Chapter One

Introduction: Moral Memories
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It was my last few years of simultaneous association with academic research and non-political grassroots mobilization\(^1\) that equipped me with the intellectual sensitivity and ideological conviction to revisit the history of the independence movement with tool(s) that were marginalized in the contemporary political demagoguery and yet, held its own importance. Mohandas Gandhi's Khadi is that instrument whose historical capacity, contemporary symbolism and future potential falls under my research area.

\begin{quote}
Yeh Charkha tope hai,
Barood Iske ban gaye gole,
Isi se Lunkashayar
Manchester ko udadenga.\(^2\)
\end{quote}

Weapons are forged in adversity. They are not produced by competition between societies and cultures which could, at times, be mutually enriching and ennobling experience. They are borne out of threats to survival due to a conflict of interests. During India's mass campaign for freedom, a new weapon was forged out of threat-perception that Indians held from Britain's textile industry. The new weapon was Charkha and its product Khadi, hand-spun and hand-woven clothe. Early nationalists blamed the British for the destruction of India's flourishing cloth industry. It was these nationalists who taught Indians how 'the English had sucked our life-

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\(^{2}\) This Spinning-wheel is a canon, yarn-balls are its ammunition, with this we shall smash, Lancashire and Manchester.

A nationalist song Quoted in \textit{Outlook}, Delhi, 18 August 1997, p.150.

The cotton industry of Manchester acquired a folkloric imagery in India. Writing in 1909, in \textit{Hind Swaraj}, Gandhi stated: 'It is difficult to measure the harm that Manchester has done to us. It is due to Manchester that Indian handcraft has all but disappeared'. Anthony J. Farel, ed., \textit{Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and other Writings}, Foundation Books, Delhi, 1997, p.107.

Gandhi's own language was full of allegorical references to war. 'We are engaged in a spiritual war. We are not living in normal times. Normal activities are always suspended in abnormal times. During the late War our rulers attempted to turn every factory into an arsenal for turning out bullets of lead. During this war of ours, I suggest every national school and college being turned into a factory for preparing cones of yarns for the nation.' \textit{The Secret of Swaraj}, \textit{YOUNG INDIA}, January 19 1921, CWMG vol. 19: 240.
Mohandas Gandhi too surmised that it was not the use of machines but the machinations of the East India Company that led to the decimation of India's craft-based clothing industry. Indigenous cloth industry 'was made to die'. The Company's persecution was so cruel as to force Indian craftsmen to 'cut off their own thumbs in order to avoid imprisonment'.

Much of the historiography of the nationalist movement has adamantly skirted the significance of the Constructive work, of which Khadi formed a vital part, in building up the liberation movement. The issues such as Swadeshi, Khadi, village-reconstruction, and other compendium concerns that fell within the generic term of the Constructive Work occupy a majority of space in Gandhi's writings and speeches. Yet, surprisingly, it is his political engagement that has remained focus of the major scholarly work to the marginalization of his real life vocation. Not much is available in scholarly analysis on Gandhi's constructive work in general and Khadi in particular. For instance, Nanda's *The Making of a Nation*, which charts India's road to independence and is published to commemorate fiftieth anniversary of independence, does not have a single chapter dealing with Gandhi's Khadi or the constructive work. Biographers like Stanley Wolpert (2001) and Rajmohan Gandhi (1995) while writing mainly on the life and legacy of Gandhi ignore his constructive agenda. Except for the study of Srikrishnadas Jajoo, who is himself a protagonist of the Khadi movement, there is no systematic study of the movement as yet. Even Jajoo's work is only a chronological appraisal of the All India Spinners Association (AISA).

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3. Parel, ed., *Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and other Writings*, p.15. Gandhi was explaining the role that the early nationalists played in vitalizing the consciousness of Indians.


5. 'Who Cut The Thumbs?', *Young India*, CWMG vol.19: 487.


In recent times, however, a spate of historical studies on different facets of Khadi movement has emerged. Emma Tarlo's *Clothing Matters* is an anthropological examination of an everyday dilemma of what to wear. It is her way to explore the much-vaunted question of identity as it wrestles with individual understanding and cultural encrustations around the matter of clothing that goes into the making of it. Her central theme is the significance of clothes in the making of individual as well as the group identity. In doing so she explores also the relationship between clothes and the wearer. Clothes help in making an identity of the wearer. And, if that is so, they also help in manifesting plethora of identities, 'multiple and conflicting', according to the kind, design and fabric of cloth that one wears. However, Tarlo here obviates the possibility of enforcing the emergence of multiple and conflicting identities. It was not as if the problem of what to wear was a natural outcome from the presence of a refurbished fabric of Khadi. It was enforced through a sustained campaign.

According to Bean, Gandhi used 'his appearance to communicate his most important messages in a form comprehensible to all Indians'. Bean, in Tarlo's critique, with such deductions fails to address the problem of intention and interpretation. Dress like other symbolic phenomenon is capable of signifying a variety of different meanings simultaneously. What was intended was not often interpreted similarly and therefore Gandhi explained his intention through self-edited journals and national tours. 'If dress was truly capable of communicating his message clearly, there would have been little need for such explicit verbal explanations.' Tarlo's own interpretation that Gandhi attempted to control the clothing of the nation by encouraging all Indians to wear Khadi and all Indian men to wear the so-called 'Gandhi cap' is, least to say, problematic. A national sartorial uniformity, she adduces, was the aim of Gandhi's Khadi campaign. She says: 'He never obtained his objective of clothing the entire Indian nation in Khadi.' It is true that Gandhi was ambitious about his Khadi agenda. He saw Khadi programme as a means towards

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9 cf. Tarlo; Susan Bean, 1989, 'Gandhi and Khadi, the fabric of Indian independence'.
voluntary co-operation on a scale never witnessed anywhere in modern times. He regarded his contribution in the resuscitation of Charkha of more vital importance than his role in the India's freedom struggle. He wanted posterity to remember him as one who refurbished the Charkha.

But his aggressive Khadi campaign was attempting the production not of homogeneous Indian, uniformly dressed in white Khadi. Instead, he was clearly dividing Indians across the sartorial divide between those who clung to self-satisfaction and those who acted for the social-well being. He was well aware that the British were in India not by their superior military power but due to the active collaboration from the well-off Indians. Khadi was a non-violent fulcrum on which was weighed empathy for the poor. One who wore Khadi also sought the inner transformation as to empathize with the poor and worked for the eradication of poverty by spinning. Khadi campaign sought to divide Indians into two ‘classes’; of those who believed in and wore Khadi and those who did not. But his ‘class division’ was enforced non-violently. It provided a mobility of passage to individuals from one class to another. His emphasis on non-violence was to provide a possibility for transformation of individuals’ alignment. In that sense, wearing Khadi was transformative. One could change one’s class affiliation through personal conviction and change of heart. Khadi became a fulcrum on which one’s political and personal belief could be authenticated. One’s clothing became a determinant of one’s affiliations. But Gandhi’s ‘class division’ was not entirely free from coercion. Ideally, it was designed to be morally and not physically coercive.

