



Ghongadi- A (Woolen) Blanket from “Myth to a Meaningful” Survival through Product Exploration.

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Abstract : Indian crafts have always revealed an ability to evolve with new times & new challenges by keeping their exceptionally sustainable & hand-crafted manner intact. These crafts have been cherished for generations and are passed on through symbolic narratives through practices, stories, beliefs, and customary traditions (Myths). “Ghongadi”- a hand-spun, hand-woven woolen blanket/Cape from rural parts of Maharashtra state; is one of such crafts known for its most natural, multi-seasonal, multi-purpose & eco-friendly element. With its metaphorical and symbolic mentions in Indian mythology, ritualistic & medicinal uses in the Shepherd community make it rare, having copious holistic facets that reflect the centrality of the craft for a sustainable future. Due to the lack of exposure, awareness, limited products, no market linkages & no product intervention, this craft lagged & unexplored in the Craft & Fashion arena, resulting in a crisis for its identity. “Ghongadi,” having a resilient interconnection with entities such as economy, community, social & sustainable manner, is yet to be explored in Fashion & has the potential to be cherished as an important, meaningful ownership for Maharashtrian Crafts. The paper reveals the uniqueness of the craft from various myths, which were eventually believed to be meaningful truths that prove to be the most meaningful addition to the rich Indian Craft heritage, delivering an identity & hope of a “holistically sustainable craft.”

The research aims to explore the craft of “Ghongadi” & its scope in the fashion context, keeping its holistic approach in mind “to create a meaning & hope not only for the craft but for weavers & the community as well.” The presumed product range is an initiative to bring the craft into the fashion context that proves to be a meaningful solution to answer the current needs of the global fashion agenda from an eco & sustainable perspective. This traditionally significant “Ghongadi,” having a typical stance, was a challenge to be investigated for the Fashion Market. This exploration process needed a strong base & apt methodology for understanding how the current market consents to the change in the existing product of the craft. A comprehensive primary and secondary research & market analysis in terms of Consumer scan & Fashion scan through a survey was essential. The stratified sample of a mix of Fashion & conscious people from Education, Design, Craft, & Industry were studied to further execute the process. The outcome represents a Social Change that brings “Ghongadi” into the fashion mainstream, fairly to answering current needs of the global fashion agenda by introducing it as a “Holistically Sustainable Craft,” acclaiming a meaning for its existence.

The paper proposes that “Ghongadi,” having a strong context of Myths that are now believed to be the “Meaningful truths” can be tomorrow’s “Hope” not only for the sake of Community and Weavers but also to build a strong “Holistically Sustainable” option that brings “Meaning” to the life and environment.

Index Terms - Woolen Blanket/ Cape, Holistic & Sustainable Craft, Creating hope & meaning through myths, Fashion Product exploration, Life and Environment

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian crafts have always revealed an ability to evolve with new times & new challenges by keeping their exceptionally sustainable & hand-crafted manner intact. These crafts have been cherished for many generations and are passed on through symbolic narratives in the form of practices, stories, beliefs, and customary traditions (Myths). It is believed that India’s varied traditions & cultures are its soul, which can be found in almost every corner, having the affluent & oldest past. This extraordinary cultural worth of countless Crafts has been passed on from generation to generation and has kept them alive & available for us.

The Craft communities- the Creative Heralds strive hard to retain these processes that create a plunged economy for themselves with a safe environment & surroundings for future generations. These communities have created a platform that promotes not only

the “Sustainable aspect of Craft” but is also meant to “Preserve the well-being & livelihood of the people and surrounding that utilizes their mind, heart, and soul.”

Unfortunately, the other side of the coin deals with some crafts that are not only facing tremendous damage to their identity as “Sustainable Craft” but are also waiting for the Opportunities and Hope to be perceived as the most “Meaningful, Sustainable & Eco-Friendly crafts” on the global platform.

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



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

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, minimal usage of water and energy that makes the craft most sustainable and authentically hand crafted that concerns Life and Environment to the core. This craft is not just a mode of building the economy of the community but also involves ethical, sustainable, natural, therapeutic, ritualistic, and truly traditional piece of culture that; in true sense are holistic for the wellbeing and livelihood of mankind.



