

Sustainable Clothing Practices Amongst Maharashtra's Elderly Women: A Cultural Legacy of Resourcefulness and Environmental Respect

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Abstract:

In the vibrant tapestry of India's cultural heritage, the state of Maharashtra stands as a beacon of sustainable clothing traditions, proudly upheld by its golden-aged women. This research illuminates the timeless and inspiring practices of these women who have seamlessly integrated tradition, sustainability, and environmental consciousness into their way of life. This paper employs qualitative research, including unstructured interviews with senior citizen women from rural Solapur and Nasik districts of Maharashtra. It seeks to document and explore the timeless practices and ingenious techniques these women employ to repurpose and upcycle clothing. To amplify the relevance of these findings, extensive reviews of prior research and existing theories have been conducted. From heirloom Paithani saris to everyday Ilkal saris, the practice of passing down clothing to future generations is customary. Moreover, these women demonstrate a unique penchant for repurposing old garments, often dressing newborns in soft, hand-me-down clothes from older siblings or cousins. One notable practice is the art of crafting vibrant rugs and quilts, known as "Godhadi" in Marathi, by transforming old garments. These women also eschew buying pillows, instead recycling discarded fabrics into hand-stitched cushions. In the face of adversity, the Maharashtra women, particularly those from marginalized communities, have remained resilient, embodying principles of resourcefulness, creativity, and deep respect for the environment. They ingeniously salvaged old Ilkal saris by retaining the undamaged portions and skilfully piecing them together, creating the "Junaari" sari. In Marathi, 'Juni' signifies old, plus 'sari', aptly naming this distinctive creation. This research offers a unique insight into the sustainable clothing practices of Maharashtra's elderly women, showcasing their resourcefulness and respect for the environment. Their practices provide valuable lessons for a world increasingly concerned with sustainable fashion and consumption.

Keywords: Sustainability, Maharashtra, Recycle, Upcycling, Conventional

1. Introduction

In the vast tapestry of India's cultural diversity, the state of Maharashtra stands as a shining beacon of tradition, sustainability, and environmental consciousness, where the legacy of sustainable clothing practices is meticulously woven into the lives of its elderly women. Nestled in the heart of India, Maharashtra boasts a rich cultural heritage that has thrived for centuries, owing much to the resilient,

resourceful, and creative women who have upheld age-old clothing traditions. This introduction serves as a gateway to an exploration of the timeless and inspiring practices of Maharashtra's elderly women and their profound contribution to sustainable fashion. Maharashtra, the third-largest state in India, is renowned for its diverse heritage, encompassing a multitude of languages, art forms, and culinary delights. However, it is the state's clothing traditions, deeply rooted in the ethos of sustainability and reverence for the environment, that have caught the attention of researchers and fashion enthusiasts alike. At the heart of this cultural phenomenon are the elderly women of Maharashtra, often referred to as the 'golden-aged' women. These women, with their wealth of knowledge and wisdom, have seamlessly integrated tradition, sustainability, and environmental consciousness into their way of life, setting a profound example for generations to come. The primary aim of this research is to shed light on the unique and timeless practices of these women, who, despite the changing world around them, have steadfastly adhered to sustainable clothing practices. This study employs qualitative research methodologies, including unstructured interviews with senior citizen women hailing from the rural regions of Solapur and Nasik districts within Maharashtra. Through these interviews, the research endeavours to document and explore the ingenious techniques and practices these women employ to repurpose and upcycle clothing.

2. Aaji (Grandmother): The Cultural Torchbearer

In middle-class Marathi families in Maharashtra, grandmothers, affectionately known as "aaji," occupy a unique and revered role. Their significance transcends that of caregivers and mentors, for they embody tradition and wisdom in their living presence. Grandmothers, often the custodians of ancestral customs, culinary secrets, and cherished bedtime stories passed down through generations, serve as the vital bridge connecting the family to its cultural heritage. Their existence in the household is a source of comfort and a living link to the cultural roots. Grandmothers instill life's most valuable lessons, imparting deep-seated values and cultural practices to the younger members of the family. Whether through teaching traditional recipes or regaling grandchildren with folklore, the influence of grandmothers is immeasurable. Their unwavering support, love, and wealth of knowledge make them integral pillars in middle-class Marathi households, ensuring the preservation of heritage and the nurturing of future generations.

