



V K Saxena

KVIC's main concern was the welfare and socio-economic development of the artisans, who sustain the pyramid of Khadi and Village Industries. Getting them better and wider opportunities for income and employment is the primary goal even while strengthening the Khadi brand as well as diversifying its business avenues.

The hand-spun and hand-woven natural fabric (better known as Khadi) is associated with India from the time immemorial, i.e. right from the evolution of civilization here. During the pre-Independence time, the movement of Khadi manufacturing gained momentum under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi - aimed to discourage the Indians from wearing of foreign clothes. After independence, Khadi was reduced to a formal uniform of the political class, and along with its wearers, Khadi too lost its symbolic force. Its charm remained merely skin-deep. In Gandhi's days, Khadi was a weapon of the swadeshi, against the imported cloth. After independence, its importance is no less. Gandhiji promoted Khadi because the hand-spun cloth was at the centre of his vision for India's self-reliant economy. In interior villages, where there are no job opportunities other than the rain-dependent agriculture, Khadi-spinning and similar economic activities can give people a means of livelihood. Now, Prime Minister himself has taken up the task of making Khadi popular again.

Taking serious notes of Khadi's relevance and its role in reducing the mass exodus to cities

in search of jobs, Prime Minister gave a clarion call of making this signature fabric a mode to attain economic transformation in the nation. What else can be a better medium to showcase 'nationalism'? A major boost to this sector will have a huge trickle-down effect directly benefiting millions of Khadi artisans - engaged in spinning, weaving, carding, cleaning, dyeing, stitching and host of other activities. The health of our economy depends on the choices we make. It is prudent economic sense to consume locally made products be it food, clothes or any other consumer items. And, that is the area - on which the PM is focused upon - to have 'economic sustenance with a grace sense of nationalism'. The current push for Khadi from him has increased its demand in multiples. He first appealed the masses to adopt Khadi with the catch-line 'Khadi for Fashion', which multiplied its craze among youths. And, then he talked about 'Khadi for Economic Transformation' - which paved the way to make rocketing growth for Khadi.

Khadi, as Gandhiji believed, is not only the tool of self-reliance or symbol of nationalism; rather it can also play a vital role in economic

growth of nation. But due to lack of vision and focus by successive governments, it could not accelerate from the proverbial snail's speed in terms of growth and job creation for many years. Surprisingly, till the year 2014 from Independence, the growth of this sector – which was most close to the Father of the Nation – could not even touch the double digits as the highest growth rate recorded in that span of 65-odd years was mere 8 percent. Undoubtedly, it was the vision of Prime Minister that this untapped sector witnessed a rocketing growth. In the Fiscal 2017-18, the sale of Khadi has grown to Rs 2509 crore, i.e. 25 per cent up with respect to Rs 2007 crore in 2016-17.

KVIC has scripted many success stories in the post-2014 era. Sample them: The total average Khadi sale, which was Rs 914.07 crore during the year 2004 to 2014, jumped to Rs 1828.30 crore in three years after that, i.e. between 2015 to 2018, with over 100 percent increase. Similarly, as many as 391 new Khadi institutions were established after 2015 in some three-odd years, whereas the number of new Khadi institutions established in 10 years' period between 2004 and 2014 was only 110. Even, few historical achievements have taken place in the Khadi industries. It was the fusion of Khadi's USP with Yoga that so far 'Khadi Yoga Kits' worth Rs 3.41 crore had been sold out in the post-2015 period – which was zero before it. Not only that, the kitty, which was nil from the damaged good clearance in

the pre-2014 period, got over Rs 2 crore in the post-2015 span of time. On the other hand, the average export of Khadi and village industries products was mere Rs 87.77 crores in the 10 years' span between 2004 and 2014. But, the moment the government started considering it as a means of economic transformation, it grew at a rocketing pace: From 2015 to June 2018, the average export of Khadi and village industries products went to nearly Rs 2100 crore with a huge growth of 133.28 per cent.

As Charkha represents the heart of Khadi, the KVIC had decided to make it a tool of employment at people's doorsteps in the remotest rural areas. The KVIC has so far distributed about 32,000 charkhas and over 6,000 looms between 2015 to June 2018. Surprisingly, this figure was almost zero between 2004 and 2014.