Fig.1.2- The traditional “Ghongadi”- Most famous piece of Traditional attire from Maharashtra

Besides being “*Sustainable, Eco-friendly and Natural*”, this craft is blessed by its ritualistic background, medicinal assets & multi seasonal use; makes it not only “Sustainable” but also adds the “Holistic” facet to its identity. 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, natural process & hand weave these yarns using a basic floor loom into the fabric, known as “Ghongadi.”

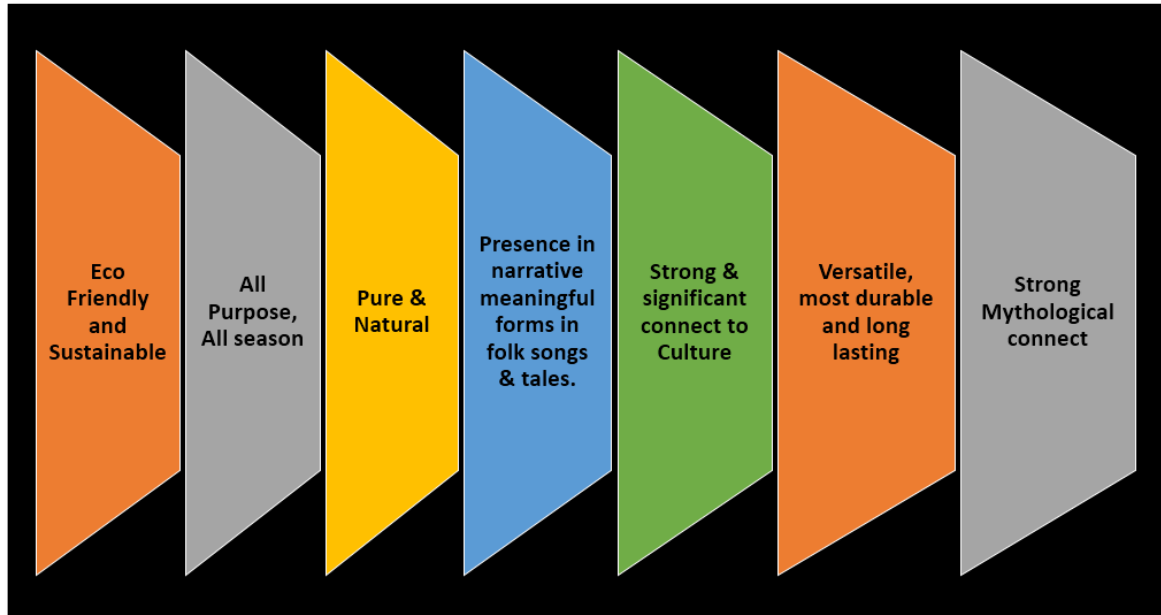
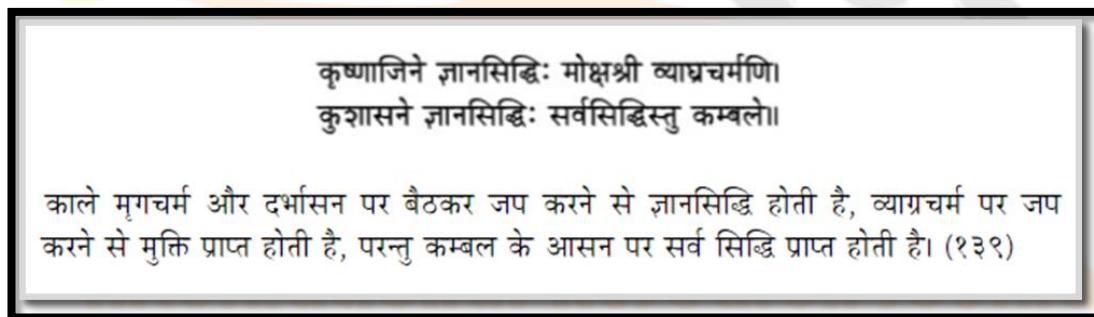


Fig.1.3- Keywords that best define Ghongadi

With its metaphorical and symbolic mentions in Indian mythology, ritualistic & medicinal uses in the Shepherd community make it rare, having copious holistic facets that reflect the centrality of the craft for a sustainable future.



