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THE
ECONOMICS
OF
KHADI

Principal, Economic Trading
25 FEB 1957
SANDHIGRAM

By : GULZARILAL NANDA

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ALL INDIA KHADI AND VILLAGE INDUSTRIES BOARD,
(Ministry of Production)
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FOREWORD

It is over twenty years since Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda wrote this brochure on "Some Aspects of Khadi" for being published as one of a series of publications issued by the Indian National Congress on the occasion of the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Congress. The All-India Khadi and Village Industries Board is grateful to the authorities of the Congress and to Shri Nanda for according permission for the re-publication of the brochure.

A Foreword for the new edition is scarcely necessary except by way of a formality, because the review of the brochure by M(ahadev) D(esai) appearing in "The Harijan" (7-3-1936) — which is reproduced as an introduction to the booklet — summarizes, in Mahadevbhai's inimitable style, the contents of this brief exposition of the subject of Khadi. One can note here only this that, except in regard to the bringing uptodate of certain statistical material, there is hardly any modification that the presentation stands in need of, in the context of our present economy. The upto-date figures are given as foot notes at the appropriate places. Foot notes have also been given in places where elucidation or explanation is found necessary in the light of the changes that have taken place after the brochure was written.

It is true that the purely political aspect has no longer any bearing now in a consideration of the place of Khadi in our life. But that aspect, though of importance at one time, was not one that weighed over much with Gandhiji when he formulated his programme for the revival of our universal cottage industry. However, in a world torn by strife, such as what a cold-war represents, we cannot

ignore the need for the achievement of self-sufficiency in securing one of the essentials of our daily life.

During the times in which we live, almost every economic activity has to be carried on as part of a planned programme. In 1935, when our economic affairs were ordered by a foreign-controlled Government, Khadi could have had no place in a programme of national development. It can have that place accorded to it now, when our destinies are in the hands of the nominees of the Indian National Congress, whose economic thinking was, to a large extent, moulded by Gandhiji. A perusal of Shri Nanda's brochure will convey to our legislators and administrators, the theoretical justification for the acceptance of the development of Khadi as an integral part of our Plan. The cultural and the sociological, apart from the economic, implications of Khadi are expounded in this brochure in a manner in which they have scarcely been presented elsewhere except, of course, in Gandhiji's own writings.

In the next stage of our planning, there is to be little, if any, provision for the production of cloth by the large-scale textile industry. Fears are entertained in certain quarters that there will be a shortage of cloth, that the handloom cloth in the production of which attention is to be concentrated, will not be of the requisite quality and that the consumer will be mulcted in price. To all these doubts, there are replies to be found in this brochure. If we can put in the requisite effort in an organized manner, it is possible, without practically any difficulty, to turn out large quantities of cloth with our cotton and without incurring any considerable expenditure on equipment and training. The texture of the handspun hand-woven cloth is not what it was when Gandhiji inaugurated the movement and, even since Shri Nanda wrote on the subject, definite efforts have been made to produce cloth that may suit the tastes of consumers.

It has to be recognized, however, that a price disparity will remain between production by hand and production with the aid of power-driven machinery. But the higher price that may have to be paid—with efforts to reduce margins—is, as Shri Nanda emphasises, a contribution to a national programme—the programme being that of finding remunerative, productive work for large numbers who are either under-employed or wholly unemployed in the villages which constitute India.

The problem of unemployment looms large before the nation to-day, Khadi, as Gandhiji visualized half a century ago, has a solution to offer. What exactly that is, is lucidly and convincingly argued by Shri Nanda. But, as he explains, it is not merely as a panacea for unemployment that the cause of Khadi should be advocated. It is providing an alternative form of industrial or economic organization that Shri Nanda pleads the cause. The form of economic organization that has developed so far is scarcely in harmony with the basic requirements of our economy. That economy can be strengthened to the advantage of those who work or want to work if we adopt decentralized methods of production where men can feel zest in their work and can have a voice in managing their own productive effort. One very useful purpose that the republication of the brochure will serve is that it will enable the new generation to get a clear conception of the place of such decentralization in an important sector of our national economy.

Vaikunth L. Mehta,
Chairman, All-India Khadi and
Village Industries Board.

INTRODUCTION*

Among the brochures published by the A.I.C.C. in celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Indian National Congress, Sjt. Gulzarilal Nanda's little brochure on "SOME ASPECTS OF KHADI" of about 40 pages will occupy an important place. Sjt. Nanda is the right-hand man of Smt. Anasuyaben Sarabhai and Sjt. Shankerlal Banker in their work for the textile workers in Ahmedabad. For fifteen years or more Sjt. Nanda has given the whole of his time and energies to a study of the conditions of the textile labourers in Ahmedabad and helped in organising a Union which is regarded as the best Labour Union. To those who do not know him it will be an agreeable surprise that one should write a brochure on the importance of Khadi in the life of the Indian nation. But those who know him and his work will not be surprised at the wonderful way in which he has placed the case for Khadi. Like Smt. Anasuyaben and Sjt. Shankerlal he has been a staunch believer in Khadi; he is a spinner and habitual Khadi-wearer himself, and has done much to popularise spinning in the schools run by the Labour Union and Khadi-weaving among the labourers in Ahmedabad. Under the auspices of the Union a Khadi store is being run and last year they organised a successful Khadi sale during the National Week, where thousands of labourers flocked, and which was the wonder of the town.

Much has been said and written on Khadi, but Sjt. Nanda has, within the brief scope of 40 pages, presented arguments for it in a

* This review appeared in "Harijan" dated 7.3.36. Written by M. D. (Mahadev Desai), it is a clear exposition of the contents of Shri Gulzarilal Nanda's brochure and its content.

manner all his own and marshalled facts and figures which make the little brochure an original contribution to the literature on Khadi. Perhaps his intimate contact with textile conditions fits him in an especial manner to present the case for Khadi, as, for instance, a Red Cross would be best fitted to present a case for pacifism. It is difficult to summarise within the compass of a brief article the contents of a solidly written brochure like Sjt. Nanda's. We might omit the historical section, though that, too, contains a lot of information packed within half a dozen pages, and we might also omit the section on the technique of Khadi, which contains a succinct summary of the improvements that have taken place in the selection of cotton, in the handgin, the carding bow and the spinning wheel, and the improvements which are still needed.* What is of the utmost importance is the unanswerable case made out for Khadi within the space of about twenty pages in a most arresting, illuminating and original manner. It would be difficult to summarise his argument, as it is presented in a remarkably condensed manner. I must quote in extenso his argument to prove that Khadi is a more even distributor of the means of living :

“Indian mills produce cloth worth above Rs. 50 crores. Of this, a sum of about Rs. 10 crores constitutes the wage bill of the industry. Khadi of the same value would provide Rs. 35 crores in the shape of wages. Khadi manufactured from the same quantity of raw cotton would, if the existing circumstances continue, be sold at Rs. 100 crores of which the wage bill would amount to Rs. 700 crores. As against a rise of 50 crores in the price of cloth, the increase in the amount, distributed as wages is 60 crores. The explanation is, that of the 60 crores of rupees which the mill industry saves in wages by restricting its employees to a small fraction of the number that would be engaged in the production of Khadi only Rs.