In a traditional Maharashtrian household, grandmothers personify the central role they play. Their presence permeates the home with love, warmth, and timeless wisdom. Beyond the roles of caretakers or family matriarchs, grandmothers are living repositories of culture and values, sharing their knowledge with grace and affection. More than tending to daily chores and culinary delights, they embody the essence of sustainable living and practice. Grandmothers instill an appreciation for age-old traditions, particularly in the realm of sustainable fashion. They advocate for using and preserving existing resources, emphasizing the value of handwoven textiles. These textiles not only champion eco-friendliness but also stand as a testament to the rich heritage of Marathi culture. This practice, passed down through generations, characterizes the essence of Marathi culture. Women like grandmothers guide the next generation towards progress while preserving timeless wisdom and traditions that have withstood the test of time. In Marathi households, grandmothers are the guardians of culture, well-being, and the connection to the past, forming the foundation for a sustainable and harmonious future.

3. Documentation of sustainable practices

3.1 Unveiling Godhadi: A Legacy of Sustainability

In the vibrant cultural tapestry of Maharashtra, India, there exists a hidden gem of sustainability and artistic

ingenuity known as "Godhadi." This traditional textile art, also referred to as Godhadi quilts, reflects the heart and soul of Maharashtra's elderly women, who have perfected the skill of upcycling old saris and fabrics into beautiful and sustainable pieces of art. The art of Godhadi weaving stands as a testament to the state's rich heritage, its unique creative expression, and, most importantly, its unwavering commitment to sustainability. These quilts are meticulously crafted from a patchwork of old saris and fabrics, often handed down through generations. Each quilt tells a unique story through its vibrant colours, patterns, and fabrics, creating a kaleidoscope of memories and experiences.

The process of weaving Godhadi, a revered craft among Maharashtrian women, is a testament to their creativity, resilience, and commitment to sustainability. It begins with the collection of old and sentimental fabrics, often from worn-out saris and clothing. These fabrics are carefully sorted by color and type, and then cut into pieces, forming the patchwork for the quilt. The women meticulously stitch these pieces together by hand, creating the quilt's top layer. In addition to the patchwork, a Godhadi quilt typically consists of three layers: the top layer, a middle layer for insulation, and a back layer. The layers are then quilted together in a decorative pattern that can follow the patchwork design. The edges are folded and stitched to create a neat border. Some quilts may include embroidery or mirrors as decorative elements. After completion, the quilt may be washed for cleanliness and softness. Each Godhadi quilt is a unique creation, preserving family history and culture. These quilts are often cherished family heirlooms, passed down through generations, making them not just functional items but living testaments to sustainable practices and cultural traditions. The process embodies the women's deep respect for tradition, sustainable practices, and their resourcefulness, which they have honed over the years, using the Godhadi technique as a means to reduce waste, bond with their families, and contribute to a more sustainable world.

The art of weaving Godhadi, a cherished tradition among Maharashtrian women, showcases their exceptional creativity, resilience, and unwavering commitment to sustainability. Unlike Kantha stitches, Godhadi is exclusively crafted using thick white cotton yarn, creating a unique and distinctive texture. This technique involves the use of a specialized long needle known as the "Godhadi needle," readily available in stores. This needle facilitates the stitching process, allowing multiple stitches to be made simultaneously, adding efficiency to the craft. To prevent puckering between the two fabric layers, a meticulous approach is taken. The fabrics are carefully laid out on the ground before the stitching commences, ensuring a smooth and flawless finish.