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11 I hold that such distributed production of Khadi requires minimum of effort and expenditure. It means voluntary cooperation on a scale never witnessed anywhere in modern times.' What it Means', Harijan, December 9 1939, CWMG vol.71: 4.

12 And, by extension, loyalty to the British imperialism.


14 There was tremendous amount of moral coercion involved in making Khadi identified with certain values. Krishnadas mentions of an incident when Gandhi along with Maulalna Mohammad Ali was in Allahabad during the non-cooperation movement. When Maulana rose to address, a man from the crowd shouted at the top of his voice that the Turkish cap on the Maulana’s head was of foreign make. This created a raucous which was however controlled when Maulana said that though in shape it resembled a Turkey cap, it was made of Khadi. Gandhi and other leaders did try to suppress such enthusiastic followers. Gandhi recalled the weapon of bonfire of foreign cloth when his jealous followers began to strip any one wearing foreign clothes.
Bean argues that by wearing loin-cloth, Gandhi 'transcended the limitations of language' in a multi-lingual country. In a recent paper, Lisa N Trivedi comes to a similar conclusion.\(^{15}\) She says that in a largely illiterate and multi-lingual South Asian context, Gandhi's Khadi movement adopted a visual medium of expression to disseminate messages, forge a national consciousness, and map the geographical and political boundaries of the newly 'invented nation'. As Trivedi reiterates, nationalism in South Asia arose 'without the benefit of a common written language and rising literacy'. She says, 'the nation in South Asia was popularly conceived in a discursive field in which visual medium and printed languages were mutually constitutive.' 'Print capitalism' and visual vocabulary together brought about the national consciousness. In substantiating her arguments she brings as evidence three printed posters or line-expressions, and discusses the role that the lantern-lectures and exhibitions played in imparting visual map of the nation in the people's mind. Whereas posters were the printed form, lantern-lectures and exhibitions were the visual form in this communication package. Such arguments erroneously assume that the visual communication is the sole preserve of oral traditions and 'illiterate' societies.\(^{16}\) Is 'visual vocabulary' for those belonging to 'illiterate culture' alone? None of the images that she produces are the case of isolated representation. Contrary to it, images retell what written text and oral speeches had already emphasized. Moreover, such argument although purportedly speaking from a 'third world' perspective is misplaced and displaces the main theme of the discourse, that of the Khadi's role in highlighting the colonial exploitation and its centrality in forging the visions of emancipatory struggle. Further, it is wrong to say, as Trivedi does, that Gandhi 'regarded visual experience as a neutral and transparent kind of communication that was open to

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\(^{15}\) She begins as a critique of Anderson's 'print capitalism' axiom and then ends up strengthening the same. Lisa N Trivedi, *Visually Mapping the "Nation": Swadeshi Politics in Nationalist India, 1920-1930*, The Journal of Asian Studies 62, no.1 (February 2003), pp 11-41.

\(^{16}\) As a matter of fact, nationalist adoption of exhibition as a means of communication was nothing new. The empire builders themselves used exhibition to disseminate imperial values through regular conduct of the 'British Empire Exhibition' in Britain. George Joseph, the then editor of Gandhi's *Young India*, wrote a pungent critic of the practice of sending dancing girls to London as part of the exhibition. Cf. George Gheverghese Joseph, *George Joseph: The Life and Times of a Kerala Christian Nationalist*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 2003, pp 143-4.
everyone'. The conduct of exhibitions was a contested terrain for the different streams within the nationalist movement.\textsuperscript{17} It was important to control and manoeuvre the exhibition site and exhibits displayed therein, and thus messages transmitted from the visual display were not shorn of politics and this Gandhi was immensely aware of. There are quite a few conceptual problems that cloud her narrative. Most important one is her erroneous understanding of the real motive of the Swadeshi movement. Under Gandhi's leadership, it was not mainly the nationality but the nature of producer and production that held significance for the Swadeshi proponents. Secondly, given India's existing material reality, the Swadeshi movement was directed more towards the literate/middle class population rather than towards the rural poor.

One of the most significant instances of Swadeshi movement contributing in mapping the national geography, though overlooked by Trivedi, was when Gandhi called for the dumping of foreign clothes outside the national boundary. He advocated its export to Smyrna. He asserted that each commodity has its specific relevance according to the national context. Burma might choose something other than Khadi to suit its national manufacturing context. Khadi for Gandhi was an economic and political imperative. Gandhi employed, as Bayly rightly observes, a symbolically charged moral language.\textsuperscript{18} But his use of this language held an immense political significance. This language did try to mould the latent 'moral' beliefs of Indian society but its purpose was very much secular. Gandhi's own sartorial metamorphosis was dictated less by spiritual than material concerns. It gave parity to precept and practice.

Therefore, Cohn's 'clothes literally are authority' equation\textsuperscript{19}, Bean's logic of 'communication', Trivedi's display of 'visual vocabulary' is articulating concerns that were not Khadi's kernel. They are scholarly productions derived from a fertile imagination and not from the material reality of the movement. My argument is: such interpretations, clever scholarly productions they might be, displace the core of the discourse, which held significance not just in the contemporary but persists even in

\textsuperscript{17} The what and where of exhibition was as much contested as its purpose and control. Elsewhere, in chapter five, I have shown how the contestation was worked out.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Tarlo; Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India, Viking, 1996. p63.

the present South Asian context. Khadi is a 'third world' commodity. It was an attempt to make a dent at the 'drain'. Colonial economy made it imperative to send the raw material from colony to the metropolis, colony in tum was receiving the 'value added' commodity. Khadi was reverse of all these. In this context, Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'reading of the use of Khadi/white in Indian public life' is of greater relevance. He explores the semiotic beneath the persistence of Khadi as a political dress for the Indian male politicians. He explains it as 'the site of the desire for an alternative modernity'. It was a desire brought to fruition by the contingencies of British colonial rule and yet nurtured an idea alternative/autonomous to/of imperialism. What Chakrabarty is perhaps hinting at is persisting relevance of the idea of Khadi despite seemingly insurmountable and irreversible global dynamics.

This study proposes to restore the kernel of Khadi to its rightful legacy. As yet there is no historical study on the subject. Such an academic effort alone makes a study of the Khadi movement, with its multifarious symbolism and historical realism, an imperative in the present world. Khadi's core semiotic lay in it being chiseled as a commodity of resistance against the colonial exploitation. Khadi was transformed by a sustained campaign into a commodity of conscious choice for the consumers. Its transformation gave the cloth a character but, ironically, it also stifled its growth. To the detriment of the mundane aims of proponents, their investment into the character of cloth brought into being a moral consumer who preferred character to cloth. In doing so it imposed a self-limiting variable to its wider acceptance as a commodity of general consumption. Being identified with certain value-system distinguished it from the plethora of commodity that were available for the consumption but its linkage between the outer manifestation and the inner being of the personality of the wearer restricted its commercial success. It became a clothing of exceptional rather than a commodity of all times.

