

Reviving the Rich Heritage: A Contemporary Approach to Khadi Cloth Production Insights from the Barkamta Community.

by

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Abstract

Khadi or Khaddar is a thousand-year old traditional cloth of the subcontinent. This traditional cloth is created by digging a shaft in the ground and placing it in it. People called it Khadi because it is made from shafts. People wore Khadi cloth after Mahatma Gandhi started the Swadeshi Movement against the British Government. So, Mahatma Gandhi is considered as the founder of this traditional cloth in the Indian subcontinent. Comilla was one of the focal points for producing Khadi cloth at that time. The produced cloth of Comilla Khadi cloth industries are very much popular among different classes of people in the country and abroad.

This paper focuses on the contemporary challenges and probable solutions for reviving the traditional Khadi cloth production in the Barkamta community of Debidwar upazila, Comilla, Bangladesh. Because of excessive raw materials costs, increase of power loom products and lack of digital marketing knowledge among the artisan communities , this phenomenal heritage is declining everyday. The paper, which conducted interviews with local weavers, identifies the major problems and provides some strategic solutions including creating a social media learning center for the artisans, providing necessary tools and infrastructure, employing a temporary content creator for helping the artisans for proper marketing procedures, and arranging different exhibitions. This project, which has a budget of 2 lakh taka and a duration of six months, focuses to boost up the artisans' economic conditions and preserve the Khadi legacy by providing them with digital marketing training and incorporating contemporary design. In order to guarantee the long-term prosperity and sustainability of the Khadi fabric sector in the area, this paper underscores the significance of strategic interventions.

Keywords: Khadi Cloth, Barkamta Artisans community, Empowerment, Economic establishment, Digital Marketing, Sustainability.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“I believe that where there is pure and active love for the poor there is God also. I see God in every thread that I draw on the spinning wheel”. By Mahatma Gandhi (Rao, 2017, p. 1).[1] Since ancient times, this sub-continent is globally famous for its handloom weaving industry. This weaving cloth not only met the demand of the people in our country but also exported abroad to meet the demand of the foreign people. Among various handloom weaving cloth, Khadi is one of the most versatile fabrics that express the vibrant tradition and rich cultural heritage of Bangladesh, especially the city of Comilla. According to Lal (2020, p. 3),[5] Khadi was originating in India, with Mahatma Gandhi in the forefront, Khadi was firstly seen as a movement against the British than as a fabric. He inspired the people to boycott expensive British clothes and make them self-reliant on cotton. At that time Cumilla was the center of Khadi cloth, especially Chandina, Burichang and Debidwar Upzilla of the district. This research paper will focus on a small community of Barkamta Union under Debidwar upazila of Comilla district. Among all the Khadi artisans community in Comilla district, Barkamta community is the oldest community of Khadi clothes production. This traditional art is carried out to the present generation from their forefathers. Although this community was one of the most stable communities in terms of production and business at one time, now their economic conditions are very vulnerable due to several problems and issues they face (Debnath, 2023, interviewed). In this paper, the focus will be on the production of Khadi clothes, as day by day the production gets lessened due to less consumption and it loses its popularity.

As mentioned above, this project is about a small community of Khadi cloth in Barkamta of Debidwar upazila, Comilla. This community is one of the existing communities who made the handwoven Khadi cloth in Comilla district. For the project, I have created a mindmap, where I have drawn my plan of actions and other things that I will discuss in the entire paper. I have also made a community map where I have pin-pointed the artisan’s locations, their local shop and different locations in Kandirpar, Comilla, where they sell their products. On 30th November, 2023, I paid a visit to the community on the purpose of interviewing them about the present conditions of Khadi artisans, the problems they have faced currently and how they think that these problems can be solved. I have also shared my step by step plan of actions and the budget and time allocated for this project. This paper also gives insights on how the artisans can be economically benefited, and the way

they might be able to revive this age-old heritage.