To penetrate in the established textile market, the KVIC decided to come up with the changed and aggressive marketing policies. For that, the KVIC invited many Textile Majors like Raymonds, Aditya Birla Fashion Retail, Arvind Mills etc. to join hands with KVIC, to market the signature fabric of India with innovative and highly market-friendly design intervention. Being a government body, the KVIC always faced the crunch of funds to expand its wings in the attractive marketing spaces like malls and up-market areas. For that, the KVIC derived a new concept of 'Khadi Korners', where space from large



retail houses was taken on shop-and-shop basis in the mega-malls and other such up-markets. KVIC signed agreements with Globus, Big Bazaar, Cotton Bazaar etc for establishing Khadi Korner within their showrooms in Mega-Malls and which resulted into a new Avatar of signature fabric for the avid Khadi lovers. It, subsequently, redressed the rampant complaints of the Khadi consumers about the unavailability of Khadi outlets in many cities.

KVIC's main concern was the welfare and socio-economic development of the artisans, who sustain the pyramid of Khadi and Village Industries. Getting them better and wider opportunities for income and employment is the primary goal even while strengthening the Khadi brand as well as diversifying its business avenues. Interestingly, in the history of Khadi, increment of wages had never been more than Re 1 per hank before 2014. But, under the present regime of this government, it has been increased twice – each time with more than Rs 1.50 per hank, i.e. from Rs 4 per hank to Rs 5.50 per hank in July 2016 (i.e. 37.5 percent) and from Rs 5.50 per hank to Rs 7.50 per hank from 15<sup>th</sup> August 2018 (i.e. 36.36 percent). Hence, on an average, an artisan spinning minimum 20 hanks in a day will now start earning Rs 202 per day.

KVIC also revived many closed and defunct Khadi institutions after 2015. Take Sewapuri: This Ashram was set up on November 5, 1946 by a group of Gandhians, under the guidance of the Mahatma Gandhiji, to promote Khadi and provide employment to weavers. Gandhiji stayed here for quite some time, when 600 people used to work in this centre those days. But, due to financial crunch and lack of proper management, the centre was closed in 1990 and since then this erstwhile glorious centre that played a crucial role in the promotion of khadi virtually turned into a testimony of negligence. In its 26-odd years' of dilapidation, it turned into a jungle – with most of the structures biting the dust. The KVIC, on September 17 last year on Sewa Diwas, reopened it. Within three months, this Ashram had given direct employment to more than 800 people of this area. KVIC roped in Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) to use its CSR funds to kick off Khadi activities there. REC sanctioned Rs 5.50 crore for this project. Notably, it is the first ever utilization of CSR funds for Khadi activities. Similarly, for the artisans of as many as 14 sleepy hamlets in the Mysuru region, KVIC

re-dedicated the 91-year-old Khadi institution of Badanavalu again to the nation, which was closed following some caste violence in 1993. Started in 1926 by four poor women of this area, acting upon the call given by Mahatma Gandhi to adopt Khadi as a vehicle for self-reliance, had caught the attention of Gandhiji and he visited and stayed the centre in 1927. Taking cognisance of this centre's historic importance and the needs of the artisanal families that had lost livelihood support, the KVIC decided to prioritize this Gandhian Khadi centre for revival. It re-developed the destroyed worksheds there and installed as many as 100 charkhas and 20 looms along with bee-keeping activities.

In an exercise to weed out any corruption, the KVIC discovered that nearly 11.60 lakh artisans were getting subsidy (marketing development assistance, or MDA)—the number was constant for the preceding 10 years. As many as seven lakh were fake or 'ghost beneficiaries'. After the implementation of Aadhar-seeded payment of subsidy directly to the bank accounts of genuine khadi artisans in 2016, KVIC was able to identify and weed out the ghost beneficiaries – pretending to be artisans. This cleansing operation has subsequently saved Rs 153 crore of the government exchequers.

Earlier in the history of KVIC, it was never ever contemplated that Charkhas, looms and other implements for Khadi activities has any avenue for public participation. Nearly four years ago, KVIC launched a livelihood donation programme named Sahyog, in which KVIC appealed the individuals, PSUs and Corporates, to contribute for providing Charkhas to the artisans – predominantly women. It got an overwhelming response and even the individuals contributed under this programme. It proactively continues to approach PSU's to work alongside them in deploying their CSR funds towards empowerment initiatives of Khadi artisans and the Khadi institutions. The KVIC, for the first time, roped in REC (Rural Electrification Corporation) to revive the legacy of the Sewapuri Ashram and got Rs 5.5 crores for it. Incidentally, it was the first CSR intervention in the history of KVIC. So far, the KVIC got the contribution of more than Rs 8 crores from various companies like ONGC, ITPO, Aditya Birla Group, JK Cement, GMR, NCCL, the IMC Chamber of Commerce etc.