20 Its career began with it being a commodity for import substitution.

21 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Clothing the political man: a reading of the use of khadi/white in Indian public life', The Institute of Postcolonial Studies, 2001, 'While Khadi persists, its meanings have lost the richness they possessed in the time of the struggle against British rule. It now represents either a thoughtless habit of the politician or—if he is too conscious of his decision to wear Khadi—his callous hypocrisy.'
Gandhi hoped that by his Swadeshi campaign he could transform the sartorial tastes of Indians. Implicit in such a hope was also an ambition to alter the inner being of Indians. It was this twin aim that spawned confusion among the consumers and its carriers alike. Its commercial prospect became prisoner to its transformatory ambition. Here, I am not suggesting that it should have shunned its latter aims and precipitated its energy on its commercial organization. I am merely hinting at a self-debilitating variable, and given the moral context of the Gandhi led movement, escaping from it meant a paradigm shift in the character of the national movement.

Khadi was, for Gandhi, a passion. It remained so till the end. It played a significant role in the struggle for freedom. It was a cloth against colonialism and an idea against imperialism. It was a fabric of freedom. Gradually, it became a commodity that denoted what entire Gandhi led freedom struggle stood for. It became a symbol of liberation not just from the exploitative colonialism but also from the market driven techno-capitalism. It came to identify with the principles of social responsibility and neighborly compassion. It stood for forging living bond between the rich and the poor. It brought the issues of social segregation, economic inequality and political participation in the agenda of the freedom struggle. It aspired to shape the content of the freedom and determine the stake-values in post-independence polity. It invested moral responsibility in the representative character of democracy. It gave a character to the politics as well as to the protest.

22 When Gandhi wrote a rejoinder to Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* he rebuffed her for authoring a 'drain inspector's report' and yet he exhorted Indians to learn from indictments as they contained important lessons (‘Drain Inspector’s Report’, *YOUNG INDIA*, CWMG vol. 34: p539). In his own assessment, as he wrote in *Hind Swaraj*, Indians were guilty of temptation that brought their fall. (Parel, *Hind Swaraj*, pp. 39-41.)

23 From many quotes of Gandhi on the subject of Khadi, I have extracted two striking passages which show that his passion for the spinning wheel were unlimited. ‘God's grace descends upon us unawares as we work away for Him, that is, spin even when you are weeping. For spinning for us is the greatest of all sacrificial acts.’ 15-10-1944 ‘An inmate of his Sabarmati Ashram wept and said one day, Show God to me face to face. Gandhi said...You will see Him in the spinning wheel. 20-10-1944 Gandhi was fond of narrating a story to his audience. It went in the following manner: 'When the first railway line was laid, there was an obstacle. There was a deep trench. If that could be filled up the railway line could be laid. The engineer said: 'Fill up the trench'. It could not be filled up in any way. The men who were trying to fill it up got tired and asked, 'What shall we do now'? 'Fill up the trench,' was the reply received again. They tried but could not fill it up. They asked: 'What now?' Once more they got the reply 'Fill up the trench'. So again basketsful of rubbish were dumped into it. At last the trench was filled. Stevenson, the engineer, became immortal. I also want to be immortal. So I tell you only one thing: 'Spin and wear khadi'. 'Letter to Kalyanji Mehta', August 20 1925, (CWMG vol.28: 96)
It is remarkable how Gandhi’s Khadi campaign made Indians see in the 'slender thread of cotton' the essence and the practical structure of Swaraj. Swaraj in his view hung on a thread, the cotton 'thread' spun on Charkha. Charkha was an arsenal of the non-violent army. In his hay days of friendship and amity, Mohammad Ali had declared that yarn cones were the bullets with which India would win her Swaraj.

Was Charkha just a symbol of struggle against British imperialism? Was it, in other words, a symbol of India’s resistance against colonization; a weapon brandished to foist her will for independence? Or was it a design to eradicate poverty and ameliorate the marginal India’s economic condition? Did it nurture the political ambitions? Or did it only desire economic well-being of the poor Indians? For Gandhi himself Charkha and Khadi possessed multiple meanings. Khadi manufacture, Gandhi said in the beginning of his campaign, was a symbol of immediate occupation till a better is found for the millions who are unemployed for six or four months in the year. It was a symbol of simplicity and economic freedom and peace and non-violence.

For India’s poor, it was the ‘symbol of salvation’. Spinning wheel was also used to provide relief from natural calamities such as flood. Khadi was the greatest and the most extensive, national industry. The hand-spinning provided one unitary thread

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24 'It is on the slender cotton thread that the honour of Islam and India and the redress of the enormity of the Punjab wrong rest. I am absolutely convinced after years of search and experiment (and now that experiment has been supplemented by experience), that the introduction of spinning in every home is the solution for the grinding poverty of the masses. Our spinning mills must be in our homes, our weaving mills must be in our villages.' 'Speech at Ellore', April 3 1921, CWMG vol. 19: 511.

25 'I met the famine-stricken people of the Puri District yesterday. It was a heart-rending sight. I assure you that there is nothing but the spinning-wheel for their deep distress.' 'Letter to C F Andrews', March 28 1921, CWMG vol.19: 484.

26 'It is an emblem of purity, simplicity, freedom; it is an emblem of peace to the whole world.' 'Speech at Cocanada', April 2 1921, CWMG vol. 19: 502.

27 'Discussion with Nagpur Congress worker', December 27 1939, CWMG vol.71: 64.


29 'It must be for the very first time in history that the spinning-wheel was used in India for famine relief. Atrai and some other parts of Bengal were the first to do this. In Orissa a successful experiment is being carried on to introduce spinning in areas which have suffered heavy losses through floods, though the work being done there can be on a larger scale still.' 'My notes: Spinning Wheel for famine relief', Navajivan, December 13 1925, CWMG vol.29: 320.

that knit the whole country into one.\textsuperscript{31} Spinning forged urban, educated and economically well-off Indians into a ‘moral bond’ with rural and famished masses. As the movement progressed, he added innumerable virtues to his initial motivation.\textsuperscript{32} Some times Gandhi emphasized Khadi’s spiritual characteristics. ‘There are many aspects of Khadi; amongst them the spiritual one I hold uppermost and the economic one next.’\textsuperscript{33} Charkha became a ‘sedative for a troubled mind’\textsuperscript{34}. Spinning made one steady and peaceful.\textsuperscript{35} In 1931, while in London, Gandhi spoke to a gathering that spinning was a ‘great exercise in patience’. ‘When your wife gets angry, just spin.’\textsuperscript{36} To a man whose active political life was interspersed with periods of incarceration spinning wheel taught ‘patience, industry, simplicity’\textsuperscript{37}. Spinning wheel was protection against urge of passion or bouts of anger. It was shield against toxic emotions. ‘I feel that the spinning-wheel has all the virtues needed to make one’s life truthful, pure and peaceful and fill it with the spirit of service.’\textsuperscript{38} The spinning wheel

\textsuperscript{31} ‘The charkha will help us overcome our narrowness. The charkha is the only device which makes us all feel that we are children of the same land. We also have a kind of sleeping sickness here in our own country, and the sole remedy for this sickness is the charkha.’ ‘Speech at Santiniketan’, May 31 1925, CWMG vol.27: 180.