At present, the artisans face multifaceted challenges to continue the Khadi clothes production. Among them, the excessive price of raw materials is a major one, and the price is increasing day by day. Most of the weavers abandoned the professions of their forefathers, as they failed to make it to the fierce competition. Although the high price of raw materials is a big issue, talking with the community I came to know that lack of digital marketing knowledge is a major problem, that is why sales are decreasing day by day. Along with these problems, this community also faces other problems, but proper digital marketing is the major one. Throughout this paper I will focus on digital marketing and try to help the community by familiarizing them with digital marketing, such as Facebook page, Instagram pages. For my project, the budget associated is 2 lakh taka and the time period is 6 months. Within this budget and time period, the objective of the paper is to help the community and resolve the above-mentioned problem. Moreover, this paper will focus not only to help the rural artisans community in Barkamta union but also preserve one of our old heritage. Although these problems require more time, along with a handsome amount of budget, with some proper planning and a set of steps, this paper might be able to resolve some of the major issues the community faces. This project paper looks into the issue of lack digital marketing knowledge among the Barkamta Khadi artisans, hence revival of Khadi clothes by proposing a sequence of plan of actions to resolve the mentioned problem through creating short term social media learning center for the weavers, helping them how to create Facebook or Instagram pages, how to connect with customers through social media in a better way, how to take better pictures of products, when to post pictures in pages etc. Thus, this paper aims to a long term success for the artisans by promoting digital marketing.

Chapter 2

Background

2.1 Literature Review

Khadi or hand-spun fabrics were once woven with great enthusiasm in different upazila in Comilla district. But with the course of time, these traditional waven clothes gradually reached towards extinction. This happened due to an insufficient number of expert craftsmen. Moreover, lack of funding, necessary yarn and labor makes it difficult for the weavers to continue the production of Khadi clothes, and also demoralizes the young generation for taking up this profession. After paying a visit to Debidwar, the UNB correspondent identified that only 8 to 10 spinning wheels are activated now. The local weavers mentioned that expanding the market access and providing training to workers by expert trainers can revive the thousand years of traditional Khadi clothes (Kawser, 2019, P. 1).[3]

According to Singha and Surjit (2020, PP. 3), Assam is the home of handloom weavers and many skilled weavers work here, but the weavers' income is very low. It is anticipated that in future the traditional hand weaving skills will be replaced by the automated machines and it will hugely affect the small community of Assam. Because the products produced by the automated machines are sold at lower prices in the local markets. This issue can be resolved by enhancing the current workers by providing modern training facilities to improve their skills and make them independent weavers. Besides, proper guidance of online platforms are provided to the weavers to increase the selling of the silk products. Moreover, proper methods of dyeing process, linkage with the stakeholder or the corporate and buying houses can increase the income of the weavers and create positive changes in their living conditions (Singha and Surjit, 2020, PP. 3).[6]

According to Karim et al.,(2021, P. 6-12), traditional kantha embroidery through Khadi fabrics can be revitalized to its own heritage and characteristics by collaborating the modern design process. At present, fashion is upgrading and people's taste also changes every day, therefore, the products of old embroidery kantha aren't able to dominate nowadays. This happens due to the old fashioned design. Adopting the modern design techniques and adapting it with the traditional techniques to create a new trend of design process for solving the problem and reviving the kantha embroidery heritage in Bangladesh. This will improve the garment's facilities, introducing various varieties that will attract consumers and re-engage more

weavers and craftsmen in this artwork. Here, the new design techniques will contain the native culture that will signify their own cultural heritage. For overseas people, creating an online website for products in English language can engage more people and expand the artwork more. [7]

The cottage industry in Bangladesh, especially Khadi, not only contributes to the economic development of the country but also creates employment opportunities for the people. Using both primary and secondary data, along with interviews with workers and the supervisor of a small community, this paper found out that old fashioned technology, expensive raw materials, inadequate marketing management and lack of capital are some of the major issues that are responsible for shutting down cottage industry. In spite of the huge demand and passion for Khadi products, it's still lagging behind nowadays and can't expand as we expect. In order to regain the market, arranging different types of seminars with the help of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) can be an effective solution. Besides, providing financial support and implementing a set of specific policies for both cottage industry and machine industry can help the industries to grow better. Moreover, engaging more consultations programs and more training facilities to the rural artisans can improve the skills of the artisans. Thus, it will ultimately expand the cottage industry and grab the attention of the global market (Hossain and Imran, 2019, P. 118-125). [2]