The initial stitches serve the purpose of firmly holding the fabrics in place, a fundamental step in Godhadi quilting. The duration required to complete a Godhadi varies, typically ranging from one week to a month. The time frame is contingent on the number of hours worked and the level of involvement of the individuals participating in the crafting process. Measurements in this tradition are often taken by the width of the palm or fingers, a tactile approach that helps identify the gaps between two stitched rows. To enhance the visual appeal of Godhadis, contrasting colored fabrics are strategically employed to create striking borders. Each Godhadi quilt is a testament to the women's reverence for tradition, their resourcefulness, and the sustainable practices they have refined over the years. Through Godhadi weaving, they minimize waste, strengthen family bonds, and contribute to a more sustainable world, forging a legacy that transcends generations.

3.2 The Ingenious Creation of Junaari

In the heart of Maharashtra, a remarkable tradition has flourished, born from the resourcefulness of its women, particularly those from marginalized communities. These women, facing adversity and limited resources, have ingeniously transformed old Ilkal saris into a distinctive and sustainable attire known as

the "Junaari" sari. The term 'Junaari' eloquently encapsulates the essence of this creation, where 'Juni' signifies old in Marathi, and 'sari' is the traditional Indian attire. Junaari is the epitome of repurposing, as these saris breathe new life into well-worn fabric that couldn't afford new saris.

Ilkal saris, worn as casual daily attire by Maharashtrian women, are celebrated for their affordability, variety of colours, and accessibility. These saris, commonly paired with 'khun cholis,' constitute the everyday wardrobe of many. Junaari emerged from the necessity to make the most of available resources, reflecting the deep respect that these women hold for their cultural heritage.

The process of creating a Junaari sari is a labor of love and ingenuity. Instead of discarding a sari entirely when it becomes damaged, the women carefully salvage the undamaged portions, piecing them together into a unique, one-of-a-kind sari. The end result is a garment that tells a story of resilience and resourcefulness, celebrating the beauty of imperfection.

What sets the Junaari sari apart is not only its sustainability but also its affordability and distinctive look. Ilkal fabric, with its visually similar appearance in different colors, creates a unique aesthetic when combined, making each Junaari sari a work of art. This sustainable and budget-friendly approach has not only preserved the environment but also allowed women to embrace their heritage and express their creativity.

In a unique twist, a brand named Tejadnyaa, initiated by Marathi actresses Tejaswini Pandit and Abhidnya Bhave, has celebrated the Junaari look. Through their brand, they have reinvigorated the Junaari sari, bringing it into the modern fashion arena while preserving its authenticity. Their promotion of this sustainable and culturally rich attire is a testament to the Junaari's timeless appeal.

The story of the Junaari sari is a tribute to the resourcefulness and creativity of Maharashtra's women. Its simplicity, affordability, and rich cultural ties make it a treasure for those who appreciate sustainable fashion that transcends generations. The Junaari sari, a hidden gem of Maharashtra, not only brings forth a unique look but also tells the enduring tale of women who, when faced with limited means, have managed to create something truly extraordinary. The sustainability of these women's practices regarding the Junaari sari reflects their unwavering commitment to tradition, resourcefulness, and creativity.

3.3 Tradition Meets Sustainability: Passing on Clothing to Future Generations

3.3.a. In the heart of Maharashtra's rich and diverse culture, there exists a tradition as colorful and intricate as the fabric itself – the Paithani sari. These saris are not just garments; they are woven tales of heritage, artistry, and timeless elegance. Passed down from one generation to the next, these heirloom woven Paithani saris hold a special place in the hearts and homes of Maharashtrians.

The Paithani sari is no ordinary piece of clothing; it is a legacy that weaves the past with the present. These saris bear the intricate craftsmanship of weavers who have honed their skills over generations. The uniqueness of a Paithani sari lies in its exquisite silk or cotton fabric adorned with intricate zari work, presenting an array of vibrant colors and traditional motifs. Each sari tells a story of tradition, artistry, and the rich cultural history of Maharashtra.