\textsuperscript{32} Speaking on the thoughts behind the institution of ‘silence day’ to Louis Fisher in June 1942, Gandhi said, at first the idea was motivated simply to protect himself from the incessant work and engagements. ‘Later of course I clothed it with all kinds of virtues and gave it a spiritual cloak.’ Interview with Louis Fischer, June 6 1942, CWMG vol.76: 433.

\textsuperscript{33} Message to Miraj Khadi Exhibition, September 28 1940, CWMG vol.73: 59.

\textsuperscript{34} ‘Let me not leave you under the impression that I have taken to spinning from any patriotic or philanthropic motives. But from the day I started spinning, I have acquired a great liking for it. I find it is a real sedative for a troubled mind and I have therefore continued it and will continue it.’ ‘Notes: Why he spins?’, \textit{YOUNG INDIA}, July 29 1926, CWMG vol.31: 223.

\textsuperscript{35} ‘Working on the spinning wheel is such an occupation that, if a restless and unsteady person takes it, he becomes peaceful and steady. A fiery-tempered person will be able to give up anger. If the activity of the spinning wheel is carried on by a saintly couple and if they make the spinning wheel the means for spreading the spirit of saintliness amongst the people, this quality would then be visible in this activity.’ ‘My Notes: Influence of the Spinning Wheel’, \textit{Navajivan}, July 22 1928, CWMG vol.37: 86.

\textsuperscript{36} ‘Interview to the Evening Standard’, September 12 1931, CWMG vol.48: 1.

\textsuperscript{37} ‘Everyday I spin for a time. While I spin I think. I think of many things. But always from those thoughts I try to keep out bitterness. Study this spinning-wheel of mine. It would teach you a great deal more than I can—patience, industry, simplicity. This spinning-wheel is for India’s starving millions the symbol of salvation.’ ‘Myself, My Spinning Wheel and Women’, \textit{Daily Herald}, September 28 1931, CWMG vol.48: 79.

\textsuperscript{38} ‘A friend once told me that whenever he felt the urge of passion he took up the spinning-wheel to forget it, and another that whenever he was angry he took up the spinning-wheel and felt calm. That is to say, the spinning-wheel gives one the peace of mind one needs for observing \textit{brahmacharya}. I feel that the spinning-wheel has all the virtues needed to make one’s life truthful, pure and peaceful and fill it with the spirit of service. I, therefore, beg of you all to give
was an ‘emblem of human dignity and equality’, the ‘handmaid of agriculture’, the ‘nation’s second lung’. Even while Gandhi spoke of Khadi’s ‘unifying influence’, spinning was also socially subversive. India was a country where Brahmins spun their own sacred thread. It was also a country where majority of its population were compulsorily excluded from the ritual of wearing sacred thread. Gandhi by asking every one to spin sought to undermine the importance of caste without seeming to do so. Either by spinning every one became a *sudra* as it was alleged at the time. Or by spinning every one became a Brahmin. In any case the caste was subverted in very subtle yet effective way. Spinning wheel, in Gandhi’s hand, became a symbol of self-respect, self-reliance, and economic self-sufficiency.

Gandhi’s Khadi campaign was part of the national regeneration agenda that had come to be called Constructive Work as distinguished from the Political Work of the Congress. While looking through some ninety thick volumes of the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, each with five-hundred plus pages, I tumbled upon a theme that not just vindicated my instinct but gave a possible reinterpretation of the national movement for independence. National movement as led by Gandhi was less a political strategy to wrest power from the British. It was a movement for national reconstruction. Its road-map was succinctly laid down in *Hindswaraj*. Throughout his career in India, Gandhi attempted to inculcate in Indians the same curiosity that first found expression in *Hindswaraj*. It was: How India, with thirty crore residents, was enslaved by a few hundred mercenaries? The reasons he found were also the factors that had lubricated India’s continued subjugation. The indigenous culture had accredited corroding element of untouchability. The indigenous intelligentsia had

half an hour’s labour daily in the form of spinning.’ ‘Speech to students’, Dinapur, May 21 1925, CWMG vol.27: 141.

39 'The sure proof that spinning has become universal will be afforded by the fact that khadi becomes current coin. I will chant the khadi *mantra* as long as there is life in me, as I believe it will bring deliverance. Khadi has a unifying influence.' ‘Discussion with Nagpur Congress Workers’, December 27 1939, CWMG vol. 71: 64.


Contrary to its subversive role, S Ramanathan, a vehement critique of Gandhi, wrote in 1947, that, 'Gandhian movement for the revival of the Charkha is but a gigantic attempt to reconstruct the Caste system and its medieval economy.' Ramanathan was also a leader of Justice Party in Tamil Nadu and formerly an activist/office-bearer of All India Spinners’ Association. A. S. Ramanathan. *Gandhi and the Youth*, Thacker & Co., Ltd., Bombay, 1947, p.vi.

41 'Spinning is a visible, sacred symbol of national purity, strength, and prosperity.' *Orissa and Andhra*, Young India, April 13 1921, CWMG vol. 19: 566.
abnegated its neighbourly responsibility by patronizing foreign fineries. A combination of social and economic neglect had brought about political subjugation. Only a simultaneous fight against social untouchability and economic drain could win India her freedom. As a reading of Gandhi's *Collected Works* reveals, if there was any causes that constantly occupied Gandhi's thought and action, it were the campaign for the eradication of untouchability and the reinstatement of Swadeshi in India's social and economic mores.

My thesis through the prism of Khadi revisits the tumultuous and contentious times in India's modern history. The thesis, in addition, seeks to explore and widen the academic debate surrounding the forces leading to the denouement of independence on 15th of August, 1947. But its frame of reference lies elsewhere, in the arena of people's politics and not either in the constitutional progress as initiated by the British rulers or the institutional agitation as led by the National Congress. People's politics hereby means issues and concerns that fed into the Constructive Works and made Gandhi to spin an alternative regenerative ideology and programme independent of the political ideology and programme as enunciated by the National Congress. In his pursuance of the Constructive Works Gandhi created a cadre of activists dedicated to his visionary agenda of national regeneration. Naturally, this cadre nurtured a greater vitality for regenerative agenda than the goal of political independence, which, in any case, was implicit in the former. Gandhi was successful in sharpening the ideological conflict between those silently toiling for the constructive works and those haranguing the political course. Yet, and that is the marvel of Gandhi's politics, he did not sharpen this conflict to the point of breaking.

