

## **Khadi: An iconic Indian cloth**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper highlights the stature of *khadi* fabric and its amalgamation in national spirit since India's freedom struggle. It was introduced during *swadeshi* movement and has gone through various phases followed by establishment of *khadi* association and its expansion. *Khadi* has progressed from a freedom fighter's fabric to fashion garments. India's humble fabric *khadi* has innovated itself as consumers are increasingly looking for natural products and require new textile materials with improved properties. It is important for youngsters to understand the uniqueness of the fabric and its association with our nation.

**Key Words :** *Khadi*, Consumers, Textile, Properties, Fashion

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Historical background of hand spun and hand woven cloth in India :**

The excavation at Harappa and Mohan-jo-daro revealed that the *charkha* was a part of the Indian household. There is evidence to indicate that *Vedic Aryan* also used the *charkha*, and it had been plied in Indian homes from the earliest times. During the reign of Mauryas, a large organization existed 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 was done by hand starting from picking of the raw cotton to carding, slivering, spinning and weaving. Our textiles were unrivalled for their excellence and involved great skill. Foreign traders *i.e.* the Portugese, the Dutch, the French and the British had begun to come to India from the West in the sixteenth century. The English traders' set-up the East India Trading Corporation in England with the main object of importing Indian goods including textiles by the seventeenth century. The invasion of Indian fabrics excited the jealousy of the weavers in England and the British Parliament passed an Act imposing excessive duties on cloth imported from India. Heavy penalties on the users of Indian fabrics were also imposed in England. Later, the British, lowered duties levied on English goods coming to India and imposed heavy duty even on inland transit on Indian products. As a consequence, India was flooded with cheap cotton goods from England where the adoption of mechanical invention gave the manufacturers an advantage over Indian weavers, which seriously affected the position of the Indian spinners and weavers.

'*Khadi*' a handspun and hand woven fabric originated from Hindi word '*Khad*' or '*pit*'. *Khad* is a native name for the pit in which the weaver is seated at ground level and operates the loom with his legs and feet. It is also probable that Mahatma Gandhi derived the name *khadi* from

*khaddar*, a traditional native word for homespun and handwoven cloth. He strongly supported its use in order to revive village weaving and to reduce cloth imports from Britain. Mahatma Gandhi started the movement of *khadi* in 1918 and emphasised on *khadi* to strive against western clothes.

The first *khadi* Production Centre was established at Kataiwad, Gujarat and Mahatma Gandhi used to refer it to as “the livery of Freedom” (Hankin, 2008). *Khadi* was introduced as a political weapon and as the best instrument for giving concrete expression to the Swadeshi Spirit to boycott foreign goods. *Khadi* rendered an opportunity to every man, woman and child to cultivate self – discipline and self – sacrifice as a part of the non- co-operation movement. It became a symbol of nationalism, equality and self-reliance during India’s freedom struggle. *Khadi* was the central core of the constructive activities of the society and made the Satyagraha effective against the foreign rule. It was in 1920s that the wearing of *khadi* became almost obligatory for members of Congress party, a political gesture.

The manufacturing of *khadi* gained pace discouraging Indians to wear foreign goods and emphasized on use of ‘*Swadeshi*’, meaning homegrown products. The *swadeshi* movement gained momentum and millions of Indians turned out in the streets, burning their foreign produced goods and started wearing “*khadi*” (Coleman, 2013). *Khadi* became integrated part of ‘*Swaraj*’, meaning independence, giving employment to unskilled rural people and provided clothing to many people and made them self-reliant. (Choudhary and Ojha, 2015) The soul of *Swaraj* was *swadeshi* and *khadi* became the spirit of *Swadeshi* as a part of Indian Identity (Ghosh, 2009). *Khadi* enabled Mahatma Gandhi to spread his message of *Swadeshi* and *Swaraj* to the people and establish connection with them (Singh and Laxmi, 2014).

### **Distinct phases of *Khadi* :**

Last one and half centuries can be split into following distinct phases of *Khadi*, viz., I (1854 – 1925), II (1925 – 35), III (1935 – 44), IV (1944 – 53) and the current phase (1953 onwards).

### **PHASE – I (1854 to 1925): Swadeshi movement- *Khadi* was introduced:**

In India the first cotton mill was started in Bombay in 1854, where yarn and fabric was prepared. The economic and cultural consequences of this event were disastrous. Due to sudden mechanization, the concept of wages and labour underwent a transformation. During Swadeshi movement, people were asked to boycott British goods (Fig.1).