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 samsara, 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; make it not only “Sustainable” but also adds a “Holistic” facet to its identity.

NEED OF THE STUDY.

“Ghongadi,” having a resilient interconnection with entities such as economy, community, social & sustainable manner, is yet to be explored in Fashion & has the potential to be cherished as an important, meaningful ownership for Maharashtrian Crafts. The Research reveals the uniqueness of the craft from various myths, which are eventually believed to be meaningful truths that prove to be the most meaningful addition to the rich Indian Craft heritage, delivering an identity & hope of a “holistically sustainable craft”.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The presumed product range is an initiative to bring the craft into the fashion context that proves to be a meaningful solution to answer the current needs of the global fashion agenda from an eco & sustainable perspective. This traditionally significant “Ghongadi,” having a typical stance, was a challenge to be investigated for the Fashion Market. This exploration process needed a strong base & apt methodology for understanding how the current market consents to the change in the existing product of the craft.

This includes primary and secondary data collection involving literature review, interviews with artisans, field visits, and product exploration experiments.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population of Ghongadi artisans was drawn from villages in the Pune district where Ghongadi manufacturing is performed. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with three craftsmen from the villages, and a small number of community members participated in the group discussions. A questionnaire was distributed to twenty-five fashion customers to pick an alternative for product research, which led to experimentation and product discovery for lifestyle products.

3.2 Data and Sources of Data

For this study, primary data has been collected from the Ghongadi weaving artisans from the villages around Pune, and the secondary data has been collected with an extensive literature review based on relevant themes.

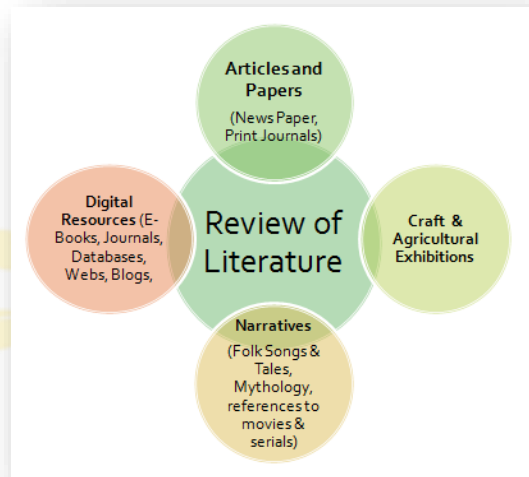


Fig.1.4- The Literature Mention on Ghongadi

A comprehensive primary and secondary research & market analysis in terms of Consumer scan & Fashion scan through a survey was essential. The stratified sample of a mix of Fashion & Craft conscious people from Education, Design, Craft & Industry was studied to further execute the process.

Due to the very limited published data on “Ghongadi,” the Primary survey incorporates closed interpersonal interaction conducted with Ghongadi weavers, & other sources consisting of a mix of Fashion and Craft conscious people from Education, Design, Craft, and Industry gave insight into how the further exploration of the craft can be carried out. The methodology followed to review the status of Ghongadi among users provided an array of information that provided opportunities to develop the craft further to suit the ultimate fashion-conscious consumer.

A primary survey was conducted to understand the need for 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 through reviews, feedback, forms, questionnaires & suggestions that furnished the idea about further product development, which is the outcome of this research paper. The reviews indicated the following facts.

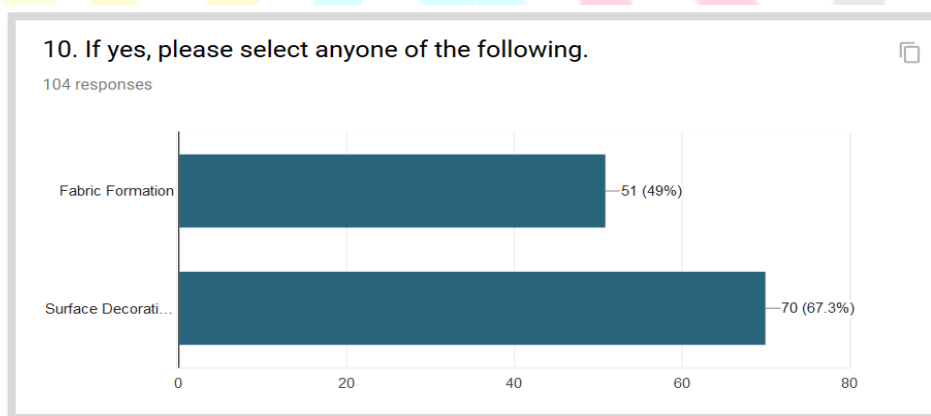


Fig.1.5-Response through the secondary survey

Chart no.2 (Question- Specify which technique would suit the best as Value Addition on the product of Ghongadi?)

