



BUILDING A SELF-RELIANT SOCIETY: THE GANDHIAN CONCEPT OF CHARAKA

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Abstract

Understanding the British colonial impulse Mahatma Gandhi started a movement for Promotion of Khadi. It was considered as relief program for poorer sections of people. The spinning & weaving of the Khadi yarn became an ideology for self-reliance & self-rule. Mahatma Gandhi started a movement for teeming millions of India called Khadi. According to him, it symbolized self-reliance, self-control & self-rule. It was an undemanding modus operandi to engage people in employment all round the year. According to Gandhi, the Khadi program if taken up seriously would serve as an answer to joblessness, a solution to economic upliftment, a control to draining away of Indian resources, an eventual formula to demand self-rule. This paper analyses the Gandhian ideology about introduction of Khadi & it later becoming a livery of freedom. The paper examines the principles that Khadi involved was so mature that it has global application is being conjectured at high levels as an answer to several economic predicaments.

Key words: Charaka Gandhi, khadi spinning, weaving.

"I see God in every thread that I draw on the spinning wheel". (Young India-20-5-1926)

Introduction

Understanding the British colonial impulse Mahatma Gandhi started a movement for Promotion of Khadi. It was considered as relief program for poorer sections of people. The spinning & weaving of the Khadi yarn became an ideology for self reliance & self rule. It was at the time of the Nagpur session (1920) that the Indian National Congress decided to encourage "Khadi". The first Khadi Production Centre was established at Katiawad, Gujarat, Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to Khadi as "The livery of freedom". It comprised of

1. Every village shall plant and harvest its own raw-materials for yarn,
2. Every woman and man shall engage in spinning and
3. Every village shall weave whatever is needed for its own use.

As agriculture was not a year round livelihood provider to an Indian farmer, the Gandhian concept of Khadi would assist in providing a sustainable solution to the farming community. As it required practically no outlay or capital, even an improved spinning wheel can be easily and cheaply made Gandhi wanted to



promote this as an answer to the reliance on foreign goods. He was of the opinion that foreign materials which directly symbolized foreign rule would get a jolt if Indian stopped importing British ready made goods. According to him, this non reliance would give a foremost example towards real independence.

Gandhi advocated Khadi as :

1. Raw materials were entirely exported from India to England at very low cost
2. Later the same was re-imported as costly finished cloth,
3. It deprived the local population of work and profits on it.

Khadi as the Livelihood Means

Gandhi also felt that in a county where manual labor was looked down upon, it was an occupation to bring high and low, rich and poor together, to show them the dignity of hand-labor. He requested not only of those in needs, but of every person to do spinning at least about one hour per day as sacrifice to his county, as duty towards the poor. He hoped for a certain bond of unity between the classes and masses by bridging the gap with a common occupation, and he saw great social value in hand-spinning. It was for economic, cultural and social reasons and not merely political that Gandhi established the Khadi Movement. In 1934-35 he expanded the idea from helping the poor individual to self-reliance of whole villages. In 1942-43 he had sessions with workers groups and village organizers to re-organize the

whole programme on a bigger country-wide scale. . Thus according to Gandhi Khadi meant not merely a piece of cloth but a way of life.

Khadi as a Hope of Masses

According to Gandhiji, the spinning wheel represented the hope of the masses. As the Charkha supplemented the agriculture of the villagers and gave it dignity. It was the friend and the solace of the widow. It kept the villagers from idleness. For the Charkha included all the anterior and posterior industries such as - ginning, carding, warping, sizing, dyeing and weaving. These in their turn kept the village carpenter and the blacksmith busy. The Charkha enabled the seven hundred thousand villages to become self contained.

Gandhi emphasized on Charkha because other village industries such as oil pressers, wrought iron compressors etc would also be vanished with the reliance on western industries. Therefore the villagers would be drained of their varied occupations and their creative talent . The industrialized countries of the West were exploiting India. Hence, the most natural supplement that was suggested was the revival of the Charkha.(Harijan,13-4-1940).

Village Community

Gandhij compared Khadi to the sun in the village solar system. According to him the planets were the various industries which could support Khadi. Without it other industries could not grow. During his vast tours all over the Indian sub continent he discovered that, without



the revival of other industries, Khadi could not make progress. (Harijan-16-11-1934)

Khadi as the Symbol of Nation's Prosperity

According to Gandhi Charkha was the symbol of the nation's prosperity and therefore its ultimate freedom. It was a symbol not of commercial war but of commercial peace. It bears not a message of ill-will towards the nations of the earth but of goodwill and self-help. It will not need the protection of a navy threatening a world's peace and exploiting its resources, but it needs the religious determination of millions to spin their yarn in their own homes as today they cook their food in their own homes. He said "I may deserve the curse of posterity for many mistakes of omission and commission, but I am confident of earning its blessings for suggesting a revival of the Charkha. For every revolution of the wheel spins peace, goodwill and love. And with all that, inasmuch as the loss of it brought about India's slavery, its voluntary revival with all its implications must mean India's freedom" .(Young India,8-12-1921)

Khadi as a Spirit of Sublime Character

according to Gandhiji 'Khadi spirit' would surround people of India with simplicity in every walk of life. The 'Khadi spirit' means illimitable patience. For those who know anything about the production of Khadi know how patiently the spinners and the weavers have to toil at their trade, and even so must we have patience

while we are spinning 'the thread of Swaraj'. The 'khadi spirit' means also an equally illimitable faith. Even as the spinner toiling away at the yarn he spins by itself small enough, put in the aggregate, would be enough to clothe every human being in India, so illimitable faith in truth and non-violence ultimately conquering every obstacle in our way.

As the Mark of Brotherhood

The 'Khadi spirit' means fellow-feeling with every human being on earth. It means a complete renunciation of everything that is likely to harm our brothers & neighbors but cultivating that spirit amongst the millions of our countrymen, what a land this India of ours would be! And the more I move about the country and the more I see the things for myself, the richer, the stronger is my faith growing in the capacity of the spinning wheel.(Young India, 22- 9-1927).Khadi delivers the poor from the bonds of the rich and creates a moral and spiritual bond between the classes and the masses. It restores to the poor somewhat of what the rich have taken from them. (Young India, 17-3-1927).

Khadi as a Supplementary Industry

The mission of Khadi was not merely to supply the town people with fashionable Khadi that will vie with the Mill manufacturers & thus like the other industries supply a few artisans with employment but it is to become a supplementary industry to agriculture)Harijan ,6-7-1935.A country remains poor in wealth, both materially and intellectually, if it does not develop its



handicrafts and its industries (Young India, 20-8-1931)

According to Gandhi, economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and therefore sinful. Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral. It is sinful to buy and use articles made by sweated labour. (Young India, 13-10-1921) . According to Gandhi 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 reintroduce spinning in their homes and every village must repossess its own weaver. (Young India, 21-7-1920)

Conclusion

In fact, Khadi was introduced in 1920 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-cooperation movement.

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