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girangaon>

**Fig. 1 : Boycotting of foreign goods**

After 1905, the movement spread to whole of the country (Fig.2). However, *khadi* was still not in vogue, and the handlooms worked with mill-spun yarn.



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girangaon>

**Fig. 2 : *Khadi* movement spread to whole country**

*Khadi* was introduced with a primary aim to boycott foreign goods in general, particularly foreign cloths and as a part of the non-cooperation movement. By 1921, *khadi* had become a part of the national movement (Fig.3).



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girangaon>

**Fig. 3 : Boycott of foreign goods**

However, this was linked with the necessity of finding work for spinner and weavers as a measure of relief from the evil of wide spread unemployment. In 1923, an All India *Khadi* Board under the supervision of the Indian National Congress, with branches in all States was constituted to create an organization for coordinating development of the *khadi* programme.

### **PHASE – II (1925 to 1935): Establishment and Expansion of AISA:**

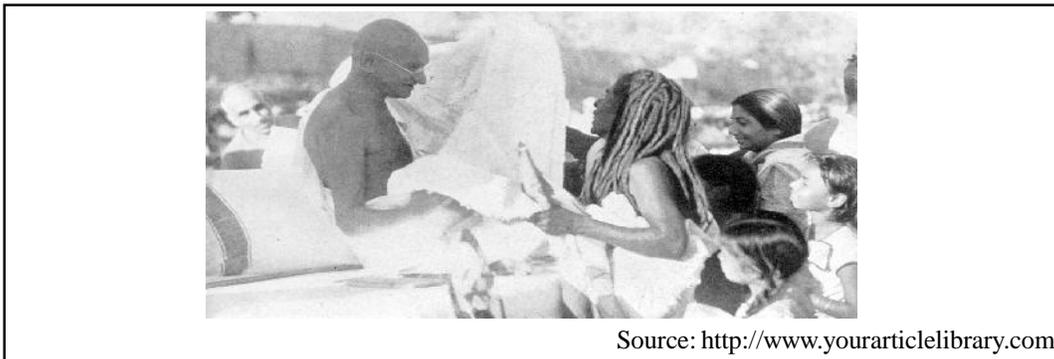
All India Spinners Association (AISA) or the *Akhil Bharat Charkha Sangh*, an autonomous organization was created in 1925 and till 1935, it concentrated its activity on production sale and propagation of *khadi*. New varieties of *khadi* were placed in the market and the technique of carding, spinning, weaving, dyeing and printing were considerably improved. 10 million sq. yards of cloth was produced in 1933 and partial employment was estimated at 2 lakh persons. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized on *khadi* made in villages, its style and durability to suit the taste of the villagers so as to create a better and stronger bond between ginners, carders, spinners weavers and *khadi*

employees.

During this period, there was considerable expansion of production, techniques were improved, new varieties of goods were put in the market and an atmosphere for development was created (<http://historyofkhadi.blogspot.in.>)

**PHASE – III (1935 to 1944): Introduction of wages to the spinners:**

In this phase, social objectives became the primary object of consideration. Mahatma Gandhi raised the issue of giving the spinners ‘living wage’ *i.e.* the spinners family had to have the means for sustenance at a minimum level. In 1938, it was decided to introduce uniform wage chart of spinners. Apart from the payment of standard wages, Mahatma Gandhi stressed the importance of other social objectives, like self- sufficiency, decentralization of production and consumption, establishment of a personal touch with the *khadi* workers and to help them in all round economic development in their economic condition (Fig.4).



Source: <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com>

**Fig. 4 : An Adivasi greets Mahatma Gandhi with a piece of *Khadi* in Ramgarh on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1940**