A search for avenues for Khadi's multi-dimensional growth was also started by the KVIC.

The KVIC – for the first time – organized Khadi exhibitions in as many as 10 Indian High Commissions/Embassies abroad – to showcase niche Khadi fabric, ready-mades and village industries. For the very first time, Khadi became the theme-line of the national day celebration of any foreign country. It was the theme-line of Montenegro's National Day on 13th July this year – which was witnessed by more than 50 diplomats. It was this signature fabric of India that draped the train at St Pietermaritzburg on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018 – commemorating Mahatma Gandhi's 125 years of throwing out from the train there in South Africa.

Similarly, Khadi Fashion shows were held in New Delhi at Australian as well as Indonesian Embassies and later on in Johannesburg (South Africa) – noted fashion designer Gavin Rajah choreographed a 20-minute textile event – aimed to project Khadi in a modern and trendy style – at Sandton Convention Centre there on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2018. As a part of Centenary Year celebrations of Gandhiji's Swadeshi Movement alias BUBU, the High Commission of India in Uganda, in association with the Republic of Uganda, unveiled the Gandhi Charkha – gifted by KVIC – at the Gandhi Heritage Site at Jinja in Uganda on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2017, which is also the International Day of Non-Violence. It was the first testimony that a Charkha had gone to the foreign soil.

Prime Minister Employment Generation Program (PMEGP) is the flagship scheme of Govt of India, for which KVIC is the nodal agency. During the last four years, KVIC, through this scheme, has established 1, 93, 818 small and medium projects across the country with distribution of margin money worth Rs 4,736 crores. Though these projects during the last four years, KVIC has created 14, 75, 888 direct employment. Looking to the success in implementation of PMEGP scheme by the KVIC, the Govt of India has increased its budget in the current financial year to Rs 1,800 crore from Rs 1,100 crore last year.

On 13th December 2016, the Prime Minister, in a Dairy function at Banaskantha in Gujarat, said that the country needs Sweet Kranti, after the Shwet Kranti. Taking Prime Minister's call on mission mode, the KVIC drafted a programme named mini 'Honey Mission' and launched it in July 2017 with a small budgetary arrangement of Rs 6 crore. Till the date, the KVIC has distributed

approximately 29,000 bee-boxes across the nation among the farmers, adivasis, SC/ST and unemployed youths. It includes distribution 2,300 bee-boxes at Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir in association with Indian Army, subsequently creating a world record of highest bee-box distribution in a single day. Before that, the KVIC derived a novel way to cut out illegal poaching and maintain flora and fauna in and around Kaziranga National Park in Assam. It first started a new training-cum-production centre setup in association with Assam forest department, giving 25 charkhas, five looms and other accessories to the village artisans of Silimkhowa village under Karbi-Anglong district in Kaziranga forest area. After that, on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018, i.e. on World Honey Bee Day, the KVIC distributed as many as 1,000 bee-boxes among 100 Mishing Asamese tribal people in Kaziranga – for rebuilding their lives and secure their future. And, last but not the least, in the tiger-prone zone of Bali island in Sunderban in West Bengal, the KVIC decided to give 75 Charkhas to tiger-victim women (bagh-bidhoba in local parlance) and 500 bee-boxes to 50 such local families. Christened as 'Tiger Victim Khadi Katai Kendra' Bali, the KVIC has also conducted training programme of spinning and bee-keeping from 30th July. Consequently, it would be a significant stride by the KVIC by encouraging the villagers to take up apiculture and Khadi activities right in their native villages and to stop villagers from collecting honey and fishing in deep waters of the Sundarban forest for eking out bread for their families – risking their lives – prey to tigers, crocodiles and poisonous snakes.

After the successful implementation of mini Honey Mission, the Ministry of MSME sanctioned Rs 49 crore during the Financial Year 2018-19, in which KVIC has planned to distribute 1.25 lakh bee-boxes till December this year, creating direct employment of 12,500 families. The bee-keeping movement is expected to generate additional incomes of up to Rs 50,000 per annum per person to the rural and tribal families. Apart from generating regular income to them, the Honey Mission would subsequently increase the crop production up to 40 per cent in and around their villages through cross-pollination.

*(The author is Chairman, Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC), New Delhi  
Email : chairmankvic2015@gmail.com)*