Seen from this perspective, in Gandhi's Khadi movement was embedded the national liberation struggle. Gandhi's own relation with the Indian National Congress was of profound ambivalence, bordering occasionally on indifference, and ultimately, snapping. It is my endeavour to bring into open the simmering tension between the political organization and the constructive man. How was the Khadi brought into the centrality of the national struggle and yet achievement of freedom was without the Khadi traversing its full course? What was its final destination? After trying to an extent, Gandhi gave up the idea of transforming Congress and formed All India Spinners' Association to take up Khadi work. Ironically, its formation marked the
beginning of the end of Gandhi's political influences. On the obverse side, frustrated
in his effort, the man who had inaugurated the politics of mass mobilization withdrew
from the Congress, taking the mobilization and the grassroots issues along. This had
long term impact on the mobilizational process so much so that in the post
independent India after the expiry of the first generation Congress politicians
grassroots mobilization too expired bringing the demise of the Congress.

This thesis had its beginning in my curiosity about building a political
movement with a constructive ideology. I was curious about the internal dynamics of
a political organization that contends for power but also attempts at building an
alternative ideology of lifestyle. Gandhi's Khadi campaign was an attempt to bridge
the gap between the political contention for power and subaltern's sheer spectatorship
in such struggles. It was designed to bring about inclusion of people in the elite's
contention for political dominance. Khadi was conceived as a bridge between 'elite'
power struggle and 'subaltern' reinvigoration. A considerable amount of 'subaltern'
participation in the politics of the day was a by-product of activities surrounding the
constructive work, primarily Khadi. Seen from another perspective, a question may
arise: Was Khadi an instrument in keeping the 'subalterns' confined to the constructive
work beyond elite's quest for power?

The aim of the study is to bring out the significance of Khadi with
exploration in its agency, agendas and activism. Some of the questions that I shall
investigate are: Was Charkha a symbol of struggle against British imperialism? Was
it, in other words, a symbol of India's resistance against colonization; a weapon
brandished to foist her will for independence? Or was it a design to eradicate poverty
and ameliorate the marginal India's economic condition? Did it nurture the political
ambitions? Or did it only desire economic well-being of the poor Indians?

Despite consistent campaign in its favour, Gandhi's Khadi accredited an
identity of being a commodity of exceptional times. It became a moral mascot that

43 It would eventually be a decade before Gandhi resigned his primary membership of Congress in
1934, though signs of the same were unmistakably evident even in 1924. Between 1924 and 1940,
Gandhi devoted himself mostly to the social, economic, and spiritual regeneration of the country,
which he came to believe would be achieved not be Constitutional concessions and reforms,
political debates and resolutions, but by the efforts of the people themselves. For details, see the
chapter four, where, the struggle between Gandhi and Congress is discussed.
weighed heavy on the conscience of the wearer. At the same time its transformation from a cloth into a moral commodity provided it a recognition that went beyond the mere commodity identification. Aside from its symbolic identification with the issues of inner-transformation in the wearer, Khadi's commercial prospect was also substantially affected by the perceived poor quality, questionable durability and high price. Whenever national political temperature soared Khadi’s sales surged. During these momentous political occasions, Khadi was bought and worn with gay abandon, making it what Nehru said, the 'livery of freedom'. The sentiments of buyer subordinated their sense and sensibilities. In other times its stock piled up and complaints against its doubtful durability, dearness, and lack of variety became considerable. In order to bring consistency in its commerce Gandhi created an agency to cater to production, propaganda, and philanthropy. It was to take cognizance of the complaints and to provide stability to the structure that the Swadeshi proponents founded All India Spinners' Association (AISA) in 1925; an association not of but for the poorest. AISA laid the foundation for an alternative science whose laboratory was an open field and every one was entitled to carry out experiments in open rather than in the seclusion of laboratory. It also explored the possibility of founding a moral market. AISA primarily fashioned itself as an economic enterprise catering to the poorest. How did it negotiate between a commercial discipline and a philanthropic sentiment?

In engaging with Khadi, one encounters a strange situation of having to deal simultaneously with two pasts: one that made Gandhi to refurbish an obsolete appliance, rekindle a fading memory and reinterpret a historical experience, and another that my historical positioning entails. When Gandhi began his attempt at the reinterpretation of the past, he was weighed down by a historical experience that saw the past as dead and decaying. His past was a victim of dual vandalism, both at the hands of colonial as well as oriental enthusiasts. His past was a dead weight which needed to be stamped out of the social memory and over which a new modern, scientific present was to be built. My vantage point is bit sympathetic to that past. My past, even while being juxtaposed with Gandhi's past, therefore, is not all dead and decaying. Gandhi was accused of reviving a commodity reduced to a relic by the inevitable march of the technology. Gandhi's India, however, found in it a deeper meaning than the earlier generations of Indians had thought of.
For Gandhi the tradition was his arsenal but the end was never revivalism; he did not revive Khadi but refurbished it to suit his needs. In any case, the notion of revivalism gives a deceptive connotation. Technically, it is taken to be a re-enactment in the present an element of the past. Society’s enchantment with the revivalism is borne out of its disenchantment with the present. The past—distanced and overpowered—in contrast to the chaotic and convulsing present, seems calm and comforting. Revivalism therefore attains an imagined realm where order about the societal norms and individual mores are established by replacing the perceived rank disorder of the present. Whereas past is soothing, present is perilously threatening. Nothing however is revived as it is. Present draws from the past a legitimacy in order to stand for itself. Past, as it is, is of no consequence. Tradition, whose lineage extends to the past, is not so much about a common practice in the past. Sculpted by the present, it is ever generative. New elements go into the making of the tradition, but at the same time it needs to have a history, to draw legitimacy. Tradition, therefore, is the legitimate past. Tradition is like an over-grown tree, whose roots are entrenched in the past with its shoots above the ground shaped by the present. Both the root and the shoot, however, rarely have a commonality in externals. It is in this framework of looking at the past from the vantage point of the present that makes a study of the Khadi movement an experience in the present.