**PHASE – IV (1944 to 1953): Employment generation after Independence and establishment of KVIC :**

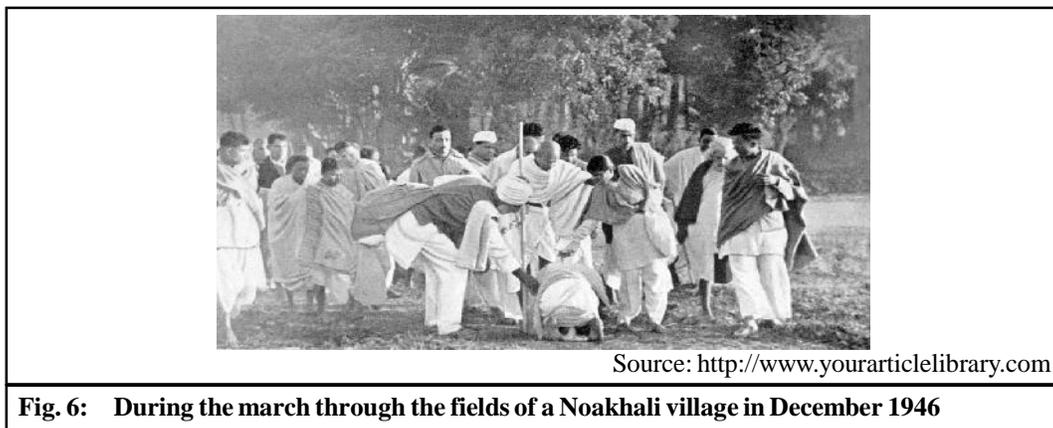
Social significance and importance of *khadi* received a new and fresh emphasis in this phase. Mahatma Gandhi convened conference of workers in 1944 to deliberate on the position and future of *khadi* (Fig.5).



Source: [www.gettyimages.in](http://www.gettyimages.in)

**Fig. 5 : Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru participate in a ‘*charkha*’ demonstration held in the Bhangi colony in New Delhi in connection with the inauguration of National Week, New Delhi, India, April 19, 1946.**

In his view, *khadi*, despite selfless work and sacrifice of many, had failed to achieve its objective. The central theme of his new approach was that *khadi* could begin 'to have permanent effect only when carried out as a part and parcel of the wider programme of non-violence, upliftment of village reconstruction – this he called “*Samagra Seva*” which meant work for re-organization of the entire rural economy on a new basis (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 6: During the march through the fields of a Noakhali village in December 1946**

After independence in 1947, All India Spinners Association (AISA) prepared an ambitious plan for meeting the clothing requirements of the country through hand spinning and hand weaving and at the same time, giving employment to large number of persons in rural areas. In the first five year plan, the planning Commission, recommended in view of the growing problem of unemployment, creation of a central organization which could give close attention to the problems of *khadi* and village industries and help create favorable conditions for action by State Governments, organizations and village cooperatives. The recommendations of the Planning Commission were accepted by the Government of India and in January 1953, the All India *Khadi* and Village Industries Board was set up. This Board took over the activity from the *Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh* in which the AISA had already merged earlier. Later in 1957, in order to overcome certain procedural difficulties which were hampering the progress of KVI, programme a statutory body called the *Khadi* and Village Industries Commission was established by the Government of India under an act of Parliament. Even after the formation of the *Khadi* and Village Industries Commission, the *Khadi* and Village Industries Board continued to be an advisory board of this Commission (KVIC, 2017).

### **Objectives and Schemes of KVIC :**

The *Khadi* and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) is a statutory body established by an Act of Parliament (No. 61 of 1956, as amended by act no. 12 of 1987 and Act No.10 of 2006. Established in April 1957, it took over the work of the former All India *Khadi* and Village Industries Board. It works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Industry, Government of India under the Department of Small-Scale Industries and Agro and Rural Industries. The head quarter of KVIC is in Mumbai and it has its state and regional offices in all the states.

The broad objectives for which the KVIC was established are:-

- a) The Social Objective - Providing employment in rural areas
- b) The Economic Objective - Providing saleable articles
- c) The Wider Objective - Creating self-reliance amongst people and building up a strong rural

community spirit.

The commission seeks to achieve these objectives by implementing and monitoring various schemes and programs. The process of implementation of schemes and programs starts at the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises which is the administrative head of the programs. The Ministry receives funds from the Central Government of India, and routes these to the *Khadi* and Village Industries Commission for the implementation of programs and schemes related to *Khadi* and Village Industries.

#### **KVIC Network :**

KVIC functions with the central office in Mumbai in association with 45 state/divisional/sub offices all over the country. There are 6 zonal offices at New Delhi (N.Z), Bhopal (C.Z), Kolkata (E.Z), Guwahati (N.E.Z), Bengaluru (S.Z) and Mumbai (W.Z). KVIC has 23 departmental sales outlets, 18 non-departmental training centres and 10 accredited training centres, 7 departmental sales outlets and 6 central sliver plants.

