




The khadi and village Industries in Bengal: A Retrospective at a Glance.

Dr. Ashim Bhumali



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Khadi was Gandhi's main weapon in colonial India during the anti-British movement. Gandhiji wanted to make social and economic changes in the country depending on Khadi. He wanted to increase large employment through Khadi to eradicate poverty in our country. Gandhiji wanted to make the villages economically self-sufficient. He stopped using foreign cloth. He wanted to eliminate caste system in our society by believing only in Khadi. He believed that it was possible to bring unity between Hindu and Muslims through Khadi. Gandhiji considered Khadi to be a living dream for women at all walks of life in our country. Gandhiji considered Khadi to be pollution free and eco-friendly. Gandhiji felt that Khadi must have and will continue to play an important role in increasing the wealth of our country.

***Keywords* :** Khadi, Industries, Spinning, cloth, Swadeshi, Swaraj, Untouchability, Unemployment etc.

Khadi means any cloth woven on handloom from cotton, silk or wool hand spun yarn or from combination of any two or all of such yarn. It may also be said that khadi's are cloth woven by hand using hand spun yarn only. Natural fibres namely cotton wool and silk are used in spinning and production activities are carried out mainly in rural areas. At present, industries which are covered by the khadi sector are- Cotton khadi, Muslin khadi, silk khadi, woolen khadi and polyvastra. They are very important in trade as well as in social and economic fields in khadi. Gandhiji wanted to change the social and economic infrastructure of India through khadi. The khadi is called the soul of India. This is because nationalism was the basis of the rural economy in India centered on the khadi.

From the earliest times spinning wheels or charkha had been used in Indian homes. The Vedic Aryans also used charkhas. During the age of the Buddha charkha continued to be used. During the reign of the Maurya's, there existed a large organization to deal with matters connected with spinning and weaving. The spinners were women who did the work at home in their spare time. The entire process from picking of

the raw cotton to carding, silvering, spinning and weaving continued to be an important occupation. The fabrics were known for their exquisite beauty. From the sixteenth century foreign traders had begun to come to India with merchandise. This resulted in the decline of khadi production. Gandhiji conceived khadi as the best instrument for giving concrete expression to the 'Swadeshi' spirit for making effective the boycott of foreign goods in general and foreign cloth in particular and thus khadi became a symbol



of 'non-cooperation' movement. In 1920 Mahatma Gandhi persuaded the Indian National Congress to adopt Charkha as a national symbol. Gandhiji introduced many khadi societies in 1920 with a view to give shelters to the freedom fighters believing in non-violence movement. Khadi was a symbol of the freedom movement against the British rule. Gandhiji also emphasized the importance of strengthening the rural economy. The rebirth of khadi occurred under the auspices of Gandhiji during the freedom movement.

He thought that it was a symbol of his nonviolence movement against the rule and exploitation of the imperialist rulers. Moreover, he thought that it will bring economic freedom and equality among the people and millions of people will get work in khadi; then the problem of unemployment will be eliminated, poverty will be eradicated and society will improve. India will move towards independence. And for that purpose, Gandhiji started using charkha in Bijapur in 1918 and also introduced it in Sabarmati ashram; with this the charkha got a place in the programme of the Congress 1921.

Gandhiji set up the All India Khadi Board in December 1923. In 1925 All India Spinners Association (henceforth AISA) or Akhil Bhartiya Charkha Sangh was formed. In the thirties Gandhiji turned his attention to other villages industries and as a result All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA) was formed in 1934. In 1948, Akhil Bharat Seva Sangha took over the activities of AIVIA. In January 1953, the government of India set up All India Khadi and Village Industries Board. In 1956 this was rechristened as Khadi and Village Industries Commission through a special Act of the Parliament.

The Khadi movement was started by Gandhi. Gandhiji 'The Father of the Nation', conceived khadi as the best instrument for giving a concrete expression to the Swadeshi spirit for making effective the boycott of foreign goods in general and foreign cloth in particular. Khadi was also expected to provide an opportunity to every man, woman and child for cultivating self-discipline and sacrifice as a part of the non-cooperation movement. The main goal of the khadi in the social fields was to create large employment. In the book Hind Swaraj, it is clear that he understood that in order to free India from the poverty, Swaraj should be established in any process. And he chose khadi as his alternative which will alleviate poverty. Gandhiji was very much disappointed after reading 'Economic History of India' written by Ramesh Chandra Dutta which made it clear that India was impoverished by Manchester's equipment and its manufactured products. In this book the author discusses how the Britishers exploited Indian people. The British industries were destroying Indian handicrafts. He thinks that the workers became slaves of the mill. The condition of women was very painful so he emphasized on khadi instead of machine. Gandhiji opposed the mill cloth. He stopped using foreign yarn at Sabarmati ashram. Because he thought this can lead to a very bad situation for the poor people. He thought that spinning through machines would not solve any one's poverty problem. If weavers weave yarn on their own spinning wheel then they will get proper wages, both men and women and can do this work.