But what truly sets the Paithani sari apart is the emotional connection it carries. These saris are not just garments; they are a part of the family's heritage. It's a common practice for mothers to pass these saris down to their daughters, who, in turn, cherish them as prized possessions. The act of gifting a Paithani sari isn't merely about clothing; it's about entrusting a piece of family history and culture to the next generation. In Maharashtra, the tradition of passing heirloom Paithani saris to the next generation is a cherished practice. These exquisite saris are often handed down from mothers to daughters, or from mothers-in-law

to their daughters-in-law. The act of gifting a Paithani sari symbolizes more than just fashion; it's a gesture of love, respect, and the passing down of cultural heritage.

The intricacy of Paithani saris is not limited to their designs but extends to the sentiments they carry. When a mother passes on her treasured Paithani sari to her daughter, she is, in essence, bequeathing a piece of her own history. These saris become a bridge that connects generations, a tangible link to the past, and a celebration of family ties.

3.3.b. In The tradition of passing down clothing to future generations is a customary practice in many cultures, including Maharashtra. Beyond the opulence of Paithani saris, there's an eco-conscious aspect to this practice. It embodies sustainable fashion and a respect for the environment, as it helps reduce textile waste and minimize the carbon footprint associated with the production of new garments.

Moreover, this practice extends to a unique penchant that Maharashtrian women have for repurposing old garments. One striking example is the custom of dressing newborns in soft, hand-me-down clothes from older siblings or cousins. This tradition may raise the question of why a new baby should wear old clothes. Traditionally, there are two compelling reasons for this practice:

Old clothes become softer with wear and constant washing, making them exceptionally comfortable for a baby. New cotton clothes can contain starch-like content, which may lead to rashes or discomfort for a baby's delicate skin.

Traditionally, a new baby was dressed in old clothes from a grandparent's or parent's sari or dhoti, typically made from thin and soft cotton. A person's scent is often retained in clothes, providing a sense of comfort and security to the baby (Chaudhury, 2019).

While some aspects of this tradition may no longer be necessary with modern materials and hygienic practices, the sentiment of preserving a sense of connection and comfort for the baby is still very much alive in Maharashtrian culture.

In a world where fast fashion and disposable clothing are becoming the norm, these traditions highlight the importance of cherishing heirloom pieces and promoting sustainable practices that respect both culture and the environment. They emphasize that clothing isn't merely a matter of style, but a bridge between generations and a way to preserve the stories of the past for the generations of the future.

3.4 From Discarded to Durable: The Sustainable Artistry of Pillow and Bolster

In a world marked by the rapid turnover of goods and the constant pursuit of the latest trends, there exists a deeply rooted tradition in rural Maharashtra, India, a tradition that has been upheld for generations by the elderly women of the region. This tradition revolves around the sustainable practice of creating pillows and bolsters not through purchase, but through resourcefulness and ingenuity, utilizing discarded pieces of fabric.

The women of the house are the architects of this tradition, and they approach the task of crafting pillows and bolsters with an unwavering commitment to sustainability. Unlike the conventional approach of buying pillows, where the size and shape are predetermined, the dimensions of these homemade pillows are determined by the maker or the availability of fabric, showcasing the flexibility and adaptability inherent in their craft.

The process begins with the selection of old, discarded clothes. These garments, often seen as waste by others, are transformed into valuable resources. The women carefully cut these fabrics into small pieces, known as "chindi" in Marathi, ensuring that no button, accessory, or hard fabric facing remains, demonstrating their meticulous attention to detail and waste reduction. These chindi pieces serve as the stuffing for the pillows, and this is where the true artistry of the craft comes into play.

The women employ a specific technique to stuff the pillows in a way that prevents the fabric pieces from clumping together, as cotton often does. This technique not only ensures comfort but also enhances the durability of the pillows. Moreover, it offers a practical advantage—these fabric-stuffed pillows can be washed, making them a more hygienic and sustainable choice than traditional pillows. Stitching these pillows is a labor of love, and while hand-stitching was the norm in earlier times, modern times have seen the introduction of machines, demonstrating an embrace of technology while retaining the essence of the tradition.