State KVIC Directorates, State Khadi and Village Industries Boards (KVIBs) and District Industries Centres (DICs) are implementing Prime Ministers Employment Generation Program (PMEGP) and other schemes of KVIC through co-operative banks of urban areas (KVIC diary 2017).

#### **Schemes and Programs of the Commission :**

##### ***Prime Ministers Employment Generation Program (PMEGP) :***

The Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) is the result of the merger of two schemes - Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY) and The Rural Employment Generation Programme (REGP). Under the scheme, the beneficiary is required to invest his/her own contribution of 10 per cent of the project cost. In case of Schedule Castes/Schedule Tribes and beneficiaries from other weaker sections, the beneficiary's contribution is 5 per cent of the project cost. The remaining 90 and 95% of the project cost, as the case may be, is granted by banks specified under the scheme. The Beneficiaries under the scheme are refunded a certain amount of the loan (25% for General people, 35% for weaker sections in rural areas) which is credited after three years from the date that the loan was extended.

##### ***Interest Subsidy Eligibility Certification Scheme (ISEC) :***

The Interest Subsidy Eligibility Certificate (ISEC) Scheme is the major source of funding for the *Khadi* programme. It was introduced in May 1977 to mobilize funds from banking institutions to fill the gap in the actual fund requirement and its availability from budgetary sources. Under this scheme, loans are provided by the banks to the members to meet their working/fixed capital requirements. These loans are provided at a concessional interest rate of 4% p.a. The difference between the actual interest rate and the concessional rate is borne by the commission under the 'grants' head of its budget. However, only members producing cotton *Khadi* or Polyvastra are eligible for this scheme.

##### ***Rebate Scheme :***

The rebate on sales of *khadi* and its products is made available by the Government so as to make the price competitive with other textiles. Normal rebate (10 %) all through the year and an additional special rebate (10 %) for 108 days in a year are given to the customers. The rebate is

allowed only on the sales made by the institutions/centers run by the Commission/State Boards and also at the sales centers run by the registered institutions which are engaged in the production of cotton *khadi* and polyvastra.

***Workshed Scheme for Khadi artisans :***

In order to provide congenial working ambiance for better productivity of artisans, KVIC is providing assistance to *khadi* artisans for construction of workshed. Under the scheme, an individual artisan is provided maximum subsidy of Rs. 60,000.

***Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP) :***

This programme is implemented for total reform of the sector. The salient features of the reform activities are:

- Offering *khadi* a special identity with mark of genuineness by introduction of *khadi* mark.
- Repositioning *khadi* linking to market needs by establishing a professionally run marketing organization.
- Provision of subsidy in a rationalized and objective manner to make *khadi* institutions self-reliant with greater involvement of artisans.

***KVIC-Position today :***

*Khadi* and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has announced the setting of five ‘*Khadi Villages*’ in all the states to make the rural population self-reliant in order to stop their migration into cities. According to KVIC, *khadi* and related industry is the best way to uplift the economic condition of poor people living in villages. Under this project, interested villagers will be given *charkhas* (spinning wheels), looms and other equipments that are required to set up small scale industries. Under this initiative, they will be able to sell their own products in the village through a sales outlet.

KVIC is taking several initiatives to increase the sale of *khadi*. Improvements have been done in the existing *charkha* (*Amber Charkha*). Using technology the *charkha* has been made light weight and its design includes 10 spindles instead of 8 spindles. This will increase the income of the artisan by 25 per cent. About 25-26 lakh people will get direct employment from *khadi* and village industries, which is likely to reach a turnover of Rs. 2000 crore by the end of this financial year. Government is trying to ensure that one *khadi* artisan should be able to make about Rs. 225-250 per day of earning. (<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com>).