* The latest in the search for an improved Charkha is the invention of the Ambar Charkha.

The figures of production, employment etc., in mills pertain to the period in which the brochure was published.

50 crores are turned on to the consumers and the balance of Rs. 10 crores is appropriated in excess charges for rent, interest, profit, ect. Paying the higher prices of Khadi is equivalent to withdrawing purchasing power to the extent of Rs. 50 crores from the consumers of cloth in all parts of the country and Rs. 10 crores from what is largely unearned increments and taxes, and transferring all that to the half-starved workers and peasants in the rural areas. The increase in the expenditure on cloth incurred by the well-to-do sections and the urban communities owing to the higher price of Khadi would be a net addition to the purchasing power of the villages, as also the saving of 10 crores of rupees of interest, profit, etc, included in the price of mill cloth. As far as the substitution of mill cloth by Khadi in case of the villagers themselves is concerned, there would be some increase in the clothing bill, but that would be more than balanced by the additional wages provided for them through Khadi. In fact, in their case, the change will very largely operate as a reversion to self-sufficiency in the matter of cloth. The redistribution of purchasing power involved in the change from mill cloth to Khadi would bring about a large curtailment of the present outlay of society on luxuries and amusements and would mean a corresponding increase in the expenditure on articles and services necessary for the maintenance of health and efficiency. At the higher price the consumption of cloth would diminish to an extent but that would largely affect the superfluous use of cloth in the country. The argument applied with greater strength to foreign cloth. Even to the extent it provides wages, it does that for foreign workers who lead a life of comparative luxury at the expense of the famished village of India.

“Again the wage bill of the mill industry is distributed among about four lakhs of workers, each earning about ten annas per day on the average, whereas khadi would spread out rupees seventy crores in wages among about one crore of persons giving each an average of about three annas a day. A considerable part of a rupee of the city workers’ wages returns to the well-to-do as rent, interest

and profit; whereas the rupee spent in the village would in its turn, furnish support and sustenance to many primary producers."

He next presents Khadi as a force for international peace.

"If all the workers whom mill cloth keeps out of employment in India were to be engaged in machine production there would be enough cloth produced in India in one year to clothe the entire world for several years. If India were to succeed in foisting the surplus on the rest of the world, million of people in the other countries would be deprived of employment as well as livelihood, Mechanized production does not only threaten the lives or individuals and sections within a nation, but it also imperils the happiness, independence, safety and integrity of nations."

Next follows the cultural argument. I shall take just two sentences; "The handicraftsman imparted his character to his goods. The machine produces for distant markets with no human link or mutual obligation between the producer and the consumer and the result is a pile of soul-less goods".

The section on the economics of Khadi is brilliant. He disposes of the "absolute price theory" as absurd. "In India there is a difference of degree and of procedure only between the action of Government when it imposes a 50 per centum duty on certain foreign goods and thereby comes in the way of the consumers obtaining this class of goods at 40 per centum less cost than they are bound to pay on account of the duty, and in Mahatma Gandhiji's appeal to the people to spend on Khadi 100 per centum more than they would have to pay for similar mill cloth. Neither Khadi nor mill cloth is economically sound in the sense that they can defy the onslaught of cheaper goods and hold their ground without external help.

Is dearer Khadi, he asks, worse than an unemployment dole? It is the other way about. The latter involves a waste of considerable

part of the revenues in unproductive work and big salaries, and what is still worse maintains the unemployed without furnishing them with any useful occupation.

Is the income from Khadi insignificant? The aggregate family income under the cottage craft system has a decided advantage against the aggregate family income under the factory system.

And if the United States helps the cotton crop with an immense subsidy, and if in India we kept alive the steel industry by giving large subsidies under the Steel Protection Act of 1924, why not a subsidy for Khadi, and a total prohibition of the importation of cloth from outside and delimitation of the sphere of mill cloth, under better political conditions?

Does the handicraft system ensure an adequate level of production? Because, answers Sjt. Nanda, the workers engaged in the mill industry are enabled to produce at half the price 50 times as much as the hand workers can. One may not assume that the wealth of the country is one hundred times increased. One only out of the 50 workers has got work in the mills and the remaining 49 have ceased to create wealth. 'When' he sums up, "the balance-sheet of gain and loss of the change from Khadi to mill cloth is drawn up, it would be necessary to show, against the saving of fifty crores of rupees in price, the annual loss of over 300 crores of working days of the villages which at the lowest computation are not worth less the amount saved. At rates paid at present for making Khadi, the value of this labour is about Rs. 70 crores.'

But I must stop. Those who are still sceptical about the vital place of Khadi in our economic life, must get this brochure at once and study it. They will need no more argument.

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF KHADI

Khadi deserves study as the predominant handicraft of the Indian nation. A nation values an industry in proportion as it provides employment and maintenance for a smaller or a larger number of the people of the land. Khadi can do that for millions who depend for their livelihood in part or whole on the various processes connected with its production in all parts of the country. Spinning, not for exchange but for domestic use on traditional lines, has still survived the inroads of machinery in many parts of the country. Immense quantities of hand-spun yarn and Khadi cloth are sold and bartered daily in the villages of India, and they are not reckoned at all in the figures of Indian production of yarn and cloth made known to us. An unofficial estimate places the number of handloom weavers in India at about 60 lakhs*, most of whom, however, use millspun yarn§. The spinners are many times more in number but of that an approximate estimate even does not exist. The number of those for whom the production centres under the

* "Indian Economics" by Jathar and Berry.

§ Since the report of the Fact Finding Committee (1952) the number of handlooms in the country has been variously estimated. The All India Handloom Board's estimate is that there are 25.6 lakhs looms, but the generally accepted figure is 20 lakhs. There is also difference of opinion about the number of workers per loom. According to one estimate it is 2.5 per loom, while another source puts it as 2 per loom. The figure on which there is general agreement is 1.5 per loom. Accepting the lower figures for the number of handlooms and employment per loom, the handloom industry provides employment to 30 lakhs of people. Between 1935 to 1955—a period of 20 years—30 lakhs persons have, apparently, been thrown out of their traditional vocation. What is more, even the depleted number of handlooms do not get adequate supplies of yarn. There is, thus, considerable idle capacity in this Cottage Industry. All this is directly attributable to the expansion of the textile mill industry.

