



Khadi: Symbol of India's Freedom Struggle

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Few countries have used fabric as a tool to achieve freedom and that's the reason why nearly seven decades after India, gained its hard-won independence. Khadi continues to inspire and amaze people around the earth.

A fabric that embodies a world view of the past as well as of the future, Khadi is a symbol of Indians textile heritage.

History yields some very interesting facts about Khadi. Hand spinning and hand-weaving have been known to Indians for thousands of years. Archeological evidence, such as terracotta spindles (for spinning), bone tools (for weaving), and figures wearing women fabrics indicates that Indus Valley Civilisation had a well developed and flourishing tradition of textiles.

Infact, the famous stone sculpture found in Mohenjodaro (dubbed the Priest King by archeologists) wears an elegant robe with decorative motifs and patterns that are still in use in Modern Gujrat, Rajsthan and Sindh. However

there is little information available about the actual mode of cultivation of method of spinning used by the Harappans. The earliest descriptions of cotton textiles in India comes from ancient literary references in 400 BC, Greek historian Herodotus wrote that in India, there were trees growing wild which produce a kind of wool better than sheep's wool in beauty and Quality. The Indians use this tree wool to make their clothes.

The trade routes established by Alexander and his successors introduced cotton to remote parts of Asia and eventually to Europe.

By medieval era, hand-woven Indian Muslim was in great demand across the world for its fine translucent quality every yarn of Muslim has a thickness that is 1/10th of a strand of hair.

The advent of the Portuguese in Calicut introduced the linen like Calico fabric (named after Calicut or present day Kozhikode) and Chintz (wood block printed Calicos) to Europe. Initially used as bed covers and draperies, these hand-woven fabrics soon became popular with common people due to their comfort, durability and low costs.

By late 17th Century India's hand-woven Muslim, Calico and Chintz held sway across markets in Europe.

This along with introduction of textile mills in Bombay, resulted in a sharp dip in the production of hand-women Khadi in India, Millions of weavers across India lost their livelihood as machine made textiles from Manchester took over the market.

The decline continued till it was single-handedly hated by a diminutive, bespectacled man who wanted to make the chakra the basis of Indian's economic Regeneration: Mohandas Karamchandra Gandhi.

Gandhi didn't just revive India's Haggling Khadi Industry he made the humble hand-spine fabric the symbol of the all things. Swadeshi. When he encouraged people across India to boycott British made clothes, Spine their own yarn and wear Khadi, he was encouraging them to rediscover their pride in the heritage while lending their support to their rural brethren.

This understand master stroke took the freedom movement beyond the rarefied circles of the educated social elite and out to masses. This was also Gandhi's way of highlighting Britain's exploitative policies and making a huge symbolic tent on the legitimacy of the British Colonial rule in India.

After Independence, the Indian Government established the All India Khadi and village Industries Board which later became the Khadi, village and Industries Commission (KVIC) in 1957. Ever since, KVIC has been planning and executing the development of Khadi Industry in India. It works towards

promoting research in production techniques, supplying raw material and tools to producers, quality control and marketing of Khadi products.

By the early 90s Khadi had started becoming a fashion statement KVIC had organised its first Khadi fashion show in Bombay in 1989. Where over 80 styles of Khadi wear were showcased. In 1990, the brilliant dress designer-entrepreneur RITUBERI presented her first Khadi collection at the prestigious three of live show held at Dell's craft museum. Now an advisor to KVIC, Beri is working to take Khadi to the global arena.

For instance, Kolkata based designer Debaren Mukherjee feels that fashion needs to go hand-in-hand with sustainability and has thus made Khadi the leitmotif of his brand line (called Khadi Resplendent).

While new age Khadi products in India are not what you would really call cheap (eg- drey raw Khadi silk fabric is at more than Rs. 800 a metre), it is not exclusive either at KVIC stores.

A part of the warp and weft of India, Khadi continues to be special in many ways. As the world moves towards industrial fashion, this fabric of freedom continues to spin incomes for the country of its legacy of sustainable living and self-reliance.

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