

Khadi of Gandhi

Prabhakar Deshpande

Abstract: Gandhi's Khadi should not be dismissed as anachronistic luddism in technological modern India. Khadi has something to offer in reduction in poverty, containing urban congestion, mitigating poverty, increasing unemployment and enhancing equality.

Date of Submission: 26-08-2022

Date of Acceptance: 10-09-2022

Nobel Laureate, Albert Einstein, said about Mahatma Gandhi that "Generations to come it may be will find it difficult to believe that a man such as this walked in flesh and blood." But this essay is not about Mahatma Gandhi but Khadi of Gandhi.



Figure 1. Khadi

Source: www.mkgandhi.org

Khadi is hand spun and hand woven cloth promoted by Mahatma Gandhi as self sufficient struggle against British rule. After first, independence struggle of 1857, domestic textile production touched a minimum. And then Khadi emerged as a silent economic revolution.

Gandhi touched by the plight of farmers at Champaran Satyagraha forced the movement on hand spinning and said - "this can offer supplementary income to people of India who are half-starving"

The freedom struggle revolved around the use of spinning wheels. The charkha – the spinning wheel - became a symbol of the Indian Flag.

Mahatma Gandhi made hand spinning of cloth part of self employment and self reliance and part of freedom movement of India.

Even after independence of India Government of India has set up Khadi and Villages Industrial Commission in India. The revenues from Khadi stood at Rs. 3200 crore in 2019 or around 500 million dollars and employed half a million people.

Khadi is complete anti thesis of modern industrial revolution and modern capital intensive business. Hence some might be appalled at the suggestion of Khadi in 21st century India know for its information technology prowess than spinning wheel.

But honestly what is wrong with Khadi even in today's modern age of machinery and industrial revolution? What is wrong with labour intensive method of production. Especially when such a labour intensive method of production can provide employment and help remove poverty?

As a customer, it does not make a difference if one buys a shirt manufactured in modern mills at Rs. 700 or 10 dollars or a shirt manufactured by hand at Rs. 700 or 10 dollars again. But as far as employment opportunity is concerned, Khadi provides greater employment for a greater number of people. Yes, Khadi may not be applicable to modern advanced economies such as USA, Europe, Japan, Middle East, South Korea etc, but Khadi still makes economic sense to poor nations such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or African nations. Khadi is the biggest challenge to the Western Industrial revolution and its energy intensive and pollution

intensive production and consumption oriented life style. Khadi is not just clothes, but production of an entire life style of products through manual labour intensive and capital light means of production. The turnover of Khadi and Villages Industrial commission stood at around 95,000 crore rupees or 15 billion dollars in 2021. That is almost 1% of India's GDP. While Khadi generated 0.5 million employment, Village Industries generated 15 million employment. Khadi is nothing like modern industry and capital intensive production. Some might argue that if khadi and villages industries just generate 1% of GDP even in India, does that not prove that Khadi has failed. But conversely it could be argued that if in an India where 10% of GDP comes from Information Technology, if Khadi has 1% of GDP, almost 70 years after the death of Mahatma Gandhi, then Khadi must mean something. Of course in India much has been written and researched about Khadi. But there is much to be explored by the Western world about Khadi.

At the very least Khadi challenges the energy intensive and consumeristic life style that has brought about the environmental destruction in the world. Khadi is good for consumers and customers. Khadi is good for labourer and worker. Khadi is good for economy and environment. Why should humanity be condemned to the industrial revolution and modern business if traditional labour intensive methods of production can reduce poverty and provide gainful employment even as it produces quality goods and services without destroying environment in a village setting thus obviating the obvious damages of urbanization and crowding. Khadi of Gandhi is a challenge to western mechanization. Khadi may have its faults, but Khadi cannot be ignored any more than Gandhi can be ignored.

Prabhakar Deshpande. "Khadi of Gandhi." *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance (IOSR-JEF)*, 13(5), 2022, pp. 31-32.