"All India Spinners' Association" alone furnishes employment, is very nearly three lakhs. Among organised machine industries, on the other hand, the best in this respect is the cotton textile industry which employs a total of nearly four lakhs of workers.* All the factories of India together maintain no more than 12 lakhs, and including the Railways and the mines just about 21 lakhs§, out of a population exceeding 35 crores. These figures do not give an adequate idea of the place which Khadi occupies in the economy of the country. They do not disclose that while helping to preserve and develop the artistic talent and creative skill of the people, Khadi means bread for lakhs of the poorest of the poor, many of whom, but for it, would have nothing to assuage their pangs of hunger. The full magnitude of the economic value of Khadi will be realized only when it is borne in mind that, given the chance, it can furnish additional employment for 10 to 15 millions of people in this country.

Khadi is important as a handicraft. It is also precious to the nation as a symbol and a concept. Khadi has been linked with the nation's struggle for freedom from the moment of its rude awakening by the Rowlatt Bills to the present day. It is a symbol of independence for which we are striving and typifies also the process by which we seek and hope to attain it. It is therefore, that the Charkha figures so prominently in the tri-coloured flag of the nation. Khadi represents also a new conception of civilization—a civilization in which material, moral and spiritual values are not divorced from one another but become interchangeable; a civilization of which Ruskin has tried to portray the essence in his 'Unto This Last'. For India, the revival of Khadi marks the beginning of an epoch of spiritual regeneration, the power and beauty of which time alone will unfold.

* According to the Millowners the number of textile mill workers at present is 7,50,000.

§ This figure is: (1948-50)

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------|------------------|
| a) Factory Employment | | 28,61,320 |
| b) Mining | .. | 4,21,159 |
| c) Railways | .. | 7,92,765 |
| | Total | <u>40,75,244</u> |

CHAPTER II

A FACTOR IN CIVILIZATION

The life of the savage is limited to the operations of the senses. He submits or merely adapts himself to the forces of nature. He has no clear consciousness of any purpose or possibilities in his life. The progress to civilization and culture consists, in the discovery of new and higher planes of thought and action, in the search for the truth and the infinite power which reside in the human soul and nature around, and in the endeavour for a mastery of the self, and the environment to satisfy human needs and fulfil the purpose of human life.

Before the dawn of the era, man acquired and assimilated knowledge at a very slow pace. After the industrial revolution, man's knowledge of the secrets of nature and his power to tap its hidden treasures have increased with a tremendous speed, while there is no commensurate increase in his moral capacity to control and apply this knowledge and power to the service of humanity. The curious result is that man is reverting to that state of helplessness which he experienced in the face of the unknown forces of nature in his savage days; only in this case, he has himself pressed the secret spring of its infinite power and released the avalanche which has overwhelmed humanity.

Machinery came with the promise of a reign of plenty. Poverty and want would be abolished. There would be an abundant release of leisure and to every one the means and opportunities for the pursuit of art, literature, religion and a higher life could be extended.

All would be happy and the millenium would be firmly established on the earth. Thus said the zealots. But what has happened ? Individuals, groups and governments are all, as a matter of fact, totally engrossed in the efforts to procure material satisfactions and in patching up the rents in the economic system. And still the bare material requisites of life are lacking for large sections of mankind. Mechanized industry has actually robbed millions of work and of hope, enslaved mankind and set the people of the world at each other's throats. Helplessness, want, worry, strife and sordidness are, in a world of plenty, the gifts of the machine era, and a measure of the extent to which civilization has receded in this world.

Khadi, standing for all handicrafts, has planted itself stoically in the path of this retreat of civilization with its mission of restoring self-respect, confidence, peace and culture. Khadi brings the message of mastery of man over self and his surroundings, of mutual help, of brotherhood of man, of ordered existence and of a society at peace. The claim which Khadi can make today does not rest simply on its capacity to provide a little bread for the hungry or some clothing for the naked. It has a much more important function as a factor in civilization.

CHAPTER III

A MORE EVEN DISTRIBUTION OF THE MEANS OF LIVING

No society can call itself civilized of which a large number of members just maintain existence in ignorance, want and squalor. No civilization can survive for long, if the bulk of the people suffer from the effects of continuous mal-nutrition of mind and body. It is very much worse if, by the side of all this penury and destitution, is a small section rolling in luxury and having a surfeit of art, literature, sport and other pleasures. The contrast serves to instil hatred, on one side, and contempt, on the other. While it hardens the minds of the upper class, it poisons and embitters the starved souls of the poverty-stricken. Machinery has accentuated this contrast deeply. The reason is that at each successive stage in the conversion of raw material into manufactured product, largescale machine industry calls for a much larger investment of capital, insists on the service of a much smaller number of workers, distributes far less in the aggregate as wages and shares much more as rent, interest and profit of capitalists, entrepreneurs and intermediaries out of a particular amount realized from the sale of goods or of the proceeds of a certain volume of product than is the case in handicraft product of the same volume or value. Tools and machines which the worker cannot himself own and to obtain which the accumulations of others have to be drawn upon, would bring in the operation of the factor of interest and then compound interest necessitating on this account an increasing deduction from the value of the products. The Spinning Wheel every family can have for itself for about one to three rupees, but a

spindle in the mill costs about Rs. 60. A spinner minding 200 spindles in a mill would thus require for his use an investment running into thousands of rupees. The Textile Industry in Bombay and Ahmedabad employs about a lakh and seventy five thousand workers and has an investment of over 50 crores of rupees.

Taking the average for about a decade, the interest charged on the entire investment amounts approximately to 6 per centum of the price of Indian mill cloth. The profit which is being paid for financial risks to the share-holders, managing agents and others is roughly equal to about 8 per centum of the price. The number of persons who are engaged to supervise and manage the work of the mill industry is far higher in proportion to the number similarly occupied in handicrafts. Owing to the social standing, education, influence and financial control possessed by the managerial element in the mill industry, its remuneration is incomparably larger. About 5 per centum of price of cloth goes this way. Of what the industry contributes to the State Revenue in the shape of taxes—a varying percentage—very little trickles down to the poor. The wages paid out to the workers in the Textile Industry constitute about 20 per centum of the proceeds. The graft and corruption which are inseparable from the present economic system, make a further surreptitious addition to the income of the rich at the expense of the wages of the poor. These figures are simply illustrative. No account is taken here of the element of rent, interest, profits and wages in coal and other materials which themselves form about 12 per centum of the value of the product consumed by the industry. The depreciation charge which is about 4 per centum is in part made up similarly of the profits and other overhead charges of foreign manufactures. The price of cloth in the above analysis is taken as it leaves the mill gates. In the case of Khadi, on the other hand, interest is negligible; and there is little occasion for profit since the distance and the passage of time between the point of production and the point of consumption, being reduced to the minimum, market fluctuations are practically eliminated and hardly any risk remains to be borne. The

cost of management and supervision is very little. The overhead charges at the production centres altogether amount to no more than about 6 per centum of the price of Khadi. The wages form about 70 per centum of the price.