The same technique is extended to crafting bolsters, which are especially valued for their ability to support the body comfortably. In a testament to the resourcefulness of these women, garments are prepared for bolsters by carefully cutting off the trims and ensuring that no fabric goes to waste. The fabric is then folded and compressed under pressure to fill the bolster. The term "takau pasun tikao," which translates to "from discarded to durable" in Marathi, beautifully encapsulates the essence of this practice. The discarded buttons and accessories are not wasted; they are covered with fabric and added as decorative elements to the bolster, creating a visually appealing and functional piece of home decor.

This sustainable habit, deeply rooted in the traditions of rural Maharashtra, reflects the values of resourcefulness, creativity, and a deep respect for the environment that the elderly women hold dear. Even as the world around them changes and the convenience of purchasing new pillows becomes more accessible, these families continue to treasure and uphold this age-old tradition. The practice serves as a reminder of the beauty in simplicity, the wisdom in waste reduction, and the enduring sustainability of handmade creations that have been passed down through generations. It is a testament to the fact that sustainable practices can have a lasting impact, even in a rapidly evolving world.

3.5 Sustainable Doormat Craftsmanship

Elderly women in Maharashtra's Marathi households exhibit remarkable sustainable household fashion practices, one of which involves the crafting of doormats that epitomize resourcefulness and eco-friendliness. This traditional method begins by repurposing old, discarded fabrics, often long rectangular pieces from sarees or lungis, typically measuring 4 to 6 inches in width. To construct these doormats, three such fabric strips are bound together, initiating the process with a secure knot.

With this secure knot, usually fashioned at the onset, the women initiate the process by entangling this knot between their toes and embarking on a braiding journey. As they braid, the women ensure the seamless addition of individual fabric strips as the initial ones are exhausted, much like adding extensions to hair during the braiding process.

Once the braids span an impressive 5 to 7 meters, they are meticulously stitched together using sturdy white Godhadi-making thread. These braids are systematically stitched in a spiral manner, forming a robust and resilient circular doormat.

What sets these doormats apart is their remarkable durability and washability, making them a quintessential example of sustainable fashion practices. Moreover, they demonstrate the versatility of these women's resourcefulness; these doormats aren't limited to serving their conventional purpose. They also function as comfortable seat cushions or find use beneath flower pots, with the size of the circular product depending on the length of the braids. This indigenous practice not only showcases their resourcefulness but also emphasizes the preservation of eco-friendly fashion habits. It is a testament to the ingenuity and wisdom of elderly women in Maharashtra, providing a window into the rich traditions that have been maintained and cherished through generations.

4. Research Methodology

The primary objective of this research is to comprehensively explore and document the sustainable clothing practices of elderly women in Maharashtra, India. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach will be employed, primarily involving unstructured interviews conducted in the Marathi regional language. The target regions for this study will include specific rural areas in the Solapur district, encompassing locales such as Barshi, Mangalvedha, and Akkalkot, as well as the Nasik district, with a focus on places like Igatpuri, Chandwad, and Niphad.

4.1 Research Design: A qualitative research design will be adopted to facilitate an in-depth examination of the experiences, traditions, and practices related to sustainable clothing among women above 60 years old in Maharashtra. This design is well-suited for uncovering the richness of their narratives and cultural practices.

4.2 Data Collection: The primary data collection method will involve unstructured interviews conducted exclusively in the Marathi regional language. These open-ended interviews will encourage participants to freely and authentically share their experiences, stories, and insights regarding sustainable clothing practices. This approach is designed to capture detailed information in their own words.

4.3 Participant Selection: Participants will be drawn from rural areas in the Solapur and Nasik districts, with an emphasis on senior citizen women aged above 60 who possess profound knowledge and practices in sustainable clothing. The selection process will aim to ensure diversity in terms of age, cultural background, and geographic location.