According to Venkatesh and deekshitha (2019, P. 3150-3160), although Khadi is considered as a sustainable textile product, it is beset with numerous challenges, including the huge competition of modern and western fabrica in the market, lack of modernization and lack of apathy of the consumers. These problems can be solved through following some strategic rules and regulations. Diversification of the products- expanding the Khadi products beyond traditional clothes. For example- making home accessories, furnishing items and other items. Rebranding or renovation of brand- marketing the quality and sustainability as well as the fashionable quality of Khadi clothes. Promotional campaigns- launching campaigns of advertisement on different social media platforms can engage more consumers and increase sales percentage. Research, inversion and government support- Implementing research facilities in order to increase the quality and production process along with government help can be a key factor for the Khadi industry. All the above mentioned strategies can revive the Khadi industry and make it one of the most demanding and sustainable fabric industries in India.[4]

2.1.1 Mindmap

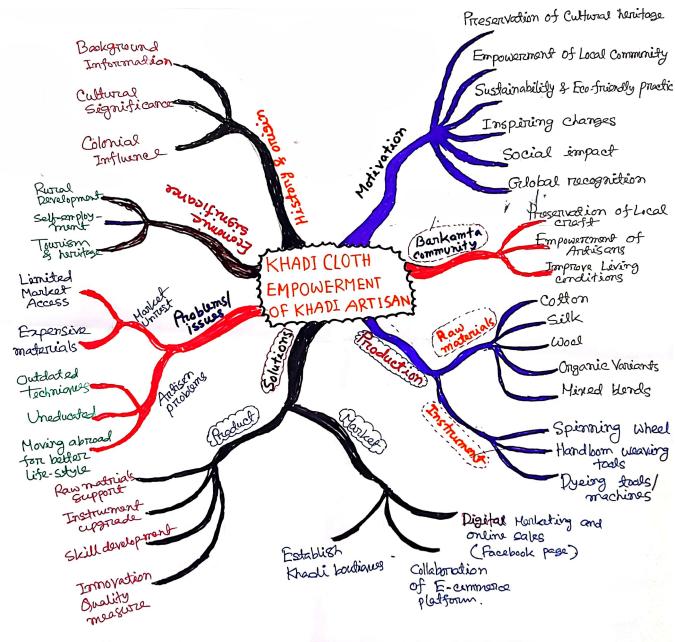


Figure 2.1: Project Mindmap

2.1.2 Community Map

Community map

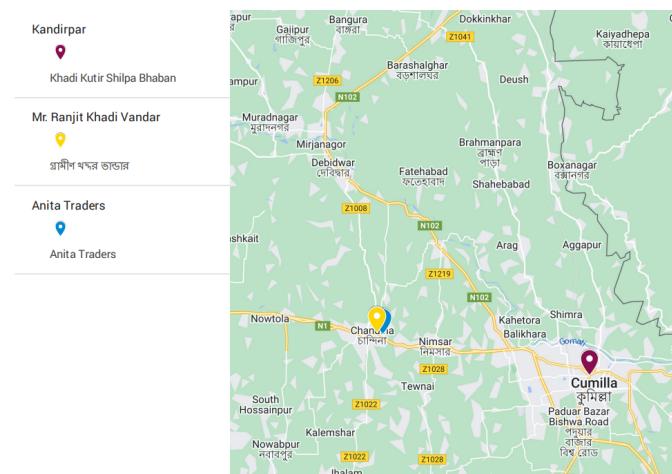


Figure 2.2: Khadi Artisans Community Map- Comilla

2.1.3 Work Plan

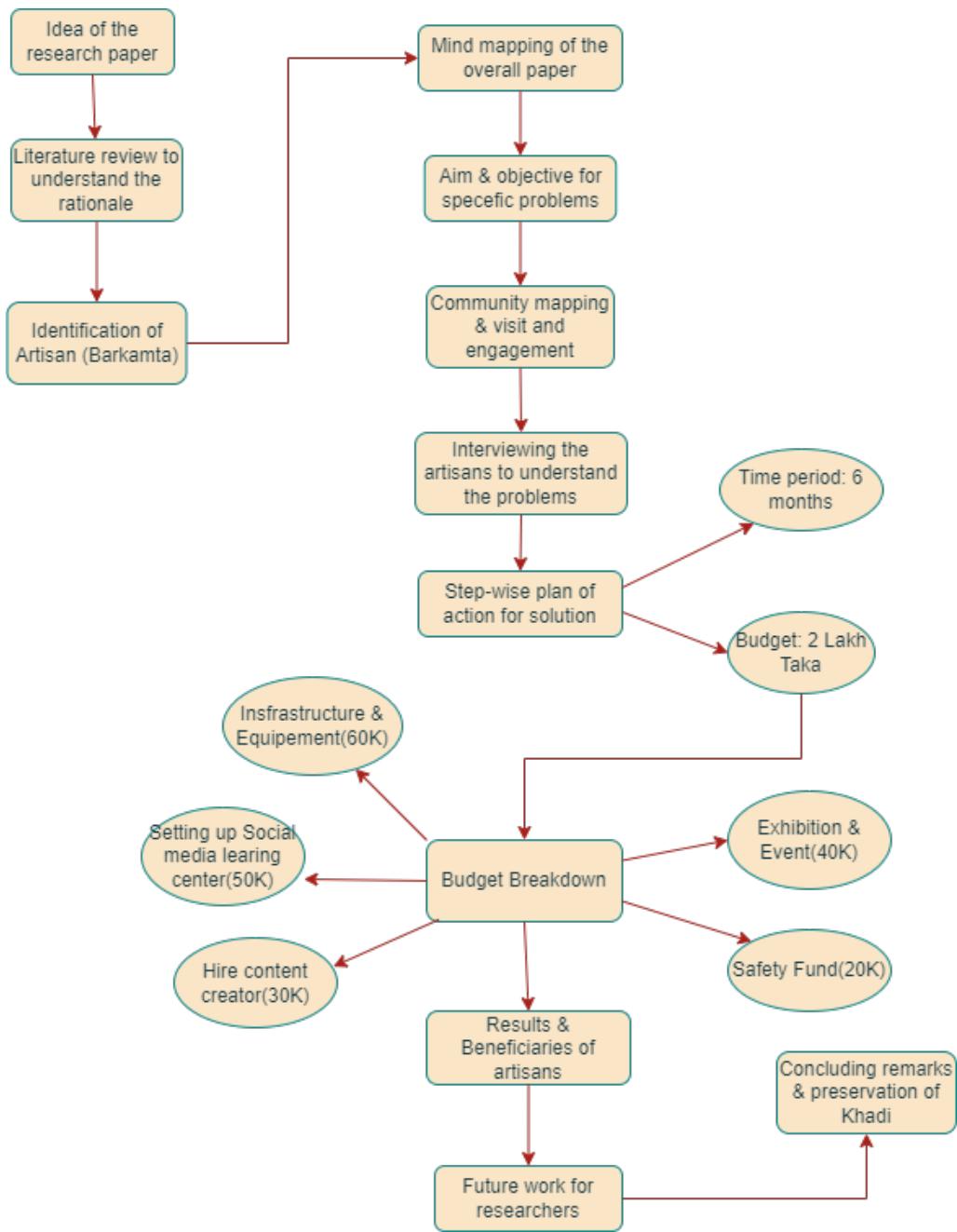


Figure 2.3: Work plan of the paper

Chapter 3

Community Interview

In my Barkamta union community project, on 30th, November, 2023, I have conducted the interview session with Raanjit Debnath and his elder brother, who run the Khadi cloth producing community in this union. This traditional cloth production has declined due to the poor income as most of the people left this profession, only two communities left in the Debidwar upazila. Going to the location, I have found that Ranjit Debnath and his elder brother Sujit Debnath are working together in the Chakra to make clothes. Besides, many weavers were working together. Some are cutting the yarn, some are skillfully carding the yarn, a few dyeing the threads, and skilled weavers make the fabrics. Several families work together in this community to produce Khadi clothes everyday.