It is apparent that the larger the scale of the machine industry, the more the investment it calls for, the higher the transportation and intermediary charges it entails, the greater are the risks involved in marketing its products and the more costly the management of its affairs becomes, the result is that a correspondingly larger proportion of the receipts of the industry are absorbed by a relatively much smaller number and the amount distributed as wages among the poor diminished to the same extent.

Indian mills produce cloth worth about Rs. 50 crores. Of this, a sum of about Rs. 10 crores constitute the wage bill of the industry. Khadi of the same value would provide Rs. 35 crores in the shape of wages.* Khadi manufactured from the same quantity of raw cotton would, if the existing circumstances continue, be sold at Rs. 100 crores of which the wage bill would amount to Rs. 70 crores. As against a rise of 50 crores in the price of cloth, the increase in the amount distributed as wages is 60 crores. The explanation is, that of the 60 crores of rupees which the mill industry saves in wages by restricting its employees to a small fraction of the number that would be engaged in the production of Khadi, only Rs. 50 crores are turned on to the consumers and the balance of Rs. 10 crores is appropriated in excess charges for rent, interest, profit, etc. Paying the higher prices of Khadi is equivalent to withdrawing purchasing power to the extent of Rs. 50 crores from the consumers of cloth in all parts of the country and Rs. 10 crores from what is largely unearned increments and taxes, and transferring to the half

* Production of mill cloth has increased considerably since 1935 when this was written. The industry has expanded and consequently production, sale and wages have also increased correspondingly. But the figures given here serve as an illustration and do not in any way affect the case made out by the writer.

starved workers and peasants in the rural areas. The increase in the expenditure on cloth incurred by the well-to-do sections and the urban communities, owing to the higher price of Khadi, would be a net addition to the purchasing power of the villages, as also the saving of 10 crores of rupees of interest, profit, etc., included in the price of mill cloth. As far as the substitution of mill cloth by Khadi in case of the villagers themselves is concerned, there would be some increase in the clothing bill, but that would be more than balanced by the additional wages provided for them through Khadi. In fact, in their case, the change will very largely operate as a reversal on to self-sufficiency in the matter of cloth. The redistribution of purchasing power involved in the change from mill cloth to Khadi would bring about curtailment of the present outlay of society on luxuries and amusements and would mean a corresponding increase in the expenditure on articles and services necessary for the maintenance of health and efficiency. At the higher price the consumption of cloth would diminish to an extent, but that would largely affect the superfluous use of cloth in the country. The argument applies with greater strength to foreign cloth.* Even to the extent it provides wages, it does that for foreign workers who lead a life of comparative luxury at the expense of the famished villagers of India.

* The import of foreign cloth has diminished since and is to-day negligible. The import is regulated by heavy import duties such as :

1) Cotton Fabrics :

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----|----|-------------------------|
| (i) of British manufacture | .. | .. | 65 per cent ad valorem |
| (ii) not of " " | .. | .. | 100 per cent ad valorem |

2) Printed piece goods, etc.

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----|----|-------------------------|
| (i) of British Manufacture | .. | .. | 60 per cent ad valorem |
| (ii) of non-" " | .. | .. | 100 per cent ad valorem |

3. Printed fabrics :

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----|----|-------------------------|
| (i) of British manufacture | .. | .. | 80 per cent ad valorem |
| (ii) not of " " | .. | .. | 100 per cent ad valorem |

Other fabrics :

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----|----|-------------------------|
| (i) of British manufacture | .. | .. | 75 per cent ad valorem |
| (ii) of non-" " | .. | .. | 100 per cent ad valorem |

Again the wage bill of the mill industry is distributed among about four lakhs of workers, each earning about ten annas per day on the average, whereas Khadi** would spread out rupees seventy crores in wages among about one crore of persons giving each an average of about three annas a day. A considerable part of a rupee of the city workers' wages returns to the well to-do as rent, interest and profit; whereas the rupee spent in the village would, in its turn, furnish support and sustenance to many primary producers.

Khadi adds to the total income of the country in a purely utilitarian sense, to the extent to which it reduces the disparity between the income level of the rich and the poor. There is a certain loss of utility on the part of the townsman who earns Rs. 100 and turns over one rupee to the handicraftsman in the village, but the latter who may be making altogether only about Rs. 5/- would be many times more. The value in use of the total income of the country in commodities and services would rise enormously by such a redistribution. But the moral and social value of the readjustment to the rich as well as the poor, can scarcely be measured. Khadi raises to a higher level both those from whom it takes and those to whom it gives.

CHAPTER IV

AS A FORCE FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

A conflict arises when there is not enough of a thing for all who want it.

A machine minded by one man may turn out as much as ten or a hundred or even five hundred men could produce without it. If it is intended to give similar employment to the 499 persons displaced by a machine, the total product would be 500 times what it was before. It is not possible to consume it internally, because the price of the product would exceed by far what is distributed by the industry as purchasing power in the shape of wages, etc. The gap is widened very much when the raw material has to be brought from outside. The excess product must, therefore, be disposed of at profitable rates in foreign markets. A compelling need thus arises for the mastery of the sources of raw materials and the control of markets for the absorption of the superfluous goods. It is evident that this privilege can be confined only to a small section of humanity. If all the workers whom mill cloth keeps out of employment in India, were to be engaged in machine production, there would be enough cloth produced in India in one year to clothe the entire world for several years. If India were to succeed in foisting the surplus on the rest of the world, millions of people in the other countries would be deprived of employment as well as livelihood. Powerful nations strive to keep the exercise of this privilege for themselves. This state of affairs can never be associated from territorial conquest, colonial expansion

and international rivalries and wars. Mechanised production, therefore, does not only threaten the lives of individuals and section within a nation, but it also imperils the happiness, independence, safety and integrity of nations.

Unless production of commodities is allowed to pursue its natural bent in different parts of the world and trade is confined to such exchange of goods as conduces to the mutual advantage of both parties, the economic equilibrium of the world, will remain constantly upset. This realignment, as the world is to-day, cannot take place as long as machinery is not relegated to a subordinate place and handicrafts come to their own. Through Khadi, Gandhiji has delivered the message of international peace to the nations of the world.

