



## Khadi's Journey: From Gandhi's Khaddar to Fashion Symbol

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**E**ven after more than seven decades since India gained its hard-won independence, Khadi continues to inspire and amaze people around the globe. And, if the growth of Khadi in the recent past is any indication, the signature fabric of the nation has emerged as a tool of economic transformation en route fashion.

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 the economic growth of the nation. In 2017, the low-profile Khadi industry saw sales worth Rs 50,000 crore. Products manufactured in villages by small-scale industries and social entrepreneurs, most of which are run by women, also saw huge demand. The sales of village industry produce, or Gramodyog also grew in the last fiscal. The astounding growth registered in production and sale

of khadi products in recent years established the fact that khadi is a versatile and timeless fabric.

The average khadi sales through departmental sales outlets also witnessed a marked increase. Over 30 thousand charkhas were distributed between 2015 to February, 2018 thereby creating over 14 lakh jobs. From Environmental Day to Yoga Day, from the installation of the world's largest wooden charkha at Delhi's IGI Airport to installation of monumental steel Charkhas at Sabarmati Riverfront, Ahmedabad, Motihari in East Champaran Bihar and Connaught Place New Delhi, from Khadi showings in South Africa to honeybee box distribution among women workers and farmers, Charkha enablement across Punjab

to the resuscitation of the worn-down Gandhi Ashram of Sewapuri near Varanasi and the Khadi-draped train that carried people from Pentrich to Pietermaritzburg in South Africa in June 2018—the many landmarks are significant.

Efforts have been made to involve corporate brands and PSUs to provide the largest spectrum for Khadi for repositioning khadi on the textile map. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed with the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) for better design development and training at different Khadi institutions. Not only that, recently an interaction was organised with CEOs of Retail Chains and Designers at WTC Mumbai, The objective was to give

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retail presence to Khadi in major malls and retail stores. Another innovation in the form of 'Khadi Mitra' is on the cards, where the housewives could sell Khadi with a very nominal capital investment initially.

It is proposed to open Khadi outlets outside the country to promote products made using the indigenous handspun fabric in the global markets as interest has been shown from Dubai, Chicago, Mauritius and South Africa. People in these places are interested in opening Khadi outlets under the franchisee model.

It was the increasing USP of Khadi that even the world of celluloid could not resist showcasing its legacy and beauty. In the recent blockbuster 'Manikarnika' the lead actress has shown the Queen's love for the country's heritage fabric Khadi in this epic biographical film. For promotion of this signature fabric the attire of the lead casts of this movie was sponsored by KVIC. Khadi is connected to India's voice of Independence since time immemorial. We all know that in 1926, Gandhiji upheld Khadi as the symbol of swaraj and spun the final yarn of India's fabric of Independence. But, perhaps few people know that some seven decades before Gandhiji's tryst with Charkha, a girl born in Varanasi as Manikarnika or Manu, not only mastered reading the Vedas and Puranas, riding and sword fighting, but also learnt weaving before becoming the Queen of Jhansi.

In a bid to increase cotton supply to Khadi institutions, six cotton sliver plants have been upgraded. The plants' production capacity will be increased by 40 per cent from the current four million kgs to 5.6 million kgs a year. Most of the plants are more than three decades old and it is necessary to change technology for better supply.

Recognising the importance of enhancing the wages of Khadi artisans to a moderate level and in order to ensure that khadi profession provides sustainable life support, remuneration per hank (a coil or skein of yarn) have been increased from the existing Rs 5.50 to Rs 7. As many as 143 defunct Khadi units have been revived and steps are afoot to start production at 124 more units. As many as 89 and 63 new Khadi institutions were registered in 2015-16 and 2016-17 respectively and have started production.

Individuals, PSUs and Corporates have been urged to contribute for providing Charkhas – the Gandhian tool of self-reliance – to the artisans – predominantly women. PSUs have been approached for deploying their CSR funds towards empowerment initiatives of Khadi artisans and the Khadi institutions. REC (Rural Electrification Corporation) was roped in to revive the legacy of the Sewapuri Ashram. Last year, contribution of Rs 7.9 crores was received from various companies like ONGC, ITPO, Aditya Birla Group, JK Cement, GMR, NCCCL etc. IMC Chamber of Commerce

recently donated Rs 20 lakh and discussions with IOC, HPCL etc are on for larger CSR funds for Khadi activities – which, in future would change the face of Khadi activities across the nation.

To popularize the khadi brand, huge charkhas have been set up at IGI Airport and Connaught place. Charkha Museum and Khadi Haat have been also been opened at Connaught Place in New Delhi.

One must not forget the words of Mahatma Gandhi that the spinning wheel represents the hope of the masses – who lost their freedom. It was Charkha that supplemented the agriculture of the villagers with dignity. Any wheel is symbolic of changing times, revolving fortunes of people and reminiscent of justice that does not discriminate between people or epochs of history. A wheel is always seen as a unifier and an icon of our past, present and future. When Emperor Ashoka used the wheel as 'Dharma chakra' and installed it in edicts around his empire, he had just one intention in his mind - establishing 'social justice, indiscriminate and reducing inequalities' of every hue. That symbolism he established in Indian society is an asset of immemorial heritage. Chakra, as a propagator of 'dharma' still revolves at the core of our social value system. And values of inheritance do not change with passing time. □

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