Gandhiji was opposed to the cloth material of the mill. He stopped the use of foreign or mixed yarn in Sabarmati ashram because it brings the worst situation among the poor people and he also suggested to start using khadi. Gandhiji thought cutting yarn through the machine will not eradicate poverty. So, he put more emphasis on the wheel since it would provide employment to many people. Men and women all could use

charkha. In the words of Gandhiji "The mission of khadi is not merely to supply the town's people with fashionable khadi that will vie with the mill manufacturer and thus like other industries supply a few artisans with employment, but is to become a supplementary industry to agriculture. This mission still remains unfulfilled. In order that it may fulfill this mission it has to be self-sustained and its use must be



spared in the village just as the villagers cook their roti or rice so must they make their own khadi for personal use". Gandhiji used to say, "Occasionally people ask me why I am khaddar mad. There are seven lakhs of villages. A larger number of their villages are living in a condition of semi starvation. There is no employment for them for nearly six months in the years. It is necessary to find for them some supplementary occupations. We must give them an occupation they are used to. Such an occupation is hand spinning, if hand spinning is to be introduced in the villages, it is but natural that we should be expected to wear Khaddar. Hence it is that I have become khaddar mad". Gandhi told the Harijans to make a living by spinning on a spinning wheel. He thought that the Harijans could take food and clothes from the poor and helpless. Cutting yarn on a spinning wheel gives benefits to the country and the nation. He told the lazy people that they would spin on the spinning wheel. Then the financial problem in their family would be solved. Another reason as to why Gandhi supported khadi was that khadi as a village industry required very little capital. In his opinion, khadi in India had a very bright future. Gandhiji believed that by weaving cloth on a spinning wheel millions of people can get jobs. It will go one-step towards organizing the country. He suggested building charkha as a central cooperative organization. Gandhiji was able to propagate his ideology among the Indian people irrespective of caste, creed and religion in the name of khadi. The rule includes exchange of food, water, touch, territorial boundaries, habitation and even clothing. Gandhi's effort to invite all Indian, no matter their caste, to set aside time for spinning homespun and to wear khadi, was an attempt to bring together minds, hearts, stomachs and hands to improve the livelihood of all. Gandhiji said that the government can give decent jobs to millions of unemployed people. He called on women to boycott foreign clothes. He spoke of the use of khadi cloth. Gandhiji said that women are companions of man, gifted with equal mental capabilities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. Gandhiji said that I have worshipped women as the living embodiment of the spirit of serving and sacrifice.

Gandhiji witnessed that the rich women did not wear khadi clothes, he advised them to use khadi cloth. He believed that those who would use khadi as a cloth, will practice the true Dharma (religion). They should do their dharma even as Sita Devi did and if all of them tried to act like Sita, he would tell them Ramrajya would come into existence. If they could not entertain feelings of sympathy and love for their poor brother and sisters of what use was their life to them. He told all the widows to run the wheel, he thought charkha was a friend and support of the widow. Gandhiji thought that Swaraj would come through the use of khadi, villages will be self-sufficient through khadi. He said that my Swaraj is to keep intact the genius of our civilization. He also said that the Swaraj of my dreams is the poor man's Swaraj. When the public will feel that they can improve a lot by their own efforts and that is the use of khadi. Gandhi said in the context of Swaraj, "I cannot conceive of Swaraj without khadi. He talks khadi to use it like, mantra. He thinks that khadi is the basis of nationalism. Khadi is one such movement that young women will be able to make a living; it would give them a lot of chances to live. He formed a committee to exclude foreign cloths and published a leaflet, for this purpose, he inaugurated khadi stores in different parts of the country. And he himself sold khadi products from the some of those khadi stores.

Gandhiji appealed to all for maintaining Hindu Muslim unity and removal of untouchability on which their independence rested. Swaraj without khaddar would be for educated men of Bombay but for agriculture there could be no Swaraj without khaddar. Gandhiji in his various speeches in different places said not to use foreign cloths. He believed that using foreign cloth would ruin the industry of the country. There will be financial loss of the country. The independence of the country will be delayed. Unemployment in the country will not go away. So he insisted on the use of khadi. Because he believed khadi could solve their problems. He told the salesmen to go door to door and highlighted the need of khadi. In Gandhi's view khadi is to serve the people. Khadi serves the working class and the mill cloth



absorbs them; however, it was through wearing khadi clothes, their work survives. He believed that if we use our own country clothes then the Swadeshi movement will be supported. He said that we took Swadeshi to mean cloth produced in our country.