CHAPTER V

ITS ROLE IN THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

No country can develop a civilization suitable to the genius of its people, if it is not free to do with its laws, institutions, its natural resources and manpower as it finds best from the standpoint of national progress. Khadi can help to redeem a glorious civilisation by its contribution to India's struggle for independence. It appears somewhat curious that the growth of foreign domination in India was accompanied by the painful process of destruction of the Khadi industry in the country; and now the revival of Khadi figures so largely in the country's efforts to throw off the yoke. It has not come about as mere coincidence. The Khadi movement is due to Gandhiji's unerring insight into the play of sociological forces and the reality of things. For him, freedom means the freedom to ensure that every one in the land has enough work to earn the bare necessities of life before any one gets more, that there is a minimum of sanitation, minimum of knowledge and minimum of every other desirable thing for the poorest of this country before its resources are applied to other objects. No wonder that Gandhiji has placed the resuscitation of Khadi and other handicrafts in the forefront of the political campaign for the attainment of independence.*

In the endeavour to revive Khadi, the workers in the Congress

* India is now free and independent. If Khadi has played a vital role in rousing the nation to great patriotic heights and in moulding the minds of the people to think in terms of constructive work and national reconstruction based on a decentralised social and economic order, in Free India, the National Government has accorded to its development a place worthy of the objectives for which it stood.

movement get the rare opportunity of doing their little bit to revive the drooping spirits of the long forsaken inhabitants of the villages. Khadi work has been associated in the villages with social reform, temperance, literacy work, medical relief, sanitation and a general awakening of the people. It is the all-round regeneration of the masses on these lines which alone will make freedom worthwhile and its attainment possible.

The disposition of political power is as important from the point of view of the masses as its achievement. On the forms of production and the manner in which the people earn their livelihood depend where political power would reside and how it would be exercised. With large-scale machine industry, the concentration of the means and control of production in a few hands is inevitable; and a corresponding concentration of political power and its use in the interest of the holders of that power would be equally inevitable. Handicraft production can, to a considerable extent, confer immunity from such abuse of political power.

Khadi has also played an active role in the political life of the country. One of the objectives of the Congress has been to oust foreign cloth which is the symbol of the country's enslavement and a reason for its perpetuation. If for the rising demand for indigenous cloth, reliance had to be placed exclusively on mill cloth, the movement of Swadeshi would have ended only in raising its price and reinforcing the exploitation of the poor masses.

The quintessence of these is enshrined in the Constitution of India in the following terms :

- "The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing :
- (a) that the citizens, men and women, equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;
 - (b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good;
 - (c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment;
 - (d) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women;
 - (e) that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength;
 - (f) that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment."

CHAPTER VI

AS A CULTURAL FORCE

Between culture and the lack of it, the essential difference is based on the quality of the outlook on life. For men of culture the quest of bread and other material satisfactions cannot be detached from the pursuit of art, literature, religion or philosophy. Life on one plane reacts on the other; and all activity is designed to help the individual along the road to the destination of human endeavour, viz., the rounded development of man in society. It is such an integral view of life which can alone give rise to true culture. Culture does not consist in outward form, in a high standard of living, in a particular degree of education or polish of manners. It is ultimately a matter of the experience of the soul and the expression of personality. It is the individuality of man, his distinctive self, something in him which craves for self-expression, the impulse to create in concrete terms, his idea of good and beauty that elevates the human being above the level of the animal.

The masses cannot derive their culture from academies or express it through literary creation or great works of fine art. Their culture consists in the experience of long generations; and their soul expresses itself in their customs, usages, traditions and above all their handicrafts. The masses base their ideas of right or wrong and express them through their limited social and industrial relations; and their conception of beauty and ugliness lives in their daily work. The advent of the machine has dislocated the old relations and supplanted the old occupations. By a minute subdivision of labour, by a perfect standardization of operations, by

reducing the workers' duty to a mere jerk of the hand or pressure of the finger, man was been reduced to the level of an inferior automation. The handicraftsman was always conscious of the fact that he was producing for his own use or generally that of his immediate neighbours. He imparted his character to his goods. The machine produces for distant markets with no human link or mutual obligation between the producer and the consumer and the result is a pile of soulless goods.

Khadi recalls to our mind the fresh country side, the open fields, rustic simplicity and the day's labour carried on in humane domestic surroundings; on the other hand, large factories usually connote slums and smoke, drink and vice, chronic disease and early death, and a daily grind in cheerless surroundings in the midst of nerve-racking noise and incessant bustle. Instead of being its own reward, work has become a punishment. Instead of helping human growth, it brings the workers down in the scale of humanity. As long as the huge mass of humanity remains baulked of the opportunities of self-expression in their humble sphere, there will be restlessness and instability in social life. Khadi and other handicrafts offer a simple culture within universal reach, a wide channel for self-expression on however humble a scale.

CHAPTER VII

ECONOMICS OF KHADI

Is Khadi a sound economic proposition? This question concentrates the deep scepticism as to the economic value and potentialities of Khadi felt by those who are reared on the economic theory which grew up with the advance of the era of mechanized production. To them nothing is worthwhile in the economic sphere which does not fit in with the theory of margins, of division of labour, of large-scale production and a high mathematical efficiency. It is right to concede these points of superiority in favour of mill cloth. It is true that an Indian Ring Spinner looks after 200 to 400 spindles and earns a wage of about 10 annas to Rs. 1-8-0 and that the Indian mill cloth trade yields crores of rupees in the way of commissions and profit to the employers, the machinists, the merchants and the shop-keepers; whereas a hand-spinner minds one spindle and earns 2 annas: and for those employed in the Khadi trade, there are risks of loss rather than the lure of profit. But the question may be asked in turn: in what does economic soundness consist? As long as national wealth stood to gain by the application of the principle of laissez-faire in industry and commerce, free trade was the pet doctrine of the industrial nations of the West and cheapness was the highest merit. Nothing which could not pay its way deserved to exist. Driven by the urge which inheres in mechanised production, the machines became faster, the plant larger and the volume of goods increased at an enormous pace till all available markets were soaked and industrial expansion reached its limit in these countries. It did not stop there. There was the inevitable recoil. Markets which had

hitherto submitted passively to exploitation became active rivals in industrial production. The imitators went one better in the art of making cheaper articles so that there was a flow back of cheaper goods into the original home of machine production. A menace was thus created to the existence of home industries. In these conditions, economic theory took on a protectionist hue and, for safeguarding of home industry, it became legitimate to deprive the consumer of the right to buy in the cheapest market. The absolute price test, therefore, no longer holds. In India, for example, there is a difference of degree and of procedure only between the action of Government when it imposes 50 centum* duty on certain foreign goods and thereby comes in the way of the consumers obtaining this class of goods at 40 per centum less cost than they are bound to pay on account of the duty, and in Mahatma Gandhiji's appeal to the people to spend on Khadi 100 per centum more than they would have to pay for similar mill cloth. Neither Khadi nor mill cloth is economically sound in the sense that they can defy the onslaught of cheaper goods and hold their ground without external help. The question then resolves itself into one of balancing of gain and loss, with reference to the income and wealth of a nation as a whole and does not remain a matter of comparison of prices, wages or profits for certain individuals or sections of society.

The consumers who are inclined to respond to the appeal for patronizing Khadi will ask as to what is the justification for raising their cloth bill, say from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 200/- a year in a particular case; and, on that account, for foregoing the satisfactions derivable

* It was as high as 75 per cent on import of piece-goods of non-British origin in 1933-34.