Being the legitimate past, the tradition is often hankered back. Gandhi argued that the India was lost as Indians did not know its significance; ‘we were self-contained, but without realizing its necessity’. The destruction of Charkha was the beginning of poverty in India. Its eradication therefore needed Charkha’s reinstatement to its original preeminence. Although a medieval instrument of

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44 Of this interplay between the past and present and their link, the tradition, Marx writes: ‘Men make their own history, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.’ From ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’, By Karl Marx; K. Marx, F. Engels, V. Lenin, On Historical Materialism: A Collection, 1976. Nirmal Varma, the Hindi author, noted: ‘It has been the singular characteristic of Indian tradition that past and present are not divided in historical fragments, but are integral and intimate part of the same time-flow. Tradition is not the memory of time past, which is kept safely in a museum and got rid off. On the contrary, it actively and creatively intervenes in all our contemporary conflicts and concerns as a moral yardstick. Bibli: A Review of Books, VOL II NO.6, June 1997.
production, spinning wheel in its modern incarnation acquired entirely different meanings. Though the article was the same it became a symbol of freedom and unity as at one time, after the advent of the East India Company, it had become the symbol of slavery. In his speeches and writings in vernacular, Gandhi drew gripping mythical phrases to liken Charkha with. It was 'Sudarshan Chakra'-the destroyer of evil in the hand of god, it was 'kamdhenu'-the mythical cow who gave milk aplenty. Andrews reported Gandhi about the Assamese tradition whereby every married girl was expected to be able to weave with her own hands. The houses in this region too boasted of a functional loom. In Punjab, Gandhi discovered, there was a tradition of spinning competition, called chhops, in which women of all ages participated. Even small girls with their little charkhas joined as auxiliary forces. The competitors would get up early in the morning and, taking an equal weight of carded cotton done into slivers, they all sat to work in right earnest, the competition generally coming to an end at seven or eight to enable them to attend to duties, personal and domestic. But his restorative attempts made many wonder about its utility.

Many in Indian politics and public life were confounded by the 'novelty and simplicity' of Gandhi's ideas. Simplicity, in the days when human advancement is inspired by the material morality, could be unsettling. It could disrobe one off all the complex cultural encrustations that facilitate one's social acceptability. It dares the practitioner as much as the spectator. It exposes the vulnerable flanks of both to the outside aggression. Each therefore gird up the loins in anticipation of attack. Gandhi's baring act was culturally threatening to the educated Indians; his progressive simplification of life attacked their notion of distinction that separated them from the famished masses. He would only wear Indian garments stitched in Indian fashion; would only eat five things in a day; travel third class in Indian Railways; only adopt hand-spun and hand-woven clothes and see greater beauty in it than the colorful mill manufactures; bare himself to minimal of clothing as India needed all the clothes for its unclothed multitudes; and, then he was so confident of his conviction that he climbed the aisles of the Buckingham Palace without any change in attire. It was

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45 Notes: Handloom and Heirloom, YOUNG INDIA, June 12 1924, CWMG vol.24: 240.
46 "Chhop" or Spinning Competition, YOUNG INDIA, June 12 1924, CWMG vol.24: 241.
47 'Discussion with a Village Worker', Before 7 1935, CWMG vol. 62: 165.
48 Letter to Mahadev Desai, September 1 1921, CWMG vol.21: 46.
culturally threatening for some body like the over-clothed Jinnah or Ambedkar or Jayakar; the educated, suave, professionally successful. It was not that he was not all these but he could gleefully expose his vulnerabilities that others were hideous about. In their simple Khadi garments they could be what masses are, robbing them of all their superiority. But this mannerism of Gandhi was just not confined to the matters of clothing alone; it extended to the realms of inter-personal relationships, to politics, to strategies for struggle etc. It was innate in him; public and private spaces merged in him. All his momentous political moves were thought out in full view of participating public and authorities were informed well in advance of his moves through his own letters. But somehow Jinnah or Ambedkar or Jayakar were from courageous lot who could bare their own abhorrence to simplicity and earn Gandhi’s attention. There were others who adopted simplicity but made such a mockery of their acceptance that imperiled the ideal more obstinately than what was done by offering the poisoned drink to Aristotle. Khadi became, in his own lifetime, a livery of hypocrisy, of opportunism, of sham patriotism. All ideals unfortunately have the same fate. Simplicity, the cardinal Gandhian ideal that also formed philosophical crux of the Khadi Movement, too met the same fate which proved the ultimate victory of Jinnah or Ambedkar or Jayakar—the ideological forerunners perhaps of globalization of consumer palate in the Indian context.

How relevant is the study of Khadi Movement in today's perspective? For many, the Khadi movement, despite being an obsessive ambition and backed by a magnificent propaganda, was a failure. For some, Khadi, the cloth, hand-spun and hand-woven, has undergone a metamorphosis what with fashion fraternity being recruited to up-scale the 'brand'. Others discover congruity between Khadi's continued existence in the shadowy shops called Bhandars and Sarojini Naidu's snigger that it took abundance to keep Gandhi in poverty. For still others, Khadi, the fabric that positioned itself as the cloth against colonialism has moved on and re-branded itself as a mascot for environmentalism. Khadi, at least in the Indian context, retains its association with the psychology of protest and activism.

In its material format, Khadi's future is prisoner of its past. It is trapped within the parameters borne out of historical brand-building exercise. Historically, Khadi, the cloth, was ideologically woven around the need to provide work to idle or under-
employed hands. As it was designed to primarily cater to rural workforce, it required simple, comprehensible technology but also a local resource-base both for production and consumption. It is another matter that it never lived to its own ideological destination. If village artisans, mainly women, spun cotton yarn, either within the confines of their homes or under the community shades, slivers for the same came from centrally located units. Its consumption was mainly dependent on the effect of propaganda in the urban-areas. The hopes of Khadi workers were that it would somehow become ubiquitous and self-spreading. It hasn't happened as yet and neither is there any prospect of happening so in future. Khadi therefore is at the threshold of restructuring and re-positioning as the brand. Its position is unenviable. If it takes to commercial enticement it dilutes its equity that had initially gone into its brand-building. And, if it abstains, it decimates itself. But from the recent trends it is evident that it has taken the former path, focusing on packaging and fashion apparels.

This study depends for its facts considerably on Gandhi’s *Collected Works*, including his edited weeklies such as *Young India*, *Harijan* and *Navjivan*. The study also draws from the publications of the AISAla, such as *Khadi Guide* and its *Annual Report* since 1926; contemporary newspaper reports, reports of provincial Khadi organizations, and government intelligence gatherings. There are also scattered oral narratives and archival sources in the British India Office library in London. Then, there are the writings by prominent Khadi workers; well-chronicled documents on the opposition that Gandhi faced from his political opponents to Khadi ideology. Even among those who were Gandhi’s colleagues or sympathizers, there are three categories of critiques: Individuals, Insiders, and Institutional. In the category of Institutional critiques were his Socialist opponents and scientific community as embodied by men like Visvesvaraya. Among the Insiders were those who once worked with Gandhi but later chose to differ from his Khadi agenda.