Starting my interview session, I have asked Ranjit Debnath about the conditions of Khadi productions in their community. Debnath (2023) replied, “nowadays most of the people left this artwork due to low income. At once there were 8-10 small communities in the whole Debidwar upazila, now only 2 communities are producing Kadi clothes, one is their own community and other one is in their neighboring village”. He replied that one of main reasons is the inclusion of power loom products, which are thinner than handloom products and are available at cheaper rates. He replied that collaborating with modern design techniques and tools will increase the production rate and increase the income of the artisans.

According to Debnath (2023), “the price of the Khadi yarn has increased almost 4 times than the previous price”. He said that they bought per kg of yarn at 80 to 90 taka, but now the price rose to almost 400 taka, which is another major problem for their production. But the price of the clothes didn’t increase that much. Moreover, they sell their products to different Khadi shops in Comilla, (i.e., Khadi Kutir Shilpa Bhaban, Khadi Cottage etc.) at a cheaper rate, where the shops sell the products at almost double the rate. Asking him what he thinks can be a possible solution for reducing the yarn price. He replied, “Punishing the syndicate businessman, and connecting or linking up to the manufacturers or wholesalers can help them to collect raw materials at cheaper rates”.

Sanjay Debnath, the elder son of Sujit Debnath, manages the Khadi cloth shop in their local market. Speaking with him, he mentioned that besides operating the business, sometimes he works in making the products as the shop does not always

have such sales. According to Debnath (2023), “some of their Khadi products are sold online which are ordered via mobile phone call by our relatives and acquaintances”. Talking with him about his thoughts on social accounts like- Facebook page, Instagram page etc. as a solution to the Khadi cloth selling, he replied that though he has a facebook account but he doesn’t know how to maintain a Facebook page. Talking to him about my plan of digital marketing and step by step solutions like- providing them a few infrastructure and equipment, short-term social media learning center, events and exhibition etc. He was very much eager to learn about social media marketing and agrees with my plan of activities. Hearing the above mentioned steps, he thinks that this may revive their Khadi production and increase their selling, ultimately improving their living conditions.