At the time, India was under British rule. The duty was imposed to protect British imports and incidentally helped the Indian textile mill industry.

The import duty on textiles to-day is (see page 16 footnote)

from the use or consumption of other articles or the opportunity of saving up to that extent. The answer is simple. Any well-organized society would make itself responsible for providing subsistence through work or otherwise to all its members who conform to its laws and conventions. When there is not enough work to go round, the earnings from whatever work there is, are, in a number of countries, shared with those for whom work is not made available, by the grant of unemployment doles or relief of some sort. It is very often only an accident or chance or an unfavourable operation of the laws and institutions of society that one man finds employment and the means of living and another remains without both. The money for doles or other relief work comes as a rule from the revenues of the State to which the people have contributed from their separate incomes in the form of taxes, direct or indirect. Indirect taxes increase the price of goods on which they are imposed. The net result to the consumer is the same, so far as this income in terms of use of commodities and services is concerned. But there is a vital difference. The collection of taxes and the administration of the doles and the relief absorb a considerable part of the revenues in unproductive work and big salaries; whereas the sacrifice made in voluntary adoption of Khadi is directly and immediately turned into the service of the needy and goes so much further in achieving the object than State aid. A little arithmetic will make it plain that the direct arrangement of which Khadi is a type, entails much less cost per head for providing a certain measure and extent of relief than the indirect devices adopted by the industrialized countries; and to that extent, Khadi is preferable from the point of view of national economy. Another and a more vital difference between these two methods is that the system of Unemployment Insurance in vogue in foreign countries, simply maintains the unemployed without furnishing them with any useful occupation. Khadi distributes suitable work as well, subsistence. The former, in course of time, transforms the unemployed into the category of the unemployable and has on its debit side the deterioration of so much morale and skill and the loss of so much capacity for work.

Khadi on the other hand, preserves and develops skill and capacity. In any proper computation of national wealth, the qualitative value of man power will constitute an item of the foremost importance; and a fair appraisal of the economic worth of Khadi will be possible only when its influence on this factor in the national wealth is duly acknowledged.

The economic basis of Khadi is, however, attacked on the ground that on the average it offers an insignificant income to the individual workers. Three annas even are according to the critics a contemptible figure as the remuneration of a whole time worker. In answer, it may be stated that it is not proper to judge the value of the arrangement by the individual earnings of spinner. We have to look at the aggregate family income under one system and the other. There is no manner of doubt that the aggregate family income of the villages would be considerably increased when Khadi replaces mill cloth. In a properly ordered rural economy no individual or family would be reduced to the plight of having to earn all his or its maintenance from spinning alone. It will be an occupation for the free hours of the family; and the bread winners of the family would necessarily be engaged in agriculture or some major process or handicraft. Moreover, if the hand-spinners are content with an anna or two or three per day, it is not because they would not rush at a chance of earning eight annas or a rupee, but because, if they were to reject the offer of this small amount, they would have nothing at all in its place.* To the person who is enabled to earn this little bit by Khadi, it is a sound enough proposal. For the country which maintains the Khadi industry, it is sound also, if instead of four lakhs of mill workers getting ten annas each, a few crores of its people can be

* With the introduction of the Ambar Charkha the wage level of the hand-spinners will increase considerably. According to the programme of the All India Khadi & Village Industries Board, an average spinner on the Ambar Charkha will be able to earn Rs. 0-12-0 per day of 8 hours. This rate compares favourably with the average rate of wages for agricultural labour in the country.

put in the way of earning, say two to three annas each, to keep body and soul together. To understand the life-giving power of the paltry sum of two to three annas per head, it is necessary to put it by the side of the average income per capita in India. Taking the rich and the poor together, the income per head has been estimated between two and four annas a day.*

That part of the production of Khadi which is marketed in towns and cities, rests on the support of those whose use of hand-spun and hand-woven cloth is inspired by sentiment. But individual sentiment is not a permanent or a secure foundation for an industry. Human nature being what it is, everybody has not the capacity for voluntary taxation for the sake of even so worthy an object as Khadi. In the existing circumstance, therefore, the position of market-Khadi is likely to fluctuate according to the atmosphere of the country, the degree of awakening to the problems of national welfare, and the education of public opinion, till the Government of the land, some day, totally prohibits the importation of cloth from outside, delimits the sphere of mill cloth or restricts its quantity, and thus permits Khadi to progress towards its rightful place in the economic life of India. Any limitation of the quantity of mill cloth will probably lead to some increase in the margin of profit on the output of such mill cloth as is available. This margin the State could easily and legitimately obtain by taxation and the funds thus secured could be applied to the financing and subsidizing of the production of Khadi.

There is nothing heretical in the plea for a subsidy for Khadi. Bounty-fed industries are not a new phenomena. The United States Administration has recently been helping the cotton crop with an

* The per capita national income is at present computed at Rs. 256 per annum. In rural areas (Agricultural Labour Inquiry Report) this income is computed at Rs. 104 per annum, or, less than Rs. 9 per month, or about Rs. 0-5-4 per day.

immense subsidy.* Nearer home, we handed over large sums of the taxpayers' money, under the Steel Industry Protection Act 1924, to the steel industry to keep it alive.

There is another part of Khadi—a much greater part—which stands on the rugged foundations of the economic necessity of consumers themselves. It needs no more than a little encouragement and guidance to maintain its position and expand its sphere of usefulness. The spinning wheel plies in a vast number of homes in the country and output of yarn is given to weavers to be converted into cloth for personal wear and for a variety of domestic purposes. All this does not form part of any census of production. No economic survey of this huge economic activity exists and no statistics relating to it are available in any Government Report. It has met with all possible discouragement—the apathy of Government, the contempt of the intelligentsia, ignorance and illiteracy of those engaged in it, the absence of the reviving influence of technical improvements, and the growing fascination for machine-made cloth§. Yet this activity is being still maintained on a large scale. Under the significant phrase 'self-sufficiency,' the All India Spinners Association has for some years been devoting attention to this field of production. It would be bad economy for a businessman to occupy himself in work worth one anna an hour when that hour can otherwise bring him ten rupees, but if having devoted himself to his business to the point of mental exhaustion, he finds leisure for a few hours and gives those hours to carpentry or gardening or some other hobby which combines for him recreation with the production utilities, an out-turn worth an anna even

* Even at present the United States Administration maintains tariff restrictions on the import of a number of consumer goods for which there is demand inside the country. These restrictions are maintained to protect indigenous production against foreign competition.

