to its natural coating, it can also be used in the summer to protect from the harsh UV rays of the sun, which is the main reason why it is shredded after the summer season is over.
- It can also be used in the Rainy season since water doesn't stay on due to the coarse & crimp texture of the yarn & slips down as Lanolin's (Natural wax coating on the fiber) waterproofing property aids in shedding water from the surface which is why it's commonly used as a Cape by shepherds.
- The “Ghongadi” is woven using ‘Plain weave’, due to which the Acupressure points are created from the coarse texture of the yarns that give comfort to the body & the skin of the wearer.
- The surface texture of “Ghongadi” is very coarse & colors such as off-white, grey & black are only found. An additional feature is added with a lengthwise, pink colored band either chemically died or in acrylic wool 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 spread, if turned into half by wrapping the body from front and back, since the older generation used to slip on the floor.
- There are many rural areas of Maharashtra state where Ghongadi used to be practiced but are closed due to the low demand & non-availability of the weavers.
- Besides protection from insects and reptiles, “Ghongadi” is also used for its medicinal properties to avoid skin infections & believed to be beneficial in the treatments given in Paralysis, Post-delivery, maintaining Blood pressure, Arthritis & reducing hemorrhoid pain.

Based on the exploration and interaction in the Primary and Secondary surveys with the help of weavers, the analysis of the “Ghongadi” craft is also discussed.

### Strengths-

Besides the facts mentioned above, the following strong character makes this craft of “Ghongadi” highly “sustainable & holistic.”

- Since the making of “Ghongadi” from process to product is produced only by hand, without any involvement of technology, less use of water makes it totally a product that is truly natural, eco-friendly, and fairly practiced, may definitely have a prospect to be considered as a “Sustainable” textile as the minimum span of life is more than 40 years.
- Extremely low maintenance as it can be hand and home-washed with lukewarm or cold water.
- It becomes softer & softer after every wash using cationic softeners at home.

### Weaknesses-

Due to the lack of commercial exposure to the craft, the following weaknesses are discussed in the primary & secondary surveys as follows.

- Lack of Fashion context, Design guidance, and Product diversification.
- Lack of Promotion and Marketing of “Ghongadi” that limits its awareness in the metro cities.

### Opportunities-

The Climate of India comprises a wide range of weather conditions that are majorly heat-prone. Since global warming is showing its effects on the changed environmental issues, the climate in India is also changing rapidly. Winter has been extremely active in recent years, creating a demand for thermal & woolen clothing in India. This has created a tremendous scope and opportunities for crafts such as “Ghongadi,” which can be explored & further modified by keeping the “Fashion Demand” in context.

The initiatives by introducing “Wool” as one of the Fashion Fabrics by extremely prominent & experienced designers globally, such as Mr. Giorgio Armani, Mr. James Ferreira, Mr. Rahul Mishra & Mr. Nachiket Barve, to mention a few, have proven to be influential in promoting the “Wool industry” in a fashion context. It has also provided the scope of using textile crafts such as “Ghongadi” that can be further explored to develop products that meet the current fashion trends.

### Threats-

With the awareness, support, and initiatives by renowned platforms from Government and nongovernment agencies, many of the crafts from various states have received recognition and have made their marks in national or international presence. Unfortunately, Ghongadi craft, with the lack of such backing, has remained unexplored. The ignorance and deterioration of such a promising craft may lead to its complete disappearance from the craft map of Maharashtra, which, concerning its sustainable attributes, is a bigger threat to the sustainable textiles industry.

### Discussion-

People are realizing the damage caused by industrial & commercial modes of fashion production to the environment and are moving towards the Sustainable approach. To achieve the same, it's imperative to find the most sustainable, eco-friendly, ethical, fair, and versatile crafts. There is a tremendous opportunity for a craft such as “Ghongadi” to regain & revive its importance in the country's cultural as well as economic side, which has immense opportunities & scope for innovations. However, the special characteristics

of “Ghongadi” will generate opportunities and gain recognition as the purest “Holistically Sustainable Craft,” providing a livelihood that can be preserved for future generations, Current life, and the future environment.

This “Sustainable & Holistic craft of Ghongadi” not only deals in associating the craft communities but also engages in the beliefs of the communities who produce & use it from generation to generation. Ghongadi, which, once upon a time considered to be a vital part of every family in Maharashtra, faces the sad fact of getting diminished. The research is an initiative to bring back its market, the 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.”

## II. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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