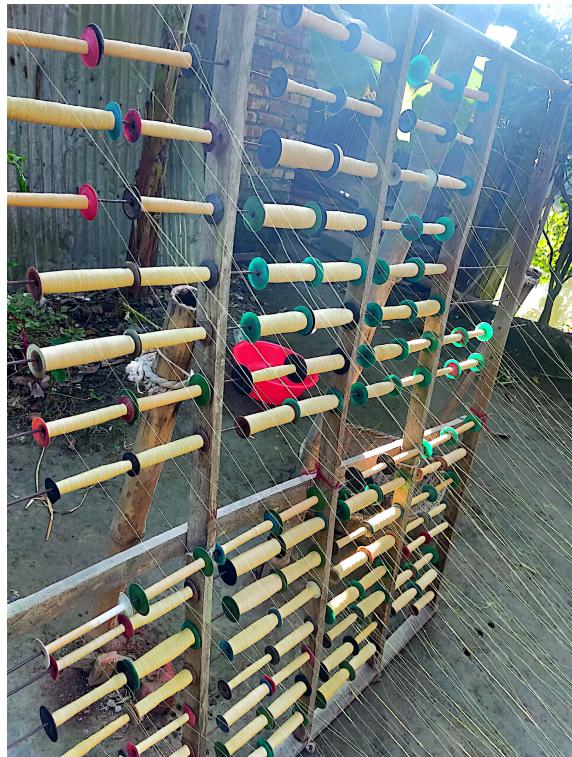


Figure 3.1: Khadi Cloth Yarn

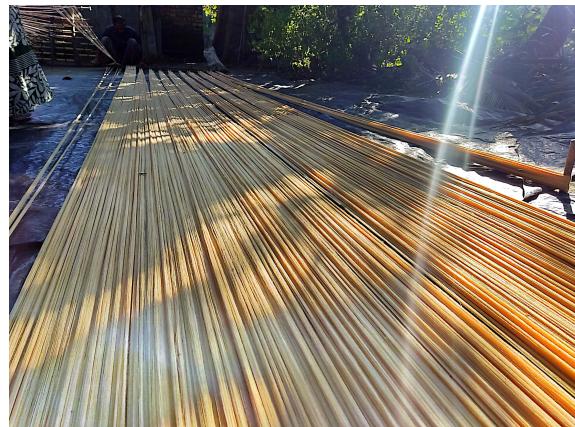


Figure 3.2: Die of Yarn- Khadi Cloth



Figure 3.3: Artisans making Khadi Cloth



Figure 3.4: Artisans Producing Khadi Cloth

Chapter 4

Body Paragraph

In this part, This paper will provide step by step solutions to the problem we have identified through conducting the interview session with the Barkamta community. As we have mentioned before, we will have a budget of 2 lakh taka for addressing the problem. Firstly, we will break down the budget according to our step-wise plan of actions.

4.1 Budget Breakdown

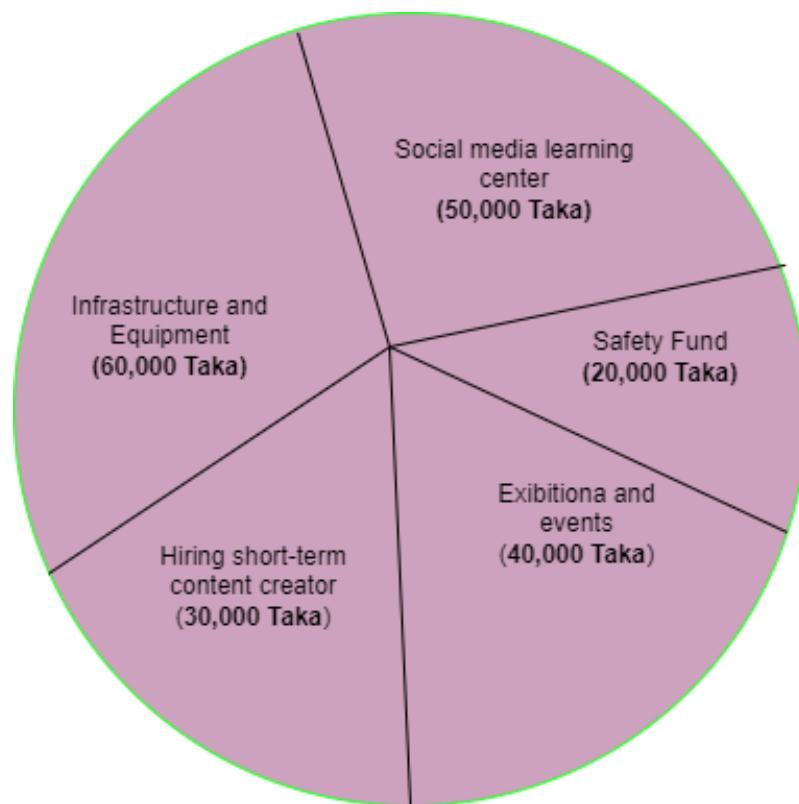


Figure 4.1: Budget Breakdown

4.1.1 Social media learning center

This is the first step of my plan, where I have allocated 50,000 taka for creating an online social media training center. For this, we will rent a single room using a small amount of the budget. A part of the budget will be used for renting the house. Then, for decoration, like- fan, lighting and basic amenities. Now, to teach the artisans about proper social marketing, we will hire an expert who will train the artisans for about a month. Then, I will help the artisans by arranging online sessions with them, and will try to address their issues.