Gandhiji asked the members of the Congress party to wear clothes for khadi's campaign and talked about the spinning of Khadi. He travelled to different parts of the country to spread khadi. Not only in Bengal but also in Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra etc., he established Khadi Bhandar. In a conference of the national congress at Belgaum in 1924 he talked about constructive work, especially Khadi. Gandhiji spoke about the importance of khadi for students. He believed that the importance of khadi to the society would increase a lot if the students came forward in this regard.

Gandhiji was against untouchability and communalism. These two were a curse in the village life. Such problem of villages could be solved by using khadi and the villages were turned self-sufficient by the use of khadi. Gandhiji believed that, "We cannot universalize khaddar without Hindu Muslim unity without removing untouchability. To make khaddar successful is to demonstrate the capacity for self-government. Khaddar is a people's programme for success in which all, high and low rich and poor Hindu and Non-Hindu, must take part". Gandhiji believed that the production of khadi will help together the workless people and those farmers who spent most of their time doing nothing except the seasonal farming work. Somewhat clothes problems will be solved. This old cottage industry will go towards modernization. Gandhi also believed that this cottage industry will contribute a lot towards India's freedom struggle.

India is a populous country; 75 percent of the population is dependent on agriculture. If the production of khadi is used by the people of the whole community then the economic structure of India will change. The importance of khadi to the common man is very high from the economic point of view. So Gandhiji wanted to make the villages economically self-sufficient then the policy of foreign economic harassment and looting will be stopped. Gandhiji wanted to solidify the foundations of rural industry and lay the foundation for independence. Gandhiji thought that if rural industries were destroyed then the economic conditions in India would suffer. The reason for the poverty of the villagers was their laziness. When the towns people began to sue foreign products at that time a disparity between the villagers and the city dwellers was increasing rapidly. It is in this context Gandhiji wrote in Young India during 1920 that, "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 reintroduced spinning in their homes and every village must repossess its own weaver". If India moves towards self-reliance depending on khadi then it will be a very good initiative because khadi will give money and self-respect to the poor villagers.

Gandhiji declared himself uncompromising in the field of women's rights because he believes that in order to bring social justice, women have to be recognized. He thinks most of the work has not yielded suitable results as women power has not been used, that is why he is asking women to come forward in khadi's work. Especially women who will get work in hand. This will improve the economic conditions of every family. If every poor family uses khadi especially in the areas where there is no work. Then economic development would take place in these areas, and for that reason national income of India would increase. Khadi is not just a trademark but also a symbol of commercial peace, symbol of prosperity and a way to make India self-reliant. Gandhiji emphasizes different aspects of society through the use of khadi. Khadi is mainly woven impure cotton but it can also be woven in silk and wool or in a mix of fibers. The making of khadi is most sustainable eco-friendly since it does not rely on electric units



and the manufacturing process does not generate any toxic waste products. It is produced by avoiding all chemicals in the process of farming of cotton, weaving and dyeing. With no machine being used in the process of creating fabric, khadi is a zero pollution eco- friendly product which is known to improve with age. Khadi is a unique capacity to generate large employment opportunities to millions of people and has vast potential to alleviate the unemployment problem which is chronic in India. Gandhiji was in favor of living a healthy life, that is why he has asked to use khadi products because khadi was eco-friendly. This is one of the reasons why Gandhi emphasized khadi, khadi produced by avoiding all chemicals in the process of farming of cotton, weaving and dyeing with no machines being used in the process of creating the fabric. Khadi is zero pollution eco-friendly products which is known to improve with age. Khadi is an eco- fabric. The process involves no environmental pollution and is extremely eco-friendly.

For all these causes khadi remained important even in post-independent India. In 2007 Khadi and Village Industries Commission (henceforth KVIC) was brought under the administrative control of the Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) government of India. KVIC played an important role in introducing the programme of khadi and village industry in the village areas. Along with KVIC the state

Khadi Board and Village Board were working to introduced an effective khadi and village industry activities.

Objectives and functions of KVIC:

1. Social: To provide employment
2. Economic: To build a stronger community

And also, be the wider objective of creating self – reliance amongst the poor and building up of a strong rural community spirit. Khadi is a statutory organization tasked with the role of promoting the production.