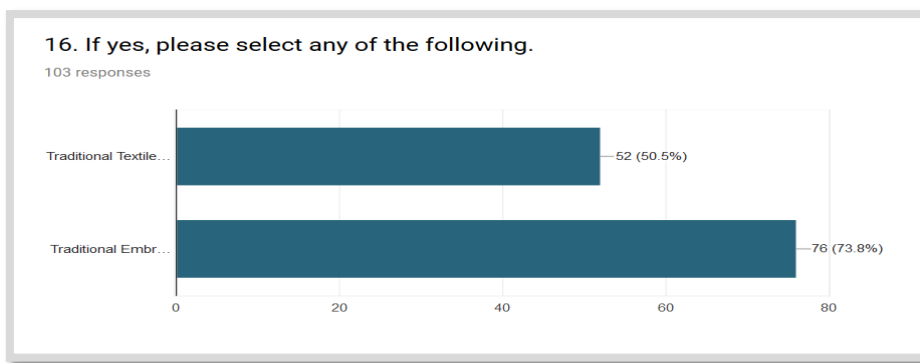


Fig.1.6- Response through the secondary survey

Chart no.3 (Question- What kind of technique according to you is most suitable for the product of Ghongadi?)

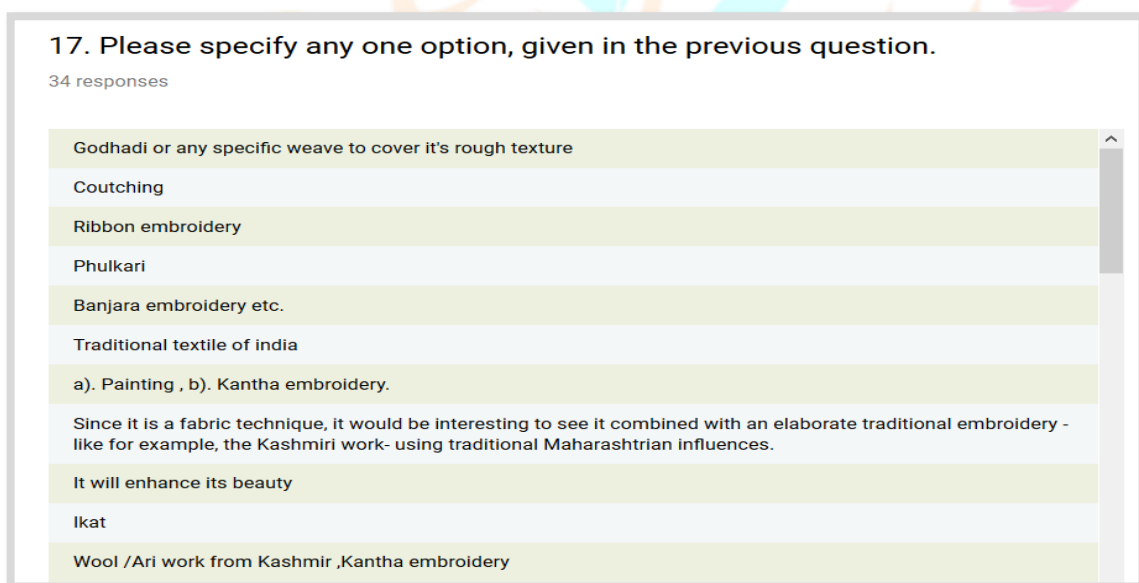


Fig.1.7- Response through the secondary survey

Chart no.4 (Question- Specify which Product Range you would like to accept the Ghongadi in?)