Gandhi’s *Collected Works* remains a vastly unexplored literary minefield despite the severe but selective scholarly flogging it has gone since the inception of the project to collect and collate Gandhi’s written legacy into an archive of a hundred thick volumes. He is quite generous with critics and lay-correspondents while giving them space in his writings and his edited weeklies.
In 1956, the Government of India established a special department of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry called *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, with a view of compiling, and publishing both in English and Hindi, all Gandhi’s surviving writings and utterances, from the earliest known, written in 1884. In 1994, the department completed its monumental task when hundredth volume was published. The general preface states, ‘This series proposes to bring together all that Gandhi said and wrote, day after day, year after year....Those who knew him in the body as he trod this earth, striving every moment to practice what he believed, owe it to those who can not have the privilege of learning by his presence and example, that they should hand over to the coming generations the rich heritage of his teachings in its purity and, as far as possible, in its entirety.’ Till the ninetieth volume, which has chronological compilation of all Gandhi said or wrote, the project’s general editor was K Swaminathan who supervised the work in Delhi. Most of the editorial work was done at Ahmedabad. CN Patel who was deputy editor of the project had hand in drafting prefaces for most of the volumes and probably knew more about the contents of ‘The Collected Works’ than anyone else. The prefaces are succinctly and precisely written.49

Collected Works is compilation of all that Gandhi ever wrote or spoke. Or if more modestly told, it is an archive of recorded Gandhi: Gandhi’s letters, political as well as personal; recorded speeches; writings in his journals, four in all, in languages of Gujarati, English, and Hindi. The journals were *Indian Opinion* that Gandhi made into mouthpiece of reform and struggle in South Africa, *Young India*, the journal in English that he began editing in 1918, *Navajivan*, in Gujarati and Hindi, also began simultaneously with *YI*, and *Harijan*, a new look Young India, that began in 1934, with the name proclaiming Gandhi’s current passion. CWMG also contains Gandhi’s full fledged writings such as *An Autobiography, Struggle in South Africa* and other such writings. The CWMG is a window to many a personality facets of Gandhi. It shows what a meticulous organizer Gandhi was. The letters contained therein show the depth of educative concern that Gandhi nurtured for his closest comrades as well

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as the country and the world at large. In his articles Gandhi deals with a fantastic range of topics. The writing is superbly simple and silken.50

A recent writer on Gandhian economics point out that Gandhi had two points to make: that one should be concerned with the good of all rather than just with those of a majority; and that one should not be exclusively concerned with material prosperity but also with the moral aspect of actions.51 Shiva Nand Jha(1958) in his A Critical Study of Gandhian Economic Thought wrote ‘Gandhi’s economic ideas as his any other ideas are smeared with spiritualism and arise out of indigenous conditions and requirements.’ How spiritual is Gandhi’s economics? Krishna Das, who in 1921-22 spent Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi and wrote of his experiences in two-volume publication, likened spinning wheel to an ‘antidote to the virus which selfish greed and commercial exploitation following in the wake of Machinery have scattered throughout the world’. It is however another matter that Gandhi himself never invested the ‘humble’ spinning wheel with any such potency.

The scholastic analysis of Gandhi’s economic thoughts had begun to appear in his own life time and as he gained domestic stature and international recognition, many appeared to interpret his ‘message’ for the wider journalistic and academic circles. Richard Gregg was one such ex-American lawyer with wide experience in his own country to write many a volumes on Gandhian economics. His Economics of Khaddar (1927) is an example of a work written with the purpose of making Gandhi comprehensible to a largely western audience or those Indians who weighed western

50 The editorial board of the Collected Work has omitted names of some of the people from Gandhi’s letters. Was there any state instruction to do likewise or was it done on their editorial consideration? Who authorized the editorial department to undertake such cuts, at whose behest was it done? It is clear some discussions must have taken place before such a far reaching decision was taken about omitting the names which are almost always controversial or had been involved in some misdemeanors. The evidences from the Collected Work indicates that despite their open defiance of Ashram rules or their occasional failures Gandhi never shut the culprit off from his surrounding. He always desires their amelioration. Then how fair is the removal of names given the moral background in which people were interacting. From historical perspective this moral battle that was very openly being played out has clear consequences for one of the most enduring lessons of Gandhi life: Is there any change of the heart in human? Can love and patience bring about the needed change of heart? By removing the names of players an attempt is made to disguise this biggest conclusion. When Gandhi himself is openly discussing moral issues in the public how fair it is academically to remove names from his Collected Works. Gandhi’s relationship with his readers were not commercial but had a strict moral base that had foundation in the assumed purity of Gandhi and his institutions. Gandhi was dead against ‘sin of secrecy’. 'My Shame and Sorrow', The Bombay Chronicle, April 8 1929, (CWMG vol.40: 209)

recognition more than their own faculty. The book had an original treatment of the Khadi movement. *Economics of Khaddar* was given an enviable publicity by Gandhi. He produced a lengthy review-cum-extract article in Young India. The originality of Mr. Gregg's examination of the problem consists in his approach to it from the engineering aspect which is the title of the first chapter, and he has no difficulty in showing that the material prosperity of a country is increased not merely by accumulation of power or machinery but by the right use of it. Gandhi wrote.

Earlier, Gregg had co-authored *Takli Teacher* with Maganlal. Gregg would continue to write even after independence, this time more to keep Nehruvian economists on Gandhian line. His *Which Way Lies Hope* (1957) and *A Philosophy of Indian Economic Development* (1958) was written with the fond and missionary hope of influencing India's economic direction. Gregg's effort was to make western world comprehend validity and practicality of Gandhian programme.

The growth of the Khadi Movement could be seen as organic to India's struggle for freedom. We have attempted to juxtapose its growth with that of the national liberation movement. Post-independent India has witnessed sporadic growth and sustenance of people oriented non-electoral grassroots mobilization. At the same time, there is a gradual decline in the intervention of institutional political parties at the grassroots mobilization. The present study of Khadi movement, as initiated, developed, and shaped by Gandhi, therefore provides a lineage to the non-political grassroots mobilization on the issues of survival and subsistence. These are the very issues that have been step-motherly treated by the mandated political parties.

Gandhi had come to India with clear conception of his agenda. From 1915, the year he landed in India, to 1920, the year he gained acceptance as India's undisputable mass leader, he was busy laying not just his agenda for Swaraj but also his method of struggle. The chapter two, *Morality of a Movement*, discusses this and puts Khadi in perspective. The central theme that links the whole chapter shows that Gandhi's mobilization techniques was rooted with grassroots needs and were directed to bring maximum number of poor, uneducated people into the arena of freedom struggle. Khadi was central to these techniques of mobilization. It was drawn from the need to

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usher in real freedom for the famished masses and their control over the country's destiny over the decision making.