§ To this category belongs Reja of Rajasthan. Spinning and weaving Reja was almost a universal cottage industry. The yarn used is 6 to 9 counts. Now mill spun yarn of these counts is delivering a death-blow to this cottage industry.

would be good business for him and for the nation. How much more bussiness-like must be an arrangement which utilizes not merely daily leisure, but long spells of enforced idleness, and which concerns itself primarily and largely not with those who have adequate incomes from other sources but with that vast masses of the people of this land in the rural areas who are without the barest minimum of subsistence and are condemned to a sort of sub-human, semi-starved condition of life. For this condition they are not themselves responsible. They have in most cases, sufficient intelligence, artistic sense, self-respect and honesty to pursue with success any decent vocation, provided they are given the opportunity and the requisite training.

Millions of such people are compelled to live on the scanty yield of minute holdings of land—an average of 2.9 acres* for each cultivator which can neither fill their stomach nor occupy the time they have at their disposal. Khadi can harness the countless hours which go waste to the service of Daridra Narayan, furnishing the naked with clothing and saving for other urgent needs of the poor the money which their clothing bill would otherwise have consumed. There are 6,96,831 villages in India, having about 91.2 per cent of the population of the country. § Taking the value of the clothing requirements of an average village at roughly about a thousand rupees and assuming that the self-sufficiency programme is capable of adoption in only about two thirds of these village where cotton can be grown, Khadi for us emerges as a proposition worth over 40 crores of rupees for the rural areas, deducting the price of raw materials at the source from the price of mill cloth. To see that this advantage materialises in full, there is need of capable workers' organisations and resources for propaganda, mechanical

* Even this has been reduced due to the increase of population since 1935. According to the 1951 Census Report the per capita average handing is only a little over 1 acre.

§ Due to the partition of the country, the number of villages in India is now computed at 5,50,000, with 85 percent of the population living in it.

improvement and the supply of tools and necessary services.

The question may still be asked as to why instead of concentrating on self-sufficiency work and expanding it to its utmost limits, should valuable energy and resources of the nation be applied to the propping the market-Khadi which cannot stand by itself. Apart from the fact that the better placed inhabitants of the towns and cities would appreciate the opportunities which Khadi brings to other doors, of rendering services to and doing their duty by their hungry and naked fellow countrymen, the sale of Khadi and its use by the educated and advanced sections of Indian Society must be maintained and developed if it is desired to avoid the decay and disuse of "domestic" Khadi even in the rural areas. Within living memory, Khadi disappeared or was greatly reduced as an article of wear in certain parts of the country because it came to be looked upon as inelegant and uncouth as a clothing material. Unless people of culture, the fashionable circles, the leaders of different ranks of life and well-to-do generally show their approval of Khadi by adopting it for habitual wear, Khadi cannot obtain or retain the stamp of respectability which it needs so much for playing its part in the uplift of the rural areas of the country. Nor can Khadi adequately enlist the good offices of science for raising it to higher places of efficiency if it does not command the loving interest of thousands of the intelligentsia.

Many would allow that Khadi merits support as an unofficial system of famine insurance or a philanthropic arrangement for the relief of distress. Many would also concede that if a poor man has spare time, he would do well to make use of it in preparing his own cloth if there is nothing better to do. What is questioned, however, is the efficacy of the handicraft system of production in maintaining an adequate level of production. When Khadi is alluded to as a reversion to primitive modes of living, the idea is that the standard of living of the people would deteriorate to the level of an uncivilized community. But will it ? It is very wrongly assumed that since the workers engaged in the mill industry are enabled to produce at half the price 50 times as much as the hand workers can, the wealth of the country

is increased 100 times by the establishment of the large-scale factories. It would be so if all the workers who used to find occupation in handicrafts were given employment in such factories. Actually one only out of the 50 has got work in the mills and the remaining 49 have ceased to create any wealth. It may still be urged that 50 crores of rupees worth of cloth which the mills produce, would have cost the country a hundred crores of rupees. If it had been Khadi, so that there is a saving of Rs. 50 crores. It is forgotten that over a crore of persons who have been rendered idle are all the time consuming some wealth, although they are not producing any. They remain on the land as a burden on its scanty income and cause a reduction in the standard of living of millions of families who are even otherwise leading a life of want and privation. By curtailing the food and other necessities of the peasantry—thus impairing its vitality and by withdrawing resources from agriculture, this change from handicrafts to machinery deals a heavy blow to the economic structure of the country. And the purchasing power which is released goes to the towns where the benefit arising from its use can hardly repair even a small fraction of the injury which its withdrawal from the villages has done there. In areas from which factory labour is drawn, agriculture suffers also by a shortage of hands in the sowing and harvesting seasons. But the soil would be incapable of maintaining this extra labour throughout the year, in the absence of some subsidiary occupation for the slack season. When the balance-sheet of gain and loss of the change from Khadi to mill cloth is drawn up, it would be necessary to show against the saving of fifty crore of rupees in price, the annual loss of over 300 crores of working days of the villages which at the lowest computation are not worthless than the amount saved. At rates paid at present, for making Khadi, the value of this labour is about Rs. 70 crores. It will also be necessary to prepare a catalogue of the large number of people who are at present engaged in doing nothing or in unnecessary tasks incidental to large-scale production and commerce on a competitive basis, and who in a simplified economic system would be making a useful contribution to the National Dividend.

CHAPTER VIII

HISTORY, ORGANISATION AND POLICY

Khadi, of course, held the field everywhere till it was supplanted by machine-made cloth. In India, the displacement commenced towards the close of the eighteenth century and foreign mill cloth had established its supremacy by the middle of the nineteenth century. Before this happened, India was *par excellence* the home of Khadi production and was noted all over the world for the unrivalled delicacy and artistic excellence of its muslins and calicos. Half the country was engaged in the making of cloth; and in addition to meeting the entire home demand, India could export large quantities to foreign countries. In the year 1790, the East India Company exported from Bengal, Madras and Surat over 10 lakh of pieces valued in those days at nearly rupees two crores and seventy five lakhs. These exports were maintained notwithstanding legal prohibition during a period and despite heavy duties which, in some years, rose higher than the price of cloth mounting to 600 per centum in the case of some articles, and attaining, in the case of one, the enormous figure of 3000 per centum. This trade with England was, however, slowly strangled till in 1830, the exports of cotton goods from India had declined to about Rs. 8 lakhs. In the same year British goods and yarn imported into India had attained a value of about Rs. 76 lakhs. By the middle of the nineteenth century, exports had been practically extinguished. The home trade was then systematically stifled by the persecution of the artisans, by numerous restrictions, harassing exactions, taxes and heavy inland transit duties. The imports of British piece-goods

steadily expanded and simultaneously the export of raw cotton also increased. In the year 1818, the first Indian mill was started. In the opening year of the twentieth century, the Indian mill products and the imports of foreign cloth were 42 crore yards and 187 crore yards respectively. In 1913-14, the first year of the European war, Indian mills produced 116 crore yards and foreign countries satisfied the clothing requirements of the country to the extent of 304 crore yards. During the war, the import trade shrank down and the Indian mills got an opportunity of consolidating their position. Immediately after the War, the relative position was as follows :-

| | Year Yds. (Crore) | 1919-20 Rs. (Crore) |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Indigenous mill production | 164 | 58 |
| Foreign imports | 83 | 48 |