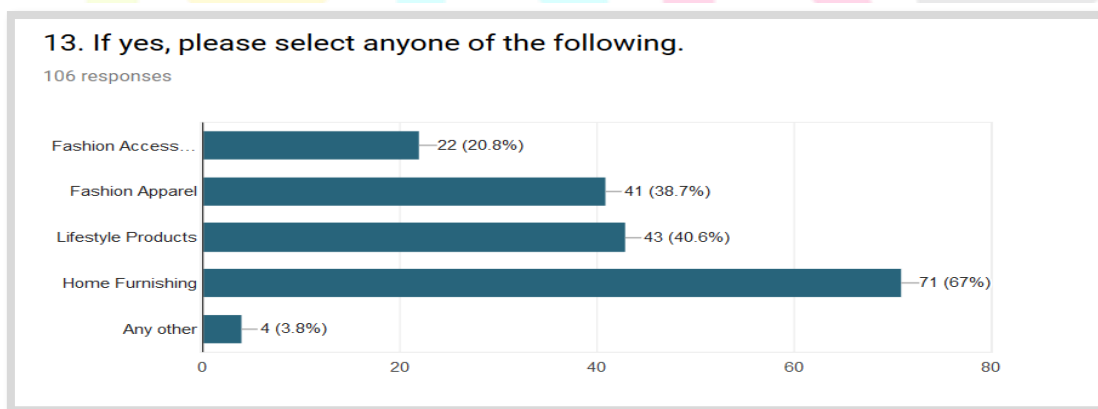


Fig.1.8- Response through the secondary survey

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the survey & considering the identities of hand-crafted techniques utilizing sustainable raw materials practiced in the various communities from the various rural parts of India were selected. The survey also provided a scope of utilizing various surface exploration techniques that change the simplicity of the surface of Ghongadi, having a rugged & coarse feel. It ensured that every detail that's part of the further Product Intervention is procured from the various other Craft communities that strive to uplift their craft for survival.

EXPLORATION IN GHOGADI:

The coarse and rough characteristics of "Ghongadi" sometimes act as a limitation in the further exploration of the craft. Also the consumers never expected this craft to be represented in any other form than a blanket. Based on the secondary survey, further *Value Additions* to overcome the coarse texture of "Ghongadi"; various techniques such as Hand embroideries & weaving techniques using pit looms of regions like Gujarat and Karnataka have been explored as follows. The above techniques work wonderfully by providing a supplementary surface through the embroidery & weaving patterns using additional threads or extra weft that create a more comfortable feel to the wearer. The surface is washed in lukewarm water and treated with home-based *Cationic softeners* to provide softness & make it more comfortable to wear. The product development results from the detailed study of the craft in terms of its functions, characteristics & surface feel by keeping its holistic approach unbroken.



Fig.1.9- Product exploration in Fashion Accessory- Hand bags

Keeping in mind the 100% pure natural, ethical & sustainable aspect of "Ghongadi," a promising lifestyle product of- Tote bag, was designed keeping every single detail to make this product handcrafted and sustainable. The details, such as interlining, strings, threads, stylish trims, surface development, etc., are handcrafted and procured from various communities who are involved in keeping their crafts alive through livelihood & probably are also striving for the craft's survival as "Ghongadi" does.

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

V. CONCLUSION

The practice-based qualitative research is an ingenuity to bring to attention "Ghongadi," which has incredible potential through its legacy in narrative forms with a certain meaning behind its existence. To make the versatile craft of Ghongadi stand in the Global Fashion agenda as the most "sustainable as well as holistic crafts" from India, a strong Product range to reestablish its worth and identity was essential. The research is not only concerned about the craft and bringing it an identity but also ensures the Hopeful Meaning by studying its significance through its Myths in the historical and Mythological narratives.

This "Sustainable & Holistic craft of Ghongadi" not only deals in associating the craft communities but also engages in creating "Meaningful Hopes" in the communities 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.”

The paper proposes that “Ghongadi,” having a strong context of Myths that are now believed to be the “Meaningful truths,”; can be tomorrow’s “Hope” not only for the sake of Community and Weavers but also to build a strong “Holistically Sustainable” option that brings “Meaning” to the life and environment.

II. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Sincere thanks to the community and Artisans of Ghongadi and Banjara embroidery from the rural villages around Pune and Solapur for sharing their skills and knowledge for the craft upliftment and revival.

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