Second theme that this chapter discusses is the advocacy (brand-building exercise) around the commodity of Khadi. The goal of Gandhi in branding Khadi was to communicate the composite of tangible and intangible values and attributes that made up the brand identity of Khadi. There is subtle but substantial difference between advertising and branding. Advertising is used by commercial enterprises to hawk their products. Branding is all about the totality of the meaning, concepts, values and ideas. It is an expression of lifestyle and experience. It is in a world of commoditization and manufacturing homogeneity the unique medium for differentiation. Gandhi's was rather less an advertising than advocacy of Khadi. 

The third Chapter, 'A Proclamation of Ideological Independence', seeks to deal with ideological forces that fed into the making of Charkha creed. In 1915, Gandhi arrived in India and soon after, despite hiccups, set a rapid pace of articulation and action. There were enough of impediments but he was on aphrodisiac of high hope. Although not very clear about his 'secondary aims' on his departure from South Africa, Gandhi's primary aim was well founded. The primary aim, as laid out in the Hindswaraj, was to engage on the civilization front. Even leading India's freedom struggle was incidental to the larger struggle. In this struggle, Khadi was one constant ideological companion.

The significance of the spinning-wheel had flashed upon him in a moment of intuition in South Africa, even before he had seen one, and in fact did not know a spinning wheel from a handloom. His Swaraj traversed through Swadeshi and was propelled with the power of Satyagraha; all the three concepts, that of Swaraj, Swadeshi and Satyagraha have specific Gandhian semiotics. However, while the concepts of Swadeshi and Satyagraha found full bloom, the Swaraj, its conceptualization, characterization, and the comprehension remained shrouded and

54 The ideas regarding the distinctiveness of advertising and branding are taken from Vikram S Mehta's "Marketing Brand India", Economic Times, 28 November 2003, New Delhi.

disputed. In this chapter we are concerned more with the Swadeshi, the path, on which Gandhi rested every fiber of Swaraj.

Gandhi's advocacy of Charkha was not an empty obsession. It was an idea that concerned with certain vital issues of increasingly modernizing world. If increasing mechanization was presenting a world with possibilities of immense leisure for the residents of first world metropolis than it was also a case of voluntary idleness for mass of the third world residents. In such a situation, a time may arrive when a wise man 'will mean by the spinning wheel not an article made of wood but any type of work which provides employment to all people.'

The fourth Chapter Khadi and Congress: Conciliating Conflict attempts to bring into analysis Gandhi's troubled relationship with the Congress. As has already been noted, the Khadi movement moved along with the national liberation struggle. It therefore went through a series of troughs and crests. Gandhi's own career with the Indian National Congress, the political party transformed in the course of time into a national movement, was of profound ambivalence, bordering occasionally on indifference. His activity within the Congress was dictated by its effectiveness in carrying out his agenda or his capacity to mould its course as per his vision. In 1908, through Hindswaraj, Gandhi began with a reasoned tribute to Congress for its role in the national awakening. In 1919, he navigated the Indian political atmosphere to register a paradigm-shift in Congress' cause-celebre, composition and constitution. He introduced a regenerative national agenda of his liking but not without irking many Congress veterans. But, in 1925, Gandhi, seeing the unenthusiastic response from Congressmen, was sufficiently convinced to sever the Khadi campaign from Congress organization although he retained tenuous relationship with the platform that the political organization provided. Simultaneously, he launched All India Spinners' Association and became its life-president. The Association was autonomous and yet carried Congress legitimacy. The experiment was tangibly successful as to make Gandhi repeat the pattern for other of his pet concerns. His accepting of Congress presidency in the same year again was strategically designed to suit his Khadi campaign. In 1934, exasperation led Gandhi to dissociate from the Congress itself and immerse in village level regenerative experimentation at Sevagram. And, in 1948,

56 'Discourses on the "Gita"', April 11 1926, CWMG vol.32: 154.
three days before his assassination, Gandhi suggested disbandment of Congress. Thus, slowly but gradually, Gandhi moved from Control to Abandonment when he saw Congress rooted in a culture obstructive to his regenerative agenda. The man who brought mass mobilization into Congress himself withdrew, taking the mobilization and the grassroots issues along. This had long term impact on the mobilizational process so much so that in the post independent India after the expiry of the first generation Congress politicians grassroots mobilization too expired.

The fifth Chapter, **Khadi: Agency, Activism, Agendas**, deals with organizing structures of the agency of Khadi. In 1925, after his resounding failure in transforming Congress into a spinning and weaving storehouse, Gandhi extracted his alternative mechanism from the Congress. It was called All India Spinners' Association. It was a body formed under the auspices of the Congress and yet it carried no obligation towards the parent organization. AISA was precursor to non-political voluntary activism. It attempted to clear out of politics and precipitate its energy into constructive and development work. The chapter focuses on the organizational structure, constitutional arrangement, voluntary ethos, and Gandhi's underlying emphasis on the a-politicization of politics of development. Gandhi is said to be laying the foundation for apolitical action and creation of space for an autonomous action, independent of power-struggle.

Gandhi through Khadi and AISA laid the foundation for an alternative science whose laboratory was open field and every one was entitled to carry out experiments. Maganlal Gandhi wrote a technical treatise called *Charkha Shastra*. It was published by All India Khadi Information Bureau, in 1924. The book dealt with the varieties of cotton available in the country then, gave details on cotton-growing, techniques of examining cotton, intricacies of different instruments for ginning, carding etc.

Chapter six, **Constructive Engagement**, discusses issues and concerns that went into the re-orientation of the course of Khadi. Khadi was the pivot of the constructive programme. The national aspiration was articulated through the campaign of Khadi. From 1915 to 1931, Gandhi's campaign focused singularly on Khadi. Even later when focus shifted to save Hinduism from severance of so-called untouchables, Khadi did not vanish altogether. Having prepared a national network of
organizations devoted solely to propaganda, production and marketing of Khadi, Gandhi could breath easy. In the new phase, Khadi became the centre of village reconstruction effort, inaugurated in the wake of Post-Poona-Pact national tour. With growing understanding of the needs of the village India, Gandhi, in 1933, effected a major manoeuvre in the movement’s momentum. It sprang from the realisation that in the impoverished villages spinning was not the supplementary occupation undertaken in leisure. It was the sole occupation. In 1945, Gandhi met his close confidants at Sevagram to discuss the future of Khadi. The conclusion reached was path breaking. 1933 and 1945, therefore, were years of manoeuvre as far as Khadi were concerned.

Some seventy years after its foundation, Sevagram stands marginalized and reduced to a museum. It seems, for eternity and erased from India’s societal memory, the ashram is reviled by the inhabitants of the region. Sevagram to Gandhi was a laboratory for village reconstruction. People now inhabiting the surroundings of Sevagram hold the cluster of dilapidated hutment as the cause of their underdevelopment. Is Gandhi’s passion dead? The Seventh, Conclusion, Chapter gleans from the preceding chapters to discuss the question.