In the very next year (1920-21), the imports of foreign cloth leaped up and Indian mill production declined to some extent. At this juncture, the Congress programme of non-co-operation was applied to the consumption of foreign cloth and its success became immediately evident in the cotton textile statistics of the country. The comparative figures are given below:-

| | Quantity (in yards) 1920-21 : 1921-22 CRORES | | Value (in rupees) 1920-21 : 1921-22 CRORES | |
|------------------------|---|-----|---|----|
| Indian mill production | 158 | 173 | 53 | 61 |
| Foreign Imports | 141 | 98 | 80 | 40 |

The imports climbed again and maintained a high level till 1929-30. Mahatmaji launched the Civil Disobedience Movement in March 1930 and its phenomenal influence on the trend of cloth

trade may be seen from the following statement:-

| | (Crores of Yards) | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| | 1929-30 | 1930-31 | 1931-32 |
| Foreign Imports (less exports) | 181 | 81 | 69 |
| Indian Mill production | 242 | 256 | 299 |

In the year 1934, the imports of foreign piece-goods were approximately one hundred crore yards.

As soon as Mahatma Gandhi entered the arena of Indian politics, he saw at once that there could be no freedom or happiness for this land if steps were not taken to cure the anaemia from which the economic constitution of the country was suffering. The future of the country rested on the re-organisation of the handicrafts, chief among them being Khadi, i.e., hand-spun and hand-woven cloth. How Khadi received increasing recognition at the hands of the Congress and what measures were adopted to place Khadi work on a permanent footing, are briefly described in the Khadi Guide published by the All India Spinners' Association in the year 1931, in the following words :-

“The first introduction of Charkha and handspinning in the national programme was at the special session of the Congress in 1920 when hand-spinning and the wearing of khadi, i.e., hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, were prescribed as measures of discipline and self-sacrifice for every man, woman and child.” At the Nagpur Congress, the Resolution was reiterated and in the following March, the All India Congress Committee at Bezwada, called upon the nation to get ready 20 lakhs of working charkhas. Khadi was worked from that date by the different Congress Committees as part of their own programme of work. In 1922, an All India Khadi Department was created by the A.I.C.C. for supervising the work, but the actual work itself was being carried on by the several Provincial and subordinate Congress Committees till December 1923, when the

Congress, at Cocanada, started the All India Khadi Board to supervise and control all the Khadi work in the country in co-operation with Provincial Khadi Boards to be established by the several Provincial Congress Committees. This organization lasted till September 1925, when the All India Spinners' Association was started by Mahatma Gandhi.

“The Association was started in September 1925, at Patna as a result of the need felt for an expert organization, unaffected by politics, for the development of hand-spinning and Khadi. The All India Congress Committee which met at Patna at the same time, passed a resolution transferring to the Association all the Congress investments in Khadi, including the assets of the All India Khadi Board and the Provincial Khadi Boards that had come into existence as a result of the Cocanada Congress decision. The Constitution of the Association was adopted at an inaugural meeting on 23rd September 1925. It has since been amended... ..” Some idea of the work that is being done by this organization may be gathered from the fact that in 1934, the centres connected with the All India Spinners' Association produced nearly one crore square yards or about 33 lakh pounds of Khadi valued at about Rs. 34 lakhs. There were 517 sale depots of which 288 belonged to the Spinners' Association, 38 were aided by the organization and 241 were running independently. The sales during the year amounted to Rs. 47 lakhs. The activities of the Association cover nearly 6,000 villages.

A perusal of the Annual Reports of the All India Spinners' Association gives one a glimpse into the growth of the organization and its policy since 1925. The Annual Report for 1926-27 describes the main features of the organization as follows :—

“Before mentioning the present position and the extent of the work, it is desirable to say a word about the different types of the organization that are now doing work in the Khadi field. First, there is the Association itself with its provincial branches and the several

departmental centres of work. The Association is not merely carrying on direct work at its own centres, but is also engaged in helping, supervising and co-ordinating the work of other Khadi organizations. Secondly, there are independent public organizations which are working not for profit, but with the sole object of promoting the interest of the movement. These are run by groups of patriotic workers whose sacrifice and devotion are giving a high tone to the whole work. These organizations have received large financial assistance from the Association. Under this class may also be brought the several Ashrams and other institutions which are either centres of training for Khadi workers or are doing intensive village reconstruction work in a limited area with Khadi as the centre of the programme. The third class consists of private organizations which are working for profit on the ordinary commercial lines, although it is but limited profit that Khadi will yield. Some of them are aided with loans from the Association; to many, relief is given whenever possible by purchase of their goods or loans on the pledge of cotton, yarn or Khadi; but mostly they are running their work on their own capital. Much the largest number of these organizations are in the South.*

In the following year, the Council of the All India Spinners' Association adopted the general policy of running only those centres which could be conducted on a self-supporting basis. The provincial branches were required to frame their budgets accordingly. It does not mean that losses have not occurred after that. In the case of the new centres, losses are unavoidable in the earlier stages. Some losing centres are kept up because of the high propaganda value of the work carried on there.

* The All India Spinners' Association and its sister organisation, the All India Village Industries Association, were merged in the Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh in 1953 when the All India Khadi and Village Industries Board was set up by the Government of India. This Board has taken over much of the commercial production of these industries and has, since February, 1953, been organising and executing programmes for their development with the funds placed with it by the Government of India.

The deep significance of self-sufficiency work and the immense importance of self-spinning were grasped at a very early stage of the Khadi campaign. The word went forth in 1921 that it was the duty of every Indian to devote half an hour daily to spinning as an act of sacrifice at the altar of Daridra Narayan. The spinning franchise was accepted by the Congress in 1924. The membership contribution of the All India Spinners' Association is a monthly quota of a thousand yards of yarn. Self-sufficiency work in the villages was taken up by earnest workers from the start of the movement and has been steadily developing since then. Model centres have been created to demonstrate the great potentialities of self-sufficiency in Khadi. Many educational institutions have introduced spinning in their curriculum. Spinning by school children has naturally a considerable propaganda value.

The Indian Legislature passed the Indian "Khaddar" (name protection) Act in the year 1933 restricting the use of the name Khaddar and Khadi as trade descriptions (under the Indian Merchandise Marks Act, 1889) exclusively signifying cloth spun and woven in India by hand. It was a very necessary measure in view of the fact that the higher price of Khadi created a temptation for unscrupulous dealers to palm off spurious Khadi as genuine on the unsuspecting public. It is regrