CHAPTER VII

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CHAPTER VII

RELEVENCE OF KHADI

Khadi or khaddar is the term conventionally used in North and Central India to refer to varieties of coarse cotton cloth hand woven using hand spun yarn. This was the cloth commonly worn by peasant and artisan groups in pre-industrial India. It was made from locally grown cotton which would be harvested by peasants and labourers, spun by local women and woven into cloth by men from various specialist weaving castes. The precise technology involved in the production of khadi would vary from region to region, as would the techniques used for its decoration (dying, embroidery, printing etc.) Although hand spun hand woven cotton cloth of this kind was common throughout India, it was not until the early 20th century, when its production and use were in severe decline that the term “khadi” entered nationalist vocabulary and the cloth became a key visual symbol of India’s struggle from colonial rule.\(^1\)

The effectiveness of khadi as a visual symbol of the Indian freedom struggle cannot be understood without examination of the critical role played by M. K. Gandhi (known by many as Mahatma – Great Soul) in elevating it to the status of a national cloth imbued with quasi-sacred properties. Gandhi’s success lay in his capacity to pick up, embody and develop existing political and economic critiques of colonialism and rework these through his own clothing practices and through his elaboration of the symbolism of cloth a simple everyday material form to which people from all backgrounds could relate.

7.1 Gandhi’s Sartorial Biography

Gandhi’s recognition of the symbolic potential of khadi was born out of a combination of personal experience and growing nationalist
awareness. His own clothing changes and experiments are well described in his autobiography and have received considerable attention from scholars. To summarise, as a young man Gandhi was attracted to what he would later call “the tinsel splendours of Western civilization.” Like most other elite educated Indian men of his generation, he made considerable efforts to adopt Western dress and manners in public life, associating these with the values of modernity, civilization and progress. At the same time, he experienced the feelings of alienation and discomfort that the adoption of Western clothes often entailed. These feelings became most apparent to Gandhi during his years working as a lawyer and civil rights activist in South Africa (1893 -1914) where he found himself the target of racism in spite of his “civilized apparel”. At the same time he was impressed by early nationalist critiques of colonialism in India which attributed India’s poverty to the decline of the local textile industry and the mass importation of mill cloth from Europe. A growing disillusionment with Western definitions of civilization and progress combined with experimentation in self sufficiency, communal living, bodily labour, celibacy and the semiotics of dress – all of which later became important aspects of his social and political crusade in India.

By the time he left South Africa in 1914, Gandhi had already learned to weave handloom cloth and had already made public appearances dressed in simple Indian styles of white cotton dress as a means of political protest and identification with oppressed peoples. When he arrived back in India the following year, he staged a dramatic appearance dressed in a white turban, tunic and dhoti, an adaptation of Kathiawadi peasant dress which visually challenged the well established hierarchies that elevated Western over Indian, urban over rural and elite over popular.
It is easy to underestimate just how radical Gandhi’s appearance and clothing policies were. Not only did he challenge long established hierarchies through his own dress but he also proposed a complete reclothing of the nation as well as a full scale reorganisation of the textile industry. The revival of khadi was central to these aims.

To qualify as khadi, cloth had to be not only hand woven and locally produced but also made from hand-spun yarn. It was this stipulation that the yarn must be hand spun that distinguished Gandhi’s promotion of home industry from the efforts of earlier swadeshi (home industry) activists in Bengal who had contented themselves with the promotion of Indian produced mill cloth. The difficulty Gandhi had in locating a woman who could teach him to spin is indicative of the extent to which the previously common art of hand spinning had been wiped out though mill technology, although it is likely that it was still practised in some rural areas. It was with Gandhi’s spinning experiments, aided by local women in the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, that khadi was reborn as a national cloth. By 1918 Gandhi was wearing what he called pure khadi and by 1919 he was appealing to all Indians to follow suit and to take a vow of swadeshi.

7.2 From Rustic Robes to Sacred cloth

The Gandhian khadi was more than simply cloth. It was the material embodiment of an ideal. It represented not only freedom from the yoke of colonialism, but also economic self sufficiency, political independence, spiritual humility, moral purity, national integrity, communal unity, social equality, the end of untouchability and the embracing of non-violence. The spinning wheel was, he argued, the new weapon in the fight for swaraj (home rule). Through spinning their own yarn, Indians could regain their autonomy just as by wearing khadi, they
would not only struggle for independence but also experience the state of being independent. At the same time the revival of hand spinning would, he felt, usher in the revival of a more general craft based society built around the notion of self sufficient village republics.

The power of khadi as a national symbol lay in the fact that since everyone wore some form of clothing, everyone had the opportunity or, as Gandhi saw it, the duty to participate in the freedom movement by embracing khadi. And since this was traditionally the dress of peasant, artisan and tribal rather than the Indian elite, its potential wearers were in theory as numerous and varied as the Indian population itself. To this extent khadi was a powerful visual tool in the creation of an imagined national community which for the first time incorporated the non-literate majority. Khadi and the charka (spinning wheel) were also to forge the previously missing links between the personal and the political, thereby encouraging a new range of actors on the political stage. Many women, previously alienated from mainstream social and political movements, lent their support to the khadi campaign, taking “vows of swadeshi” and donating their jewellery for social and political causes. This was a broad-based political and social movement that incorporated people of all ages, including children.

It was through a combination of Gandhi’s passion and existing economic and political strategies that the Congress Party placed khadi at the centre of the Non-cooperation campaign of 1920-21 and the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930. These included boycotts on the import and sale of foreign cloth and the staging of public bonfires in which foreign cloth and clothes were burned and participants re-clothed themselves in simple white khadi garments which, Gandhi argued, represented self sacrifice, purity and service of the nation. In using such
highly charged symbolic language Gandhi was playing on existing semi-dormant “magical” and “moral beliefs” concerning the polluting potential of cloth, but he reversed conventions, attributing purifying properties to humble khadi rather than fine luxury silks and mill cloth.\(^5\) Gandhi’s insistence that European clothes were dirty, defiling our greatest outward pollution came under attack from those who felt he was in danger of reviving harmful and backward notions of untouchability.

Central to the infrastructure through which khadi was propagated was the All India Spinners Association which organised khadi tours throughout the country, replete with exhibitions, sales of cloth and demonstrations of spinning. These not only stimulated the spread of a shared visual culture but they also combined politics with entertainment in significant ways. In particular the new technology of lantern slides contributed to the visual spectacle, attracting mass audiences from rural communities. Meanwhile, at the political centre, the Congress Party adopted khadi as its official uniform, placing the image of the spinning wheel at the centre of the national flag (which was, of course made from khadi cloth), and even accepting Gandhi’s controversial proposal that every Congress member should spin for half an hour a day. Within a few years of his arrival back from South Africa Gandhi had effectively transformed the visual culture of Indian politics. White khadi cloth became a powerful presence in public protests, creating an image of visual unity as well as a sense of shared community in the struggle for freedom for swaraj (self-rule).

Gandhi’s invention of a small white khadi cap (which later became known as the Gandhi cap) represented an explicit attempt to create a single unifying piece of headwear that would be accessible to all Indian
men and boys, thereby downplaying existing sartorial diversity on the basis of region, religion, social status and occupation.

Converting the nation to khadi was, however, an ambitious quest that was only ever partially achieved. Indian clothing practices were highly diversified according to caste, religion, occupation, education and region as well as politics. Not all agreed with Gandhi’s particular vision of a future India built around the notion of self-sufficient village republics with the spinning wheel occupying a central place. Prominent amongst Gandhi’s critics was the “untouchable” leader Babasahib Ambedkar who perceived the promotion of khadi as a means of keeping the poor in poverty. Many were dubious about the benefits of a return to hand-spinning, arguing that its demise was part of the natural progress that came with development. Amongst those high profile public figures who verbalised their criticisms was Rabindranath Tagore who suggested that “if man be stunted by big machines, the danger of his being stunted by small ones should not be lost sight of.” Others complained that spinning was women’s work and that it was a laborious and repetitive activity.

Uniting religious groups through khadi was also a difficult task. Whilst some Muslims did support the khadi campaign, others were no doubt alienated by the explicit Hindu imagery of much of Gandhi’s rhetoric. A closer look at the clothing practices of different groups reveals that social and religious differences were not entirely wiped out. Rather different groups found ways of expressing difference through khadi, sometimes by dying it, making garments in particular styles or wearing particularly fine varieties of cloth. Hand woven cloth made from handspun silk and wool were also developed and referred to as “khadi silk” and “khadi wool”. Fine hand spun hand woven cottons and silks, though conforming to definitions of khadi, did of course distance their
wearers from the rural poor who, if they could afford khadi at all, were likely to be dressed in the thicker weaves.

The problem of poor people’s access to khadi was something that haunted Gandhi throughout the khadi campaign. The mass export of raw cotton to Europe had meant that cotton was in short supply in India where handspun thread competed in the market place with cheap imported machine spun yarn and mill cloth. This meant that obtaining raw cotton or hand spun thread was difficult and costly, making it beyond the reach of many of India’s rural poor. This economics of khadi was a cause of constant frustration to Gandhi who recognised that many of the rural poor simply could not afford to discard their foreign cloth in favour of khadi. Gandhi’s decision to adopt a short dhoti or loincloth in 1921 was partly a response to this situation. For two years he had been preaching that it were better for people to reduce their clothing to a mere loincloth made of khadi than to wear more ample garments made from foreign cloth but he felt that his words did not hold weight as long as he himself was fully dressed. It was the plight of the poor combined with what he considered the failure of the khadi campaign that finally drove him to reduce his own clothing, initially on a temporary basis “as a sign of mourning” that swaraj was still far off and as means of “making the way clear” for those who could only afford a minimum quantity of khadi.

As Gandhi grew into his loincloth, it became a permanent feature of his identity, codifying his principals and priorities, visually evoking and enacting India’s poverty whilst simultaneously suggesting its solution through khadi. Whilst the subtleties of what Gandhi wished to evoke were often misunderstood, his humble appearance had a profound impact on his followers both in India and abroad. Though written as an adversary of state power, he was not above using it to further the cause of Khadi. As
he says in his essay ‘Ministers’ Duty’ “each Provincial Government has to tell the villagers that they must manufacture their own khaddar……. The Governments should notify the villagers that they will be expected to manufacture khaddar for the needs of their villages within a fixed date after which no cloth would be supplied to them.”7

7.3 KHADI : Gandhian Critique of Modernity

In his dress and demeanour Gandhi almost belongs to the ascetic tradition of the East. Not only in his choice of such and image, but in the essential making of his philosophy and politics, he took recourse to an innovative set of words and symbols. In deed as a mass leader he had an uncanny knack for creating and using symbols and like most popular symbols, In deed as a mass leader he had an uncanny knack for creating and using symbols, Khadi has a complex and different appellation. Gandhi sought to convey multiple messages through Khadi, arguable the focal one among them was a critique of modernity. Khadi was apt symbol of long Indian tradition on the one hand and a critique of modern western Civilization on the other hand. In relation to three important concepts, which form the very core of modernity in India again Khadi, has been used as a critique. These three concepts are nationalism, industrialism and western education.

“Khadi and Indian Tradition,” Indians have not only been weavers, but even exporters of cotton fabric since time immemorial. Historians have found clear evidence of Harappans supplying cotton textiles to Sumerians around four millennia back in the past. In the more recent history, British themselves imported huge quantities of clothes from India, before they introduced a colonial pattern of made. At the time of arrival of the British in India, next to cultivation weaving was the commonest economic exploitation by the British themselves imported
huge quantities of clothes form India, before they introduced a colonial pattern of made. At the time of arrival of the British in India, next to cultivation weaving was the activity in the Indian country side. The saga of the economic exploitation British is replete with reference to the decline of cotton weavers. That the theme of hand –woven fabric, that is, Khadi was brought up and invested with new meaning by Gandhi was nothing but natural. In fact weaving has been a common metaphor, even in the spiritual discourse of many saints and philosophers, the most notable among than was Kabir, himself a weaver. His poetry is replete with reference to warp and woof or the mechanism of weaving. One of his many oft quoted songs is “Jheeni, Jheeni rebeenee chadria “Kabir expresses the spiritual endeavour of man through the metaphor of weaving. While not exactly forsaking the spiritual content, Gandhi reinvented the mundane human endeavor, no less complex through. Innumerable songs were composed during the years of freedom struggle or afterwards how Gandhi will or did drive out the British with the help of his charka. It became symbol of freedom struggle. “Livery of freedom” as Nehru described Khadi which was however also a means of economic regeneration of the village and much more. Gandhi declared, “My Swadeshi chiefly centers around the hand spun Khadar and extends to every thing that can be and is produced in India.

7.4 Khadi As a critique of Modern Civilization

Many of us recall with relish the famous remark of Gandhi on western civilization being yet ‘a good idea’ He in deed had a deep suspicion of the material progress in the west and further, of the whole concept of modernity’. He identified the real enemy of the Indian people not as the British themselves but as their modern civilization. In the preface to the English edition of his seminal work Hindi civilization,
which is the Kingdom of God. The one is the God of War, the other is the God of War, My countrymen, therefore believe that they should adopt modern civilization to drive out the English. Hind Swaraj has been written in order to show that they are following a suicide policy, and that, if they would but revert to their own glorious civilization either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianized or find their occupation in India gone. Among the borrowings from the modern west, uncritically accepted by the western educated intelligentsia, two crucial ones are the idea of nation state and modern industrialization. Gandhi had a different concept of both. Further down, he rejected the very system of education that made educated Indians modern.

7.5 Nationalism with a Difference

In his interesting book the illegitimacy of Nationalism’. Ashis Nandy compares Tagore and Gandhi respect of their position on nationalism in the following words: “Both recognized the need for a ‘national’ ideology of India as a means of cultural survival and both recognized that, for the same reason, India would either have to make a break with the post-medieval western concept of nationalism or give the concept a new ‘content’. As a result of Tagore, nationalism.” Interestingly, Tagore who was no great votary of Khadi though, used it as metaphor in an article on Nationalism written in 1917:

“Before the nation came to rule over us (under British colonial rule) we had other government which were foreign, and these like all government, had some elements of ‘the machine in them. But he difference between them and the government by the Nation is like the difference between the handloom and the powerloom. In the products of the hand-loom the magic of man’s living fingers finds its expression, and
its hum harmonizes with the music of life. But the power-loom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production.”

While Tagore’s critique has a poetic flavour and a streak of romanticism. Gandhi’s critique as well as proposed alternatives is more robust and real, Albert, idealistic. Gandhi asserted that “violent nationalism, otherwise known as imperialism, is the curse, non-violent nationalism is a necessary condition of corporate or civilized life”.

He saw Indian freedom movement as ‘India’s contribution to peace.” Gandhi defined his version of nationalism in terms of Swadeshi and Swaraj. He declared that his ‘Swaraj is to keep intact the genius of our civilization.

This is extended to include the principles of love and ‘freedom for the meanest of the countrymen’ on the other. Both of these are linked with the cause of Khadi, which was part of our long tradition as also the need of the poor.

He exhorted his fellow beings to spin and weave Khadi. “I would ask you to come in Khadi, for Khadi links you with the fallen and the down trodden.” Khadi epitomized the noble spirit of truthfulness and purity. He averred that ‘Khadi had been conceived as the foundation and the image of ahimsa, Areal Khadi wearer will not utter an untruth. A real Khadi-wearer will harbour no violence, no deceit, no impurity.

Against mechanistic and aggressive concept of nationalism in the west, Gandhi proposed a concept of People’s Swaraj based on truth and non-violence for which Khadi was an apt symbol. Moreover, this symbol also linked the concept of Swaraj with the concern for the poor- the last man and village, the supported bastion of backwardness. Prior Gandhi, the nationalist leaders had acquiesced in by an large to a western concept of nationalism; Gandhi not only critiqued that but provided an alternative
concept, more deeply rooted in the tradition and encompassing all Indians, rich and poor alike, He gave a moral perspective to the national movement for which a set of new symbols were created by him, Khadi Ramraj, and Satyagraha he was designing a new framework of ideology more appropriate for the teeming millions of India, eighty five percent of them residing in the country side. His critique was not merely, an alternative ideology, it was a plan of mass action that he visualized was again not merely a political programme but a social and economic agenda, to quote one of his sentences: “Khadi service, village service and the Harijans service are one in reality, thought three in name”.  

**7.6 An Alternative Frame Work of Economics**

True economics, according to Gandhi, ‘never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics’. He was critical of pursuit of materialism which was the characteristic of the advancement of the west. He was generally opposed to machines and centralization of production and favored on the contrary a life of labour for everyone in the society, succinctly contained in his concept of bread labour. He believed in the ideal of economic self-sufficiency of the villages. He describes his idea of an ideal socio-economic order in the following words:

“Independence must begin at the bottom, Thus every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. In this structure composed of innumerable village there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circles whose centre will be individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals,
never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral parts”.

In this there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands. Labour has a unique place in a cultural human family. Every machine that helps every individual has a place.

Khadi is evidently the centre piece of the strategy for such an economic utopia. It not only means compulsion of labour through spinning but a very decentralized mode of production contributing to the possibility of a self-sufficient rural economy. It is both a value system in it self and defines an alternative framework of economy. He writes clearly that ‘Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the production and distribution of the necessaries of life.’

In this years of with drawal from active politics from 1924, Gandhi devoted himself to the propagation of Khadi turning it into a cult, as a strategy of nation building ‘from the bottom up’ He suggested a ‘Khadi franchise’ for the organization and even ‘envisaged a ‘yarn currency’.

B. R. Nanda comments ‘that Gandhi’s almost emotional attachment to the spinning wheel should have baffled both the British and Western educated town bred Indians, educated town bred Indians, is not surprising’ for ‘they were both unable, the former form lack of will, the latter from lack of ignorance, to grasp the incredible poverty of Indian village. Even Tagore, otherwise an admirer of Mahatma ,feared that spinning wheel that spinning wheel and the economic stagnation it implied will cause a ‘death like sameness in the country.’ Gandhi reply was loud and clear:
“I didn’t want the poet to forsake his music, the farmer his plough, the lawyer his brief, and the doctor his lancet. They are to spin only thirty minutes every day as sacrifice. I have every day as sacrifice. I have in deed asked the famishing man and woman, who is idle for work whatsoever to spin for a living and the half-starved farmer to spin during his income.”  

Gandhi’s appeal surely had a moral ground and further he would make spinning wheel the centre of his scheme of rural reconstruction building up anti-malaria campaigns, improvement in sanitation, settlement of village disputes, conservation and breeding of cattle and hundred of other beneficent activities required for the resuscitation of the village. He proposed that ‘Khadi is the sun of the village solar system.’ It is well-known that Ruskin’s book Unto This Last had an indelible imprint on his mind. Behind the whole Khadi campaign, it was this last man who was always in Gandhi’s mind. On the other side, he opposed the tendency of ever increasing consumption and multiplication of wants. The self-abnegation and asceticism of Gandhi’s economic prescription has often been criticized as too idealistic and taken to the extremes Even if it is true, now environmentalists are veering round to almost a similar position. Excessive consumption may not be sustainable and may result in depletion of the limited resources on the earth. Sidestepping this debate, it may benoted that the Khadi –centered scheme for rural development was typical of Gandhian economic framework, rather, its core principal.

Not with standing misgivings about the feasibility of his economic ideas, in the first ten years of its existence the. The all India Spinners Association had extended it activities to 5300 villages and provided employment to 220,000 spinners 20,000 weavers and 20,000 carders and
disbursed more than two crores of rupees in Indian villages. Gandhi, of course, knew the limitations of his efforts in the context of the magnitude of the problem. He decided to settle in a village, named, Segaon near Wardha, which was later renamed as Sevagram. Soon Sevagram became a centre of Gandhian Scheme of village welfare and several institution All Indian Village Industries welfare and several institutions started there including All Indian Village Industries. The Association set up a school for training village workers and published it own periodical, Gram Udyog patrika. Hindustani Talimi Sangh was the other institution which experimented on Gandhi’s ideas of education. Basic Education as Critique of Modernity.

Education was arguably the most important arena for the introduction of modernity in India. Designed as it was by the colonial masters, besides remaining generally divorced from India tradition, it was also oblivious to the needs and problems of the teeming millions in the countryside. Gandhi’s basic education scheme was primarily a system of rural education and handicraft constituted the medium of instruction. Spinning and weaving was again Gandhi’s preference among the crafts and so his entire pedagogy and educational philosophy was intermeshed with his khadi based approach to life.  

From his earliest days in Indian public life Gandhi was critical of the Western system of education for much of what it stood for in his opinion. A sample of his critique can be read below:

“The system of education at present in vogue is wholly unsuited to India’s needs, is a bad copy of the Western model and it has by reason of the medium of instruction being a foreign language sapped the energy of the youths who had passed through our schools and colleges and has produced an army of clerks and office-seekers. It has dried up all
originality, impoverished the vernaculars and has deprived the masses of the benefit of higher knowledge which would otherwise have percolated through the intercourse of the education classes with them. The system has resulted in creating a gulf between educated India and the masses. It has stimulated the brain but starved the spirit for want of a religious basis for education and emaciated the body for want of training in handicrafts. It has criminally neglected the greatest need of agricultural training worth the name…."

Judith Brown has rightly observed, it is difficult to appreciate quite how radical and abrasive Gandhi would have sounded to educated Indians as he castigated their educational training and their values and told them they were traitors to their mother land by being willing ‘victims’ of the current system’. Despite their opposition to British rule, most their nationalists did not reject the British rule, most other nationalists did not reject the British system of education outright, since they viewed it as a means by which India could became a materially advance nation. But form the beginning of his career Gandhi thought differently.

Alongside Champaran Satyagraha, his earliest foray into local politics, he launched his experiment in education. In November 1917 the first school was opened in Barharwa just a week after. The experiment grew mature and eventually in 1937 after Wardha Conference fully developed was announced, although system was announced although it was indeed a modified version of Gandhi’s won scheme of education. Even in June 1921, writing in Young India he had outlined his views with a great deal of clarity:

“I can see nothing wrong in the children, from the very threshold of their education, paying for it in work. The simplest handicraft, suitable for all, required for the whole of India undoubtedly spinning along with
the previous processes. If we introduced this in our educational institutions, we should fulfill three purposes. If we introduced this in our educational institutions, we should fulfill three purpose: make education self – supporting, train the bodies of the children as well as their minds and pave the way for a complete boycott of foreign yarn and cloth. Moreover, the children thus equipped will become self-reliant and independent.”

7.7 Khadi post Independence

Whilst khadi represented a powerful symbolic challenge to British imperialism, Gandhi’s dream that it would become the everyday dress of Indians after Independence was never realised. Even during the freedom struggle many had worn it more for its political effectiveness than for love of the cloth, just as many had spun their own yarn more out of self-sacrifice and national duty than out of belief in the economic and moral benefits of hand-spinning. However, having played such a significant role in nationalist politics and in India’s self-definition, khadi could be neither abandoned nor forgotten.

In politics it has retained its place as national dress in spite of the fact that today the white khadi worn by politicians is associated more with hypocrisy and corruption than sincerity or purity. The image of the khadi-clad politician has long been a favourite with cartoonists for whom it functions as a visual shorthand for greed and insincerity in the recognisable guise of honour and humility. This has lead Chakrabarty to ask why Indian politicians continue to wear khadi given the ubiquity of its negative associations. They do so, he suggests, because even if Indians no longer hold Gandhian ideals, they have retained the desire for an alternative modernity and it is this desire that khadi continues to represent even as people’s lives are increasingly informed by capitalism.
Interestingly when artists, academics and social activists choose to wear khadi, their distance from the white-clad politician is generally marked by their choice of coloured and flecked weaves or by the particular combinations of clothes that they wear. Their khadi wearing is not associated with hypocrisy but rather with the lived reality of an alternative life style, aesthetics and politics for example, among self-professed radicals in university politics.

The ambiguous status of khadi in politics is echoed by its ambiguous economic position. In 1956 the Khadi and Village Industries Commission\(^{13}\) (hereafter KVIC) was established with a view to promoting and developing khadi production and other village industries in rural areas. Despite high levels of Government assistance in the form of grants, rebates and subsidies, the khadi industry has always struggled to sustain itself and had problems selling the goods it produces. The liberalisation and globalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990’s has further contributed to khadi’s marginalisation. The years 1997-2002 saw a steady decline in khadi production as well as the accumulation of large quantities of unsold stock. How to attract people into working in a labour intensive industry associated more with morality and crafts skills than profit or exciting new technologies remains a difficult challenge. In particular, hand spinning is perceived as an unglamorous activity which offers appallingly low returns and is pursued principally by poor women from marginal groups in rural areas. None the less the KVIC continues to pursue an expansionist policy and is optimistic that it may be able to provide increased employment in rural areas, thereby stemming the tide of unemployment and migration to cities. Is it worth mentioning that almost all Indian towns and cities have so-called ‘Khadi Gramudyog
Bhawans, including large and chic ones in Delhi, that sell khaddar, along with other products of ‘village industries’

How to revive the khadi industry whilst retaining its particular moral and nationalist character remains a challenge that is currently being pursued in several directions. On the one hand the National Institute of Fashion and Technology (NIFT) and National Institute of Design (NID) have been charged with the role of updating khadi and introducing “new and trendy designs” to be taken up by the khadi sector. This strategy of making khadi more desirable by contemporary standards is to be matched by more aggressive marketing strategies, including the promotion of khadi abroad in such countries as the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and South Africa. Techniques of global capitalism such as e-commerce and the registration of khadi as a brand name and geographical indication have also been recommended. Meanwhile fashion designers and private companies have for the last two decades flirted with the potential of khadi as fashion. One astute Kolkata based clothing company has, for example, produced a successful range of brightly coloured khadi garments under the brand name Khadder. Whilst labels such as “bio-khadi” and “organic hand-spun cotton” indicate khadi’s entry into the elite global arena of “eco-friendly” capitalism, the development of something called “polyester khadi” by the KVIC reminds us that popular consumers in India are often more concerned with practicality than purity.

A development more in tune with Gandhi’s original aim to provide mass employment for the rural poor is the Railway Minister’s recent decision to replace all linen used on Indian trains with khadi and to consider introducing of khadi uniforms for railway staff. These proposals, though welcomed in some quarters, have been greeted with cynicism in
others, with people complainging of khadi’s lack of durability, its high maintainance costs and its “stone age” associations.

What the history of khadi’s revival in the 20th and 21st centuries reveals is an ongoing tension between capitalist development and a Gandhian-style modernity based on alternative economic and moral principles. Whilst khadi is never likely to become the popular everyday wear that Gandhi hoped it would be, it is likely that it will retain its important symbolic role in providing an alternative vision of modernity and evoking the texture and uniqueness of India’s Freedom Struggle.

7.8 Gandhi and the Twenty First Century

“Khadi is the sun of the village solar system. The planets are the various industries which can support khadi in return for the heat and the sustenance they derive from it. Without it other industries cannot grow. But during my last tour I discovered that, without the revival of other industries, khadi could not make further progress. For villagers to be able to occupy their spare time profitably, the village must be touched at all points.”

It is a tragedy for India that we have never given a chance to ‘Gandhian Philosophy’. However, Gandhiji’s views on Khadi and Village Industries, were being followed by appointing the Khadi and Village industries Board since 1946. This article is an attempt to characterize the rural industrialization approach evolved in Gandhian Philosophy. It also briefly reviews and analysis our approach to implement this ideology based approach in practice. Some specific policy suggestions are also attempted in light of the most dominant issues experienced by us in the last fifty years.

Adam Smith in the British parliamentary debate had depicted the picture of a prosperous India prior to the colonial period saying that “East
India offered a market for the manufacturers of Europe greater and more extensive than both Europe and America put together”. This India was destroyed by British industrialization and its backwash, disintegrating self-assured villages through progressive impoverishment of the peasants and destruction of the artisans.

Gandhi had grasped the history of India very well which he well reflected in his Hind Swaraj where he provided the main constituents of his strategy of India’s reconstruction. Gandhi made it clear that ‘modern civilization’, nourished by British rule, was the real cause of ‘economic distress’. Against that, Gandhi envisaged that the salvation of India was in the revival of its ancient civilization. Under the shadow of ancient civilization, Gandhi wanted to develop a New Social Order which was based on the foundation of non-violence and truth, where economic progress and moral progress go together and the focus is on the development of man. Life and human relations in society, village and nation in the new social order were envisaged not like pyramids with an apex sustained at the bottom but, as an oceanic circle.

To achieve this New Social Order Gandhi’s development model was evolved around “Village Development” and it is so much emphasized that it is truly coined “VILLAGISM”. Gandhi’s emphasis on village reconstruction was negatively viewed as an onslaught on the exploitative tendency inherent in industrialism and dominance by urbanization and positively viewed as an attempt to establish a non-violent social order from which exploitation is completely done away with.

‘Rural Industrialization’ was never the term used by Gandhi. However, two basic components of Gandhian development, self-sufficient villages and decentralization of economic and political powers,
gave a very important place to development of Khadi and Village Industries. According to a recent study the Khadi movement was not only a mass mobilization movement against anti-imperialist struggle, it was also a social movement of recognizing women’s capacity as economically and politically active beings without whose support the goal of freedom or Swaraj would be unattainable and meaningless. In fact, Gandhi’s well known concept of ‘Living Wage For Spinners’ originated in his realizing the danger of women being paid low wages even by constructive workers.

Gandhi’s clear rationale behind the choice of Khadi was led by his anxiety of “Work to all”. He believed that Khadi and Village Industries were the only alternative. This is evident from his statement of challenge to rulers to whom he stated that,

“If the government could provide full employment to all without the help of Khadi and Village Industries, I shall be prepared to wind-up my constructive programme in this sphere”.

He said, “Production of Khadi includes cotton growing, picking, ginning, cleaning, carding, slivering, spinning, sizing, dyeing, preparing the warp and woof, weaving and winding. These, with the exception of dyeing, are essential processes every one of which can be effectively handled in the villages”.

Although ‘Khadi’ is the sun of the village solar system, various other industries, like planets, do have a place in the village solar system and in fact, “Those who do not see Khadi as the centre of village activities, they are welcome to concentrate their efforts on these other industries”, because a village economy can not be complete without essential industries such as hand grinding, hand pounding, soap making, paper making, metal making, tanning, oil processing, etc. Gandhi had anticipated a complimentary relationship between Khadi and Village
Industries. He believed that these industries come in as hand made to Khadi. They can not exist without Khadi and Khadi will be robbed of its dignity without them.

Gandhi had not perhaps conceptualized the Khadi and Village Industry except once when he stated that ‘Khadi of my conception’ is that hand spun material which takes the place entirely, in India, of mill cloth........and indirectly explained what is Khadi. If men and women will not take to hand spinning as a sacred duty, that is, the same person will not do carding, slivering and spinning, there is little hope for Khadi. Similarly conceptualization of village industries was left to Kumarrappa who provided the conditions to consider the industry as a village industry.

1. Those that produce essential commodities in villages for villages.
2. Using the local raw materials and using simple processes which are within the easy reach of villages.
3. Requiring only such tools and implements which can be acquired within the financial capacity of the villages.
4. With the aid of human or animal power since they are easily available in the villages.
5. Meeting the demand of local or immediate surrounding population.
6. That which does not cause displacement of labour.

These characteristics widened the scope of village industries and at the same time ensured the absence of concentration, violence, exploitation, inequality and anti-nature industrialization.\(^{16}\)

The question of market, method of production by machine tool or technology and credit etc. which have occupied a major significance in the post-independent period of rural industrialization, did not have a place in the initial stages, but came into the picture during the post
independence period and Gandhi’s stand on the issues have undergone change.

The question of a market for Khadi was not significant to Gandhi. In the sense, that Khadi was conceived with a much more ambitious object i.e. to make our villages starvation-proof. He believed that, “This is impossible unless the villages will wear Khadi themselves, sending only the surplus to the cities. The singular secret of Khadi lies in its salability in the place of its production and use to the manufacturers themselves”. However, finding problems for a market for Khadi, Gandhi in 1946, accepted “Commercial Khadi” as a “go-cart”. He said, “We ourselves are responsible for the creation of this problem, we did not know the science of Khadi, we do not know it fully even now. Therefore, like children, we stumble again and again and thereby learn to work. In order that we may not fall so as never to rise again we made use of a go-cart and are still using it”. In so far as the village industries are concerned Gandhi believed that the question of demand does not arise as the expansion of village industries is related to demand which did exist in the villages. He said, “Given the demand, there is no doubt that most of our wants can be supplied from our villages”.

Gandhi insisted on “Primitive methods” of production in the village industry and explained that, “I suggest the return because there is no other way of giving employment to the millions of villagers who live in idleness”. Mechanization he regarded as evil in view of more hands than required in work. However, in the later periods, Gandhi accepted the role of small equipments, machines, tools and technology, which should not replace labour but reduce the cost and drudgery of labour and increase efficiency of labour. Thus, Gandhian design of rural industrialization was developed in the passage of time.
7.9 Review of Ideology Based Approach Practised in India

There are three basic evidences of accepting Gandhian rural industrial approach in India. First, right from the industrial policy of 1948 till the New Small Enterprise Policy of 1991, we have placed Khadi and Village Industries as the prime instrument of promotion of rural employment and rural economy. There are specific studies which analyzed the role of village industries as expressed in all the industrial statements. These statements have become the guide lines of the plans relating to K.V.I. As early as 1953 we established an exclusive institution of Khadi and Village Industries Board and later established a Khadi and Village Industries Commission in 1957. It was asked to assume responsibility for initiating, assisting and financing Khadi programmes on a much wider basis, make it a part of the whole development programme of the country and an essential constituent of a planned economy in the making.

The first plan had adopted a complete ‘Gandhian’ perspective in development of KVIC as it was decided to be developed ‘with processing of local raw material for the local market with simple techniques (1951). As an appropriate method of protection a “Common Minimum Programme” was formulated, which was mainly related to reservation of production, restriction on capacity expansion and continuation of research. A multi-institutional approach was developed by establishing a separate institution like the KVIC Board, Hand-loom Board, Handicraft Board and Small Scale Industries Board for their development.

The Second Five Year Plan gave a very strategic place to village industries to generate marketable surplus as consumer goods to support heavy industry development without inflation and also gave a task to liquidate unemployment as quickly as possible. The basic approach for
the KVIC was worked out by the panel of economists appropriate to the development of these sectors. The Kurvey Committee of 1955 led to the establishment of KVIC and it also suggested distribution of 2-5 million ambar charkhas—technologically improved hand spinning equipment. The Zaman Committee advocated the decentralization of Khadi work, recognition of large certified institutions and formation of co-operatives 1959. The Gyanchand Committee appointed to evaluate Khadi, pointed out the vicious cycle of low output, low wages and even falling wages as the central problem. It advocated that the yarn production through the traditional charkha to provide relief to distressed persons should be separated from the economic problem for Khadi production as an employment generation activity. The Nathu Committee in 1962 recommended that the policy of production and sales should be reoriented to effect at least 40% of sales within the district and 80% within the state and export to other states should not exceed 20%. The Ashok Mehta Committee on KVIC in 1968 attempted to evolve a fresh approach to development based on the three basic components of producing salable articles, providing employment to people in backward areas, tribal and inaccessible areas, famine and drought stricken areas and also the backward and less privileged section of the population and to create self-reliance and community spirit among rural people.

Apart from suggesting specific target groups, it also recommended minimum wage for spinners at a level equal to off-season agricultural wages and a seven year programme for progressive improvement of techniques was recommended to achieve viability defined in terms of minimum earning of the artisan without any protection. It also recommended that the Khadi programme of the new model charkha should be developed on a commercial basis, keeping the element of
grants and subsidies to the minimum. However, without an ensured market, at a given level of output, it created a problem of unemployment for traditional spinners and weavers, though marginally subsidy element could be reduced.

However, our efforts to implement the recommended approach in various Plans, are the feeble exercises initiated in the Second and Third Plans to integrate Khadi and Village Industries with larger programmes of rural development, came to an abrupt end with an abandonment of the Community Development Programmes and the dismantling of block machinery in most of the states. Programmes like Crash Scheme of Rural Employment and Drought Prone Area Programme were introduced to battle the rising unemployment, they remained and continue to remain land based activities oriented to agriculture. KVIC with its character of skilled based activities and artisans was by and large not drawn in these special employment programmes.

In the policy packaged for KVIC in the Eighth Plan there was nothing notable except, (a) encouragement for modernization and technological up-gradation and (b) to set up a monitoring agency to ensure the genuine credit needs of this sector and also insurance to review all the statuettes, regulations and procedures to ensure that their operation does not militate the interest of the small and village industries. It also stated that it is possible to dovetail the programmes of Khadi and Village Industries, Handlooms, Sericulture and Handicrafts to integrate local areas of development programmes for villages for poverty alleviation through increase in employment. However, no steps are suggested to implement this policy in practice.

We find that during the Second Plan period KVIC was given great significance which went on declining. Its approach changed and the
The direction of the change was pointing towards sacrificing the ideological character of KVIC envisaged by Gandhiji in the name of a pragmatic approach. The diminished significance of KVIC is reflected in the allocation of the resources in various Plans.

7.10 Dominant Issues and Major Policy Suggestions

Our failure to achieve an impressive dent in our problem of poverty and unemployment alleviation through an ideology based on Gandhian rural industrialization approach we may address these problems and solutions as follows:

1. After almost five decades, we have not been able to resolve the age old problem of adequate earnings for those who choose to work on Khadi. Our attempts to introduce new technology in spinning failed to generate adequate and attractive earnings. A recent study conducted by the Centre for Women’s Development Studies have shown that even in Gujarat the per capita income of a Khadi worker was not only inadequate to cross the poverty line but was consistently lower than any other sector in recent years.

2. The major problem faced by the KVIC is that of a market for their goods.

3. The marketable surplus with KVIC has failed to popularize the new technology of production. In fact, at a given level of output without an adequate market technology leads to unemployment of those who are already engaged in the Khadi industry.

4. All the evidence of performance like that of output, productivity, employment, technology transfer, investment allocation and utilization, preference for workers for alternate occupation, consumer’s presence and even government etc. show the fact that Khadi is declining, while village industries have a better scope and potential.
5. Institutional development to promote marketing and production via ‘Co-operatives’ has failed. Co-operatives provided an opportunity to establish a non-exploitative, self-employed and self-reliant rural community. Hardly 5% of the production of Khadi was accounted for by the co-operatives. Most of the co-operatives in Khadi were found dormant and “displaying the characteristics of ignorance and non-participation”. 19

6. 70% of KVIC time and energy was being spent on routine administration, leaving little time for its main function. Their cost of operation has gone on increasing as indicated by declining earnings and increasing non-wage cost.

7. Finally, KVIC is expected to alleviate poverty in those areas that are really backward. It is expected to play a greater role in such areas. However, KVIC work is very poorly spread in those states where they are supposed to work most effectively.

There are a large number of Review Committee Reports and even some research studies to provide policy guidance. It is unfortunate that Plan documents have not taken note of such documents. Some broad policy suggestions are:

1. We must accept that village industries have a better scope for development. KVIC should concentrate only on the most potential industries as pointed out in the Eighth Plan. Though there are 96 industries presently within the preview of KVIC, it would be better to concentrate on those 15 industries for which there is enough infrastructure, powerful tools and technology and adequate provision for training as well as a potential market. These industries should be ensured of getting raw materials. The raw material function alone can enhance the artisans earnings from 5% to 35%.
2. The intervention of voluntary agencies with innovative approaches could certainly help in the promotion of village industries.

3. The marketing of the Khadi product is a crucial issue. If there is a strong intervention of devoted voluntary agencies Khadi production could be sold in the local market.

In Gujarat state, there are institutions which have sold 90% of Khadi amongst tribals who have themselves produced it. Apart from aggressive marketing, taking into account the consumer’s preference, taste, price and other related factors including cost of production, we should try to educate the consumers and cast on them social responsibility. Consumers should be oriented to think of the origin of Khadi, production process, relevance of buying it, ecological significance, etc. The government itself could help in the promotion of Khadi by becoming a bigger buyer than the 5% it now buys mostly in the form of woolen blankets. There are a large number of products the government could buy from KVIC which would help more than blanket subsidies.

The performance of KVIC in the technology development sector is very poor. It is the key to the development of KVIC. The withdrawal of the Department of Science and Technology from KVIC is disappointing and they need to review their relationship. The KVIC should have very strong links with national laboratories, research organizations and manufacturing institutions for transference of technology.\textsuperscript{20}

Gandhiji’s approach to rural industrialization was evolved over a period of time. Our success in its implementation was less than desirable. However, it should not lead us to believe that we must get rid of this as a burden of ‘Gandhian Legacy’. We should keep in mind the following words of Pandit Nehru in his famous Gandhigram Speech, “I begin to
think more and more of Mahatma Gandhi’s approach. It is odd that I am mentioning his name in this connection: that is to say, I am entirely an admirer of the modern machine and want the best machinery and the best technique. But taking things as they are in India, however rapidly we advance in the machine age—and we will do so—the fact remains that large numbers of our people are not touched and will not be touched by it for a considerable time. Some other methods will have to be evolved by us for a considerable time. Some of the methods have to be evolved so that they become partners in production even though the production apparatus of theirs may not be efficient as compared to modern techniques, but we must use that; otherwise, it is wasted”. This statement is self-explanatory and in favour of more sincere and sustained efforts to develop rural industries on Gandhian lines.

7.11 The Environmental Crisis and Relevance of Gandhiji

The environmental deterioration that is happening, thanks to our life styles and worship of development and progress, is worsening day by day.

Gandhiji has not said anything specific on it as environmental degradation had not become a problem then. But we have it in his writings. Once, when asked for a message to humanity, Gandhiji said, "my life is my message". We can find everything we want, provided we go through his writings, his speeches and his life.

Man's progress and the road to development has led to the deterioration of nature. In his quest for fulfilling his needs, he has exploited nature to its maximum. This is development that is ecologically not sustainable. In the words of James Mc hall, the human being has become the most dangerous organism that the planet has ever hosted.
Awareness about the degradation of environment has been growing since the fifties. Steps were being taken to increase this awareness through books, conferences, etc.

The irony is that though every responsible person seems to be worried and anxious about environmental degradation, a meaningful solution is nowhere in sight. It is here that the Mahatma's teachings give us some hope.

In the western tradition man was an entity apart from the earth which he was encouraged to conquer, whereas in Indian tradition earth was his mother which he should hold in veneration. Gandhiji was very much influenced by our tradition and stressed on Truth and non-violence. In the words of Gandhiji "man has no power to create life, therefore, he has no right to destroy life." 21 Man has been endowed with higher faculties so that he can be compassionate to lower beings.

If environment is to be saved from degradation we have to avoid or limit the use of machinery. That is where Gandhiji's promotion of Khadi and Village Industries have become more relevant today than during the freedom struggle. We should read Gandhiji's Constructive Programme. Harijans and women are not yet treated as equal members of our society. Health and hygiene are wanting in Rural India. Many other aspects of life are discussed in the constructive programme. Adopting some of his ideas will be the first step in saving the environment.

Even more important are the eleven Vows or Vratas of Gandhiji which are non-violence, Truth, Non-stealing, Brahmacharya, Non-avarice, Physical labour, Control of Palette, Religious harmony, Fearlessness, Swadeshi and Abolition of untouchability. In fact, the significance of each of the vratas could be elaborated in the context of preserving the environment.
Through the cardinal point Gandhiji has been expounded in this essay, I cannot help repeating Gandhiji's famous quotation. "The earth has enough resources for our need, but not for our greed." What greater message is there to save this earth from the environmental disaster?

7.12 Khadi and Self Sufficiency

Gandhiji thought unemployment to be a women’s issue, and therefore symbolically as well as practically he introduced the ‘charkha’ (spinning wheel) as an instrument of the freedom movement. The propagation of khadi was to protect the employment of the poorest women. Spinning was an important home industry during the nineteenth century. It was source of livelihood for women of all castes, communities and even for the women of low income levels. Many widows supplemented their family income by spinning cotton yarn. Muslim women, who were not allowed to step out of their homes to earn livelihood, spent their time, spinning cotton thread. Thus spinning wheel brought economic independence, specially for women.  

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, hand spinning dwindled rapidly because it could not with stand the competition of cheap foreign as well as Indian machine made yarn. It had almost vanished by time Gandhiji settled down in India in 1915.

The weaving of khadi is preceded by the spinning of the thread on the charkha after which it goes to the bobbin winder, warper, sizer and finally the weaver. While spinning is organized by the Khadi Board. Weaving is done by the weaver at his home in an individual capacity. Spinning is mostly done by the girls and women in the villages. For Gandhiji khadi was not a cloth but a thought, a philosophy that aimed at a self reliant economy, a link of concern between the haves and the have nots. Around that time Gandhi used khadi as the first Non-cooperation
movement and the Gandhi cap had strong symbolic overtones that of the Indo-British battle over the looms of Manchester and a bid for a modern Indian identity.

In 1915 Gandhiji introduced a few handlooms in the Ashram and learnt the art of weaving. However, the yarn used was produced from Mills. Gandhiji was eager to start hand spinning in Ashram and was in search of spinning, who teach him and the inmates of Ashram of spin. But he would neither get a spinning wheel nor a spinner. The art of had spinning was almost lost. His visit to Champaran in 1916 made him more aware of the pathetic condition in the extent of poverty of the people. Women in Bhitiwara were unable to change their clothes due to lack of availability of another pair.

At this critical juncture, Gandhiji met Smt. Gangaben Mujmuder, an enterprising middle age widow from Vijapur near Baroda in October 1917 to whom he entrusted the important task of finding a spinning wheel.

Though immortalized in Gandhiji’s autobiography and in his speeches and writings, Smt. Gangaben could find carders and after finding them, she trained some youngsters to make slivers form the carded cotton. She hired a house at Vijapur and started staying with her daughter Saraswati, sisters Hiralaxmi and Keshawlabhai and together they started a spinning centre. She faced greater difficulty in getting spun yarn women because handloom weaves at the time only wove finer yarn for mills. She met a Muslim weaver, who helped her to train weavers to weave hand spun yarn. Thus started a production centre of Khadi Vijapur khadi gained a name for itself.

In 1919 about one hundred and fifty women spinners worked at the centre. Soon she started a weaving unit at the centre and thus her khadi
enterprise included Carding, Slivering, Spinning and Weaving. It was the first production centre for khadi manufacture. Gandiji exhorted people and women in particular to follow her example and to start centres of khadi production in villages.

Soon Gangaben expanded her activities and her enterprise thrived and prospered under her able leadership. She showed immense organizing capacity and innovative skills. In 1921 she had 2000 spinning wheels at the centre. Thus she restored the lost craft to hand spinning and weaving. Khadi became a new word in the vocabulary of India. Thus, plain and uneducated Gangaben Mujumdar became a pioneer in a new era. Through her, the khadi industry was born. Gandhiji has decided to bring the work of Gangaben to public notice and he published ‘Pateri issue of Sani Vartaman that’. In my humble opinion the work of Mrs. Gangaben is of the highest importance and nation ought to know about it.

With Gandhiji’s inspiration and Gangaben’s hard work, the khadi activity began. Gandhiji’s inspiration awakened many women for this khadi activity across different parts of the country. Among these women were mainly Maniben Nanavati, Mithooben, Maniben Patel, Harshaben and Ushaben Mehta.

Maniben and three of her friends, Jayaben Desai, Shirin Havewala and Sunaben Rao started Khadi Mandir in 1934 at Vile Parle as an effort by women towards the liberation of the Nation. She had put a aboard “Khadi Mandir is run by women”. Women were confident and well equipped to work bringing khadi selling it and maintaining accounts. All these women, were those who had not gone beyond 7th standard. Most of Khadi Bhavans are running from women’s only.

Before 1947, the expansion of khadi was associated with mainly the goal of political and economic independence. After independence and
in the absence of Gandhiji there was almost a rapid change in the attitude of the leaders. Significance of khadi changed from ‘Livery of freedom’ to Saleable article.

But unfortunately in India today, this spirit of Swadeshi or Self reliance is not taken seriously and hence women’s unemployment is not taken seriously.

Khadi over the decades has moved from a freedom fighter’s identity fabric to a fashion garment. At one time it was secured as fabric for the farmer and rural wearer. Today there is such an increasing demand for khadi is that despite the million (women) workers all over the country involved in spinning it they are unable to meet the demands of the market.

In 1989 the first high fashion khadi show was presented in Mumbai by the khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). Where nearly 85 dazzling garments were created by Devika Bhojwani. There was an exciting array of eastern and western attire. Devika had launched the swadesi label in 1985 which distributed through nearly 5000 Khadi Gramodyog Bhandars and Emporia. In 1990 designer Ritu Kumar of Delhi presented her first khadi collection at the crafts Museum. Her Tree of Life Show, an audio visual tableau spanning the history of textiles in India.

Ritu Kumar comments about the women pioneers, Actually they were the first generation growing up after Independence and so the need to underline their identity was immense. There was also the need to emerge with something totally different and in opposition from the dress code foreign rulers had imposed. Another person who has been working regularly with khadi is Kamal Wadkar, the well known promoter traditional crafts. Komal has been associated with the Gujarat Handicrafts
Board and the Mumbai Khadi Sangh. Her exhibitions in Mumbai for KVIC (Khadi Village Industries Commission) have netted nearly Rs. 12.5 million. Kamal has presented nearly 4500 garments in 150 styles in different colours weaves and embellishment with prices ranging from Rs. 460 – 750.

Today the younger generation may draw inspiration from the way film and MTV stars are dressing, but there was a time when fashion too was dictated by our political leaders more than the dresses it was what they signified and the fiery personalities behind them that caught the imagination of the masses and influenced them to unwaveringly follow the footsteps of their leaders, even in adapting the way they dressed, recalls Ritu Kumar.

Many women contributed in Gandhiji’s khadi activities. Even today women are mostly involved in the production of khadi in one of the five year plan reports. There are interesting figures 2.75146 villagers including 19,645 Harjans and Muslim scattered in at least 13,451 villagers received as spinners, weavers etc. Rs. 34,85,609. The spinners were largely women. Now approximately 16 lakhs women are involved in different khadi related associations. If they spin the cotton for eight hours a day they get Rs. 60 to Rs. 80 today with the help of new techniques.

The rediscovery of the charkha has brought in a new economic thinking for Indians. It has given new life to the individual made him more resourceful and self dependent.

Today khadi is synonymous with Indian freedom struggle and the empowerment of India’s women. It is the contribution of women like Maniben Nanavati and other stalwarts that has made khadi the pride of India.
7.13 In Gandhi’s words

“The spinning wheel represents to me the hope of the masses. The masses lost their freedom, such as it was, with the loss of the Charkha. The Charkha supplemented the agriculture of the villagers and gave it dignity. It was the friend and the solace of the widow. It kept the villagers from idleness. For the Charkha included all the anterior and posterior industries- ginning, carding, warping, sizing, dyeing and weaving. These in their turn kept the village carpenter and the blacksmith busy. The Charkha enabled the seven hundred thousand villages to become self contained. With the exit of Charkha went the other village industries, such as the oil press. Nothing took the place of these industries. Therefore the villagers were drained of their varied occupations and their creative talent and what little wealth these bought them”. 23

The industrialized countries of the West were exploiting other nations. India is herself an exploited country. Hence, if the villagers are to come into their own, the most natural thing that suggests itself is the revival of the Charkha and all it means.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s ideas are still highly relevant in this day and age, particularly during debates on development issues. One recalls his advice to policy-makers and others that whenever you are in doubt “recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him? Will it restore him the control over his own life and destiny?” Translated into tangible terms, the needs of the poorest people should receive the topmost priority in development planning. The two most important challenges today are : protecting the environment; and meeting the basic needs of all. The Gandhian response to both challenges is simple and identical – release resources from the grip of the very rich
so that the needs of the poor can be met. The lifestyle of the richest is attractive, and so it soon becomes a model for others. Mahatma Gandhi had said clearly that this is a model not worth emulating because it is destructive to nature. Instead he tried throughout his life to experiment with low-cost food, farming, education and medicare which could meet the needs of all the most prominent of them being Khadi.

7.14 The Environment

He challenged the well-entrenched concepts of what passes by the term “development”, a task which must have been even more difficult in his time when development had not been impeded by the most damaging aspects of the environment, as we know them now.

While considering an alternative path of development, Gandhi was very clear on the point that it must not be based on exploitation. He wrote in 1929, “Surely exploitation means usurpation. And usurpation can never be reconciled with spiritualism.” He was once asked whether he would like India to develop as much as Britain. He replied that Britain was such a small country but it required the plunder of half the planet to bring about such development. Therefore, if a large country like India is to develop in the same manner it will probably require the plunder of several planets. But he was certain that even if these planets were available, he would never want this country to follow this path. He wrote in 1940: “I have no idea of exploiting other countries for the benefit of India. We are suffering from the poisonous disease of exploitation ourselves, and I would not like my country to be guilty of any such thing.” He went a step further and asked the rich to introspect how their wealth has come directly or indirectly from the exploitation of the poor. One aspect of this exploitation, which particularly pained him, was the exploitation of villages by cities, of rural life by urban life. He wrote in
1927: “The half-a-dozen modern cities are an excrescence and serve, at the present moment, the evil purpose of draining the life-blood of the villages.”

In 1936 he wrote in more specific terms: “Little flour mills are ousting the chakki, oil mills the village ghani, rice mills the village dhenki, sugar mills the village gud-pans, etc. This displacement of village labour is impoverishing the villagers and enriching the rich. If the process continues sufficiently long, the villages will be destroyed without any further effort.” In this system of exploitation a particularly destructive role was played by labour displacing machinery. He wrote in 1936:

“A factory employs a few hundreds and renders thousands unemployed. I may produce tons of oil from an oil mill, but I also drive thousands of oilmen out of employment. I call this destructive energy, whereas production by the labour of millions of hands is constructive and conducive to the common good. Mass production through power-driven machinery, even when state-owned, will be of no avail.”

When asked what kind of machinery he approved of, Gandhi said in 1935: “Any machinery which does not deprive masses of men of the opportunity to labour, but which helps the individual and adds to his efficiency, and which a man can handle at will without being its slave.”

Mahatma Gandhi’s views on machinery were not confined to a theoretical level. Perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, these views found practical application. They became an integral part of India’s freedom movement.

In 1936, while evaluating the progress made by khadi, he wrote with some satisfaction: “The progress khadi has made in terms of the millions, though little in itself, is comparatively the largest of all the other single industries. It distributes yearly the largest amount as wages among
the largest number of wage-earners in the villages with the minimum of overhead charges, and every pice practically circulates among the people.”

Gandhi was very clear that the progress of Swadeshi and khadi should continue after the end of foreign rule, as these are equally relevant to post-independent India. He wrote in 1947: “We were trying through khadi to place man above the machine, rather than allow the machinery driven by electricity or steam, to be the master. We were endeavouring through khadi to establish equality between man and man in place of the enormous inequality now existing between the poor and the rich, between the high and the low, between the man and the woman. We also endeavoured to make the labourer independent of the capitalist instead of the capitalist exploiting labour and assuming undue prestige. If, therefore, what we did in India during the last 30 years was not wrong, we should now carry on the programme of the spinning wheel, with all its allied activities with more understanding of all the implications and with greater vigour.”

7.15 Benefits of Khadi

More recently, Nandini Joshi, who has a doctorate in Economics from Harvard, wrote a book in Gujarati (which has also been translated in Hindi) titled Our Distress and Alternatives. It argues that khadi and the spinning wheel are still practical and economically viable if only we give them a fair chance. An additional argument she advances is that khadi can help us to recover several hundred thousand hectares as urgently needed fertile land to grow food. The mills require long and medium staple cotton which need more fertile land, irrigation and chemicals.
On the other hand short-staple cotton needed for the charkha can be obtained on less fertile land some of which is not under cultivation at present and there is no need for agri-chemicals.

A country remains poor in wealth, both materially and intellectually, if it does not develop its handicrafts and its industries and lives a lazy parasitic life by importing all the manufactured articles from outside. There was a time when we manufactured almost all we wanted. The process is now reversed, and we are dependent upon the outside world for most manufactured goods. The past year brought forth a remarkable awakening of the Swadeshi spirit. It has therefore become necessary to define Swadeshi goods. But in giving a definition care had to be taken not to make the definition so narrow as to make manufacture all but impossible or so wide as to become farcical and Swadeshi only in name. We do not want to follow the frog-in-the-well policy, nor in seeming to be international, lose our roots. We cannot be international, if we lose our individuality, i.e., nationality.

7.16 As Gandhiji believed

“I feel convinced that the revival of hand-spinning and hand weaving will make the largest contribution to the economic and the moral regeneration of India. The millions must have a simple industry to supplement agriculture. Spinning was the cottage industry years ago, and if the millions are to be saved from starvation, they must be enabled to reintroduce spinning in their homes and every village must repossess its own weaver.”
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