4.1.2 Infrastructure and Equipment

For this segment, here I have allocated 60,000 taka to execute the first step of my plans. Here, for digital marketing the community needs some tools, which they don't have right now. So, a big portion of this segment budget will be used to buy a smartphone. After getting proper training about social media, then the artisans will be able to use the smartphone to take photos, make videos, post them on social media and thus, be able to utilize online marketing.

4.1.3 Hiring short-term content creator:

In this segment, the budget will be used for hiring a short time content creator who will help the artisans on taking pictures, making videos and managing their Facebook page. The aim is that at the initial phase the artisans might face difficulties about proper social media page management, so hiring a content creator will be help the artisans. Besides, he/she can help to promote the business and reach many people by providing quality content for the Khadi cloth. The plan is to hire the content creator for one month, then the artisans will be able to do the task on their own.

4.1.4 Exhibition and events

As we have a 6 month period for our project, after executing the above step of plans I think the artisans might be able to become familiar with social media marketing. Now, during the last month of our project period, arranging an exhibition or events by highlighting the Khadi products will attract more people. Besides, the artisans will also be able to sell products during the exhibition. Here, I will try to communicate with some local journalists to make a report about the exhibition and publish this in the local newspaper. So, the allocated 40,000 taka will be used for arranging the exhibition and other facilities.

4.1.5 Safety Fund

This budget will be keep for unforeseen expenses or the emergency situation. This fund will be an useful resource for unexpected costs or make adjustments during the above mentioned step of plans.

Chapter 5

5.1 Future Work

Here, this paper focuses on only one specific Khadi cloth community which is Barkamta community. It emphasizes on how the community gradually loses their Khadi cloth production due to some major challenges and identifies some key solution strategies that can help the community to revive this traditional product. Researchers can work on other existing communities in any area of Bangladesh. They can follow different strategies like- online based survey questionnaires and responses from the local artisans and community. Moreover, future researchers can focus on collaborating with the existing all local communities within the Comilla district. Researchers can aim at the major collective problems that the communities faced most and identify some effective solutions. Here, one strategy could be managing a higher budget and extending the research period for a longer period of time (like- 2/3 years), which eventually helps them to implement sustainable interventions to resuscitate the Khadi sector. So, this long-time commitment will help the researchers for the creation and execution of strategic steps that improves production processes, marketing techniques and give the artisans both financial and infrastructural support they need. This longer period will help the researchers to observe and assess the conditions of the Khadi communities more effectively and sustainability. Therefore, the main objective of revival of Khadi cloth production not just in Comilla but throughout the entire country, in order to protect this rich heritage. The above mentioned strategies can significantly uplift the Khadi production, its longevity and development in Bangladesh.

5.2 Conclusion

In essence, the above mentioned initiatives aim to revive the Khadi cloth artisans In Barkamta community in Debidwar, Comilla. This community is dealing with the excessive price of raw materials and lack of social media marketing as they face huge economic struggles. This paper conducts an interview session with the community, identifying their major issue that is the key obstacle in their income. The strategy aims to empower the artisans for long-term progress rather than solving the current issues. At present, it is more certain to prioritize online selling and digital marketing proficiency. Furthermore, revitalizing the Khadi business may be implemented by collaborating with stakeholders and using contemporary design ideas. As Khadi is considered as self-reliance and resistance against British rule, this heritage of this subcontinent needs to be revived. Apart from its traditional aspects, this cloth also serves the associated communities who have been entangled themselves from thousands of yours back. A strategy plan with a budget of 2 lakh taka has been developed through insightful interviews. Some key actions include the establishment of a social media learning center, arrangement of critical infrastructure, the hire of a short-term content producer, and the organization of exhibits. Beyond immediate issues, the aim is to empower the community for long-term success by promoting digital marketing literacy and cooperation using current design methodologies.

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