***Khadi -Changing profile :***

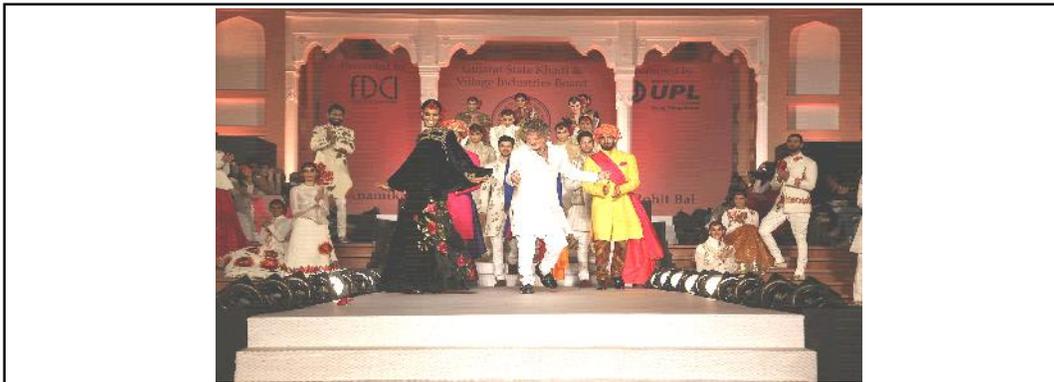
Earlier, *khadi* was only preferred by the political class but now the use of *khadi* products has seen huge demand from young shoppers as well. Today, consumers are increasingly looking for natural products and require new textile materials with new or improved properties and are becoming more demanding in terms of quality and design. ([www.khadiculture.com/khadi.html](http://www.khadiculture.com/khadi.html)). More varieties of *khadi* fabrics are available like cotton, wool, silk, polyvastra, *khadi* denims, azo-free dyed fabrics. *Khadi* fabric is eco-friendly and made without the use of harmful chemicals. This fabric is extremely versatile in product creation and also in terms of seasonal usage. Since *Khadi* is made on handloom, the woven designs are distinct, durable and easy to maintain (Jain and Pant, 2015). In rural India, handloom production meets the twin objectives of green production and employment creation.

The precise technology involved in the production of *khadi* varies from region to region, as do

the techniques used for its decoration (dyeing, embroidery, printing etc.). There is an increasing demand for *khadi* and millions of workers all over the country are involved in its production.

India's humble fabric *khadi* has innovated itself to be the favorite of fashion designers and fashionistas and it is now amongst the most preferred choice on the global and Indian fashion ramps. Efforts have been made by the government in collaboration with eminent Indian designers to showcase *khadi* on the fashion scenario. In 2001 Ms. Vasundhara Raje, the minister of small scale industries decided to rope in designers like Rohit Bal and Malini Ramani to give it a new cool look, their effort helped in giving the cloth a glamorous look. Since then many designers are involved and fashion shows have been organized to showcase beauty of *khadi*.

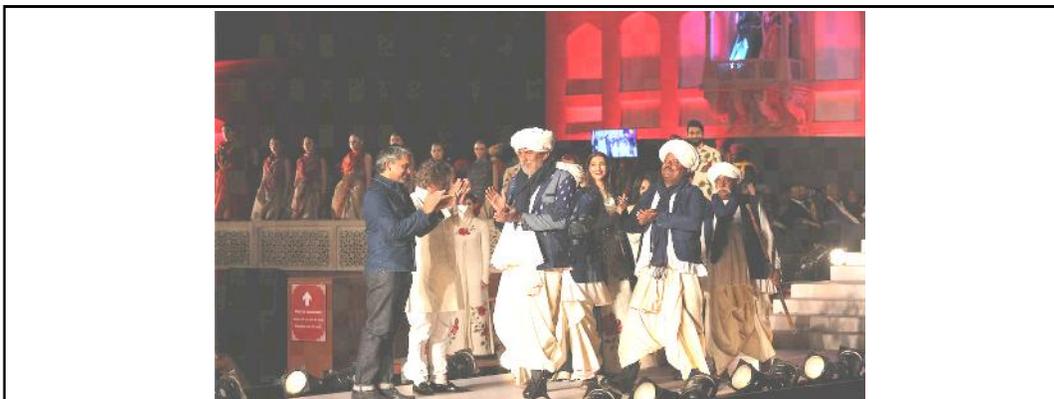
Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) collaborated with Gujarat State *Khadi* and Village Industries Board and curated a special fashion show in Ahmedabad in November, 2015 called "From Huts to the High Street". India's top designers Anamika Khanna, Rohit Bal and Rajesh Pratap Singh showcased their *khadi* collection (Fig.7).



Source: <http://www.fdc.org/newsdetails.aspx>

**Fig. 7 : Rohit Bal on the ramp with the models wearing his *khadi* collection**

Rajesh Pratap Singh presented his denim-*khadi* collection wherein denim *khadi* jackets were designed (Fig.8).



Source: <http://www.fdc.org/newsdetails.aspx>

**Fig. 8 : Rajesh Pratap Singh with local Rabari men showcasing his *Khadi* denim and dhoti collection**

#### KHADI: AN ICONIC INDIAN CLOTH

Anamika Khanna created a new range in which she combined *khadi* with cape-like jackets and sequins teamed with jewelry (Fig. 9).

