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Indian Khadi & its Challenges

(The Hindu, 20-08-24)

Khadi refers to cloth that is hand-spun and hand-woven, typically made from cotton, silk, or wool fibers.

- The fibers are first hand-spun into yarn using a spinning wheel (charkha)
- The yarn is then hand-woven into fabric on a handloom
- Texture: Usually has a coarse, rugged texture, though finer varieties exist
- Breathability: Known for being highly breathable and suitable for Indian climate
- Durability: Generally very durable due to its handmade nature

What is the significance of Khadi in India?

- **Symbol of independence:** Khadi was a key element of Mahatma Gandhi's Swadeshi movement, promoting self-reliance and boycotting foreign goods.
- **National identity:** It became a symbol of Indian nationalism during the freedom struggle and also post-Independence,
- **Economic significance:** Khadi production provides employment opportunities in rural areas, particularly for women and marginalized communities.
- **Cultural value:** Khadi represents India's rich textile heritage and traditional handloom techniques.
- **Eco-friendly:** Khadi production has a low carbon footprint and uses natural, biodegradable materials.
- **Soft Power:** Khadi has gained international recognition as a uniquely Indian product. It's often presented as a diplomatic gift, representing Indian culture and values.

What recent changes have been made to the national flag production in India?

- Flag Code amended in 2022 to include machine-made polyester flags
- Polyester flags exempted from GST, putting them on par with khadi flags. This decision came when India became a net importer of polyester yarn

How have these changes affected the khadi industry?

- Threatens the livelihood of khadi spinners and weavers
- Karnataka Khadi Gramodyoga Samyukta Sangha (KKGSS) went on indefinite strike opposing the new changes
- Reduction in government procurement of khadi
- Wages for khadi spinners remain low (₹200-₹250 per day)

What broader issues does this situation highlight about India's handloom sector?

- General disinterest in cultivating India's handloom and handicraft traditions
- GST burden on handloom workers (on final products as well as raw materials)
- Exclusion of handloom spinners and weavers from the Vishwakarma Yojana
- Lack of support for khadi spinners and weavers to form their own cooperatives
- Failure to build a global audience for Indian handlooms

What solutions does the article suggest?

- Restore khadi as the only fabric for the national flag
- Reimagine the place of India's handloom traditions in society and economy
- Regulate the market to prevent semi-mechanised khadi from being sold as hand-spun
- Increase government efforts to promote khadi globally
- Address the GST burden on handloom workers

Can you answer the following question?

Discuss the historical importance of Khadi and evaluate the challenges it faces in contemporary times.

Banni grasslands of Kachchh, Gujarat

(The Hindu, 20-08-24)

What is the current state of grasslands globally and in India?

- Grasslands are one of the largest ecosystems in the world
- 49% of global grassland areas are experiencing degradation
- In India, grasslands cover about 24% of the country's total land area
- Indian grasslands are threatened by agricultural conversion, tree plantations, invasive species, and development projects

What are the key findings of the study on Banni grasslands in Gujarat?

- Banni grasslands have decreased from 3,800 sq. km to about 2,600 sq. km
- 36% of the existing grassland area was "highly suitable" for restoration, 27% "moderately suitable" and 2% "not suitable"
- Nearly two-thirds of Banni grasslands can be easily restored with adequate water sources

What are the threats to Banni Grasslands?

- **Invasive species:** Prosopis juliflora (mesquite): This invasive shrub is rapidly spreading, outcompeting native grass species and altering the ecosystem.
- **Climate change:** More frequent droughts are impacting vegetation and water availability.
- **Overgrazing:** Increased livestock population is leading to overgrazing, reducing grass cover and biodiversity.
- **Land-use changes:** Conversion of grasslands for agriculture and other developmental activities. Fragmentation of the landscape due to infrastructure projects.
- **Desertification:** Soil degradation and loss of vegetation cover are leading to desertification in some areas.
- **Salinity ingress:** Increasing soil salinity due to seawater intrusion and improper water management.
- **Loss of traditional management practices:** Decline in traditional pastoral practices that historically maintained the grassland ecosystem.
- **Pollution:** Increased pollution from nearby industrial and urban areas affecting soil and water quality.

What is the way forward for conservation of Banni Grasslands?

- Ecological restoration:

- Implement large-scale removal of invasive species, particularly *Prosopis juliflora*
- Reintroduce native grass species through seeding and planting programs
- Restore natural water bodies and wetlands within the grassland ecosystem
- Sustainable grazing management:
 - Develop and implement rotational grazing systems
 - Establish guidelines for optimal livestock numbers based on carrying capacity
 - Promote traditional pastoral practices that maintain grassland health
- Legal and policy measures:
 - Designate Banni as a protected area or conservation reserve
 - Develop and enforce strict regulations against land-use changes and encroachment
 - Create a special administrative body for Banni grassland management
- Community involvement:
 - Engage local communities in conservation efforts through participatory management
 - Provide alternative livelihood options to reduce dependence on grassland resources
 - Implement community-based monitoring programs
- Traditional knowledge integration:
 - Document and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into management plans
 - Support and revive traditional crafts and practices linked to grassland resources

Can you answer the following question?

Evaluate the importance of grassland ecosystems in India and discuss the challenges they face. In light of the recent study on Banni grasslands, suggest comprehensive measures for their conservation and sustainable management while balancing ecological and economic concerns.

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