In West Bengal the wage structure for artisan is largely determined on work. Khadi cloth is also an important part of the khadi business and there were two particular organizations named Raymond and The Aditya Birla Group export the cloth in England, France, Italy, Australia etc. countries. The market promotion for khadi products for export and in the local market is also an important technical innovation in the district to strengthen their marketing activities. There was separate council constituted like an export promotion council for marketing. The council adopted multi-pronged start such as through -1. Regular sales outlets, 2. Promotion of export markets, 3. Participation in melas and exhibition, 4. Orders through direct contact with the buyers. Exhibition and melas

organized by KVIC at zonal and state level for promotion and sales of khadi cloth.

KVIC (Khadi and Village Industries Commission) and KVIB (henceforth, Khadi and Village Industries Board) both organization facilitated PF for the artisan and provide economic support for education of their children. There are various schemes like Shikhsa Sahayog Yojna, Stipends, some policies like Jay Shree Bima Yojona, Artisan Welfare Fund Trust, free distribution of houses for poor card holder and the like, to uplift the family directly engaged in the business of khadi. KVIB is supervising the manufacturer of a lot of commodities; such as soap, honey, cosmetics etc., which is important in contemporary economic field.



Among which 74 institutions (aided by KVIC, 2023) are situated in Murshidabad District. With these Khadi institutions there was also some KVIB aided khadi institutions in different districts in West Bengal. Activities of one of the biggest khadi concerns of West Bengal may be analyzed here. Chandrakanta Lalit Mohan Rasham Khadi Samity (KVIC aided) in Murshidabad shows in its constitution that it is dedicated to the Yeoman's humanitarian service. It is evident from the aims and objectives of this Samity. The objectives are:

1. Service of the village as a whole and impart with wide publicity the knowledge of fine arts, literature, science and voluntary education.
2. Eradication of untouchability, protection of cows.
3. To provide dignified self-employment to the poor rural artisans through the expansion of Khadi and Village Industry Programmes.
4. To raise the socio economic and moral levels of the rural artisans by means of selfemployment through khadi and village industries.
5. Literacy and health awareness programme of the rank and file.
6. Vastra- Swavalamban.

The Samity awards prizes to the talented artisans, looks to the welfare of the artisans, arranges free eye operation and does such other activities. Simultaneously, it helps the distressed people, gives donations to fathers in difficulty for their daughter's marriage and to various social and philanthropic organization's and to both little and big magazines and papers and in the same way samity is performing its social and cultural obligations. There was a group Bharat Khadi Sevak Sangha. It was founded in the year of

1959 at Lalbagh Murshidabad Districts in West Bengal. The purpose of this samity;

1. To develop clusters of traditional industries in various parts of the country over a period of five years commencing 2005-06;
2. To make traditional industries more competitive with more market driven, productive, profitable and sustained employment for traditional industry artisans and rural entrepreneurs;
3. To build up innovated and traditional skill, improved technologies, advanced processes, market intelligence and new models of public private partnership, so as to gradually replicate similar models of cluster based regenerated traditional industries.

The work done by this samity's are follows: product development, market promotions activities, participation in zonal and state level khadi exhibitions, artisan awareness & sensitization camp, eye testing camp for the artisans etc. Major achievements and impacts of this samity are as follows: Confidence Building has been a major achievement of the cluster. Due to increase in productivity, the income has also increased reasonably. This has not only helped the existing artisans to regain their confidence in the profession, but also motivated the others to join the profession. More work has been done by this samity they are: converting BIDI workers to Khadi workers, improvement living standard, artisans linked with Banks, increase employment etc. Instead of these there was another Khadi Samity's. These are Islampur Chak Kendra Resam Tantubaya Sambhavya Samity Ltd., Das Silk Khadi Samity, Jangipur Cotton Khadi Seva Samity etc.



To conclude it can be said that, Gandhiji called for embracing the ancient handicrafts tradition of our country, he also spoke about boycotting the products which were made of British textiles. Mill cloths when failing to meet the demand for fabrics in the Indian market, then the products made of khadi attracted the attention of ordinary poor people. It can be said that khadi helped liberate India from colonial rule. In the 1920 Nagpur session the Indian National Congress decided to encourage' khadi. Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to khadi as the liberty or freedom. Commercially this pollution- free and eco-friendly khadi had played an incredible role inside and outside even after its centenary. Gandhiji has given more importance to charkha than political activities. Khadi is the symbol of freedom struggle. khadi urges the poor to survive, even after 100 years of its birth. Khadi is not just a choice for politicians and social activists, but Designers also like khadi products. Gandhiji said that the charkha is the symbol of non- violence on which all life, if it is to be real life, must be based. Khadi has not only increased family employment, it has contributed to increase national income.

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