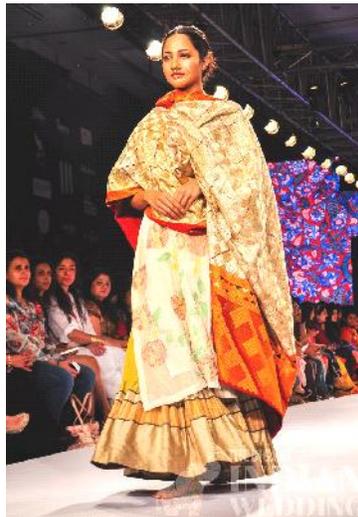


Source: <http://www.fdc.org/newsdetails.aspx>

**Fig. 9 : Anamika Khanna's *khadi* collection**

Designers like Neeru Kumar, Ritu Kumar, Pranavi Kapur and Madhu Jain are working closely with the weavers of *khadi*. According to Ritu Kumar, *Khadi* dyes beautifully, is more eco-friendly than any other Indian textile, and its matte texture looks fabulous with subtle embellishment. Also, according to designer Rohit Bal, *khadi* is India's answer to linen and designers are trying to lead the fabric into the big league.

Gaurang Shah showcased a *khadi* line "Kalpavriksha" which brought out the best of traditional Indian weaving at Lakmé Fashion Week Summer/Resort 2015 (Fig.10).



Source: <http://thebigfatindianwedding.com/2015>

**Fig. 10 : Garment from Gaurang Shah "Tree of Life" collection**

Kalpavriksha is the wish-fulfilling divine tree in Hindu mythology. Gaurang creatively merged the *khadi* with Phulkari, Kalamkari and Chikankari and represented with "Tree of Life" in his collection (Fig.11).



Textile revivalist Rita Kapur Chishti, a long-time fan of the fabric showcased as many as 108 different varieties woven across nine Indian states in an exhibition titled '*Khadi*: The Fabric of Freedom'. Sabyasachi Mukherjee has created embroidered *khadi* lehengas (Fig.12).



The fabric of ages is here to stay and rule not only through political attires but through national and international fashion scenes (Colourage, 2013). The perception about *khadi*. is changing and efforts are being made to uplift *khadi* from common fabric to a fashion fabric. Designers are trying to provide more value addition to *khadi* fabric, which will give better growth to the *khadi* industry.

#### ***Khadi* Promotion by Government:**

To promote government's 'Make in India' campaign and boost the rural economy through employment generation, the *khadi* village industries is spreading its wings. Initiatives are being taken by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) to promote *khadi* in

government schools. Efforts are being made to promote the use of *khadi* products in various other departments including police forces, government hospitals, railways and airlines. According to MSME there is a big market for school uniforms in the country and promotion of *khadi* uniforms will lead to the growth of the rural economy. Air India, the national carrier has already decided to use the natural and eco-friendly *khadi* products for its international flights. KVIC is also in the process of opening *khadi* outlets at some airports in the country. Airport Authority of India has also given its consent for allotting space at important airports to develop the outlets. Indian Railways is already using *khadi* bed-sheets. There will be more KVIC products that will be used in the railways over time. Similarly, they can make curtains and bed-sheets for hospitals and uniform for police forces (<http://indiatoday.intoday.in>).

### Conclusion :

Handloom industry is playing an important role in Indian economy. *Khadi* was introduced as a political weapon and gave an opportunity to every man, woman and child to cultivate self – discipline and self – sacrifice as a part of the non- co-operation movement and played a vital role in India’s independence struggle. Since then, it has gone through various phases; it was introduced during Swadeshi movement followed by establishment of *khadi* association and its expansion. All possible efforts were done to provide employment to people and wages were given for their sustenance. KVIC has helped in the implementation of various policies and programs for providing infrastructure and support services to small enterprises. Consumers are increasingly looking for natural products and require new textile materials with new or improved properties. India’s humble fabric *khadi* has innovated itself to be the favourite of fashion designers and it is now a preferred choice on the ramps. However, youngsters of present generation are obsessed with international brands that are coming in; they need to be made aware of the upgradation of *khadi* fabric. People need to understand the importance of our national fabric. It is the soul of India since our freedom struggle and unites people together. It is important to understand the uniqueness of the fabric and its association with our nation.

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