4.4 Data Analysis: The data collected from the unstructured interviews will be transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. This qualitative method involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights within the interview responses, leading to the extraction of key findings regarding sustainable clothing practices among elderly women in Maharashtra.

4.5 Ethical Considerations: The research process will uphold strict ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring their privacy and confidentiality. Any personal information that could identify the participants will be anonymized. The research will also adhere to principles of respect and cultural sensitivity in its interactions with elderly women and their traditions.

4.6 Limitations: While qualitative research offers valuable insights, its findings may not be readily generalizable. This research will be confined to specific rural areas within the Solapur and Nasik districts, and cultural and geographic factors may influence the results. Additionally, the subjective nature of qualitative research may introduce some degree of bias.

4.7 Conclusion This research methodology outlines the approach and methods used to explore the sustainable clothing practices of elderly women aged above 60 in specific rural areas of the Solapur and Nasik districts in Maharashtra. Unstructured interviews in the Marathi regional language are the primary data collection method, allowing for the collection of detailed and authentic information about traditions, practices, and wisdom. The research design emphasizes ethical considerations and aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainable fashion practices within the target population.

Sample interview questions may encompass:

1. Can you share your experiences with sustainable clothing practices in your family or community?
2. What are some traditional methods of repurposing or upcycling clothing that you have been practicing or witnessing?
3. How have these sustainable practices been passed down through generations in your family?
4. Can you describe any specific garments or textiles that hold cultural significance and are preserved for

future generations?

5. What motivates your community to adopt these sustainable practices and what environmental or cultural values do they represent?
6. How have these practices evolved or adapted in response to changing times and technology?
7. Are there any challenges or barriers to maintaining these traditions, and how have you addressed them?
8. In what ways do these sustainable clothing practices connect you with your cultural heritage and the environment?
9. Can you provide examples of how these practices have contributed to a sense of community and shared values?
10. How would you like to see these sustainable practices preserved and passed on to future generations?

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this research delves deep into the rich and culturally significant sustainable clothing practices of elderly women in Maharashtra, India. The findings resonate with the essence of tradition, sustainability, and environmental consciousness that have been seamlessly integrated into the lives of these remarkable women. Through unstructured interviews, we have successfully documented and explored the ingenious techniques and practices employed by these women to repurpose and upcycle clothing, emphasizing their invaluable contributions to both cultural heritage and eco-friendly fashion.

The practices discussed, such as the creation of Godhadi quilts, the crafting of Junaari saris, the tradition of passing down Paithani saris, the utilization of old garments for newborns, and the crafting of pillows and bolsters from discarded fabrics, underline the profound resourcefulness, creativity, and environmental respect that define these women's way of life. These practices are a testament to their unwavering commitment to sustainability and tradition, reflecting the rich tapestry of Maharashtra's culture.

The study's implications extend far beyond the boundaries of Maharashtra. In an era characterized by fast fashion and the environmental toll of disposable consumption, the findings underscore the significance of cherishing heirloom pieces, promoting sustainable practices, and safeguarding the environment. These practices emphasize that clothing is not merely a matter of style but a bridge between generations and a means of preserving the stories of the past for future generations.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research, particularly its regional and demographic focus on specific rural areas in the Solapur and Nasik districts. However, these limitations also present opportunities for future research to expand the scope and explore the broader implications of sustainable clothing practices.

In essence, this research sheds light on the remarkable traditions of sustainable clothing in Maharashtra, carried forward by the wisdom and resourcefulness of elderly women. The findings of this study underscore the importance of preserving and learning from these practices, advocating for sustainability in a rapidly changing world. They reveal that the lessons from these women transcend cultural boundaries and have the potential to inspire sustainable fashion practices worldwide, offering a harmonious blend of tradition, environmental consciousness, and resourcefulness. This research marks a significant step toward preserving and celebrating these traditions while recognizing their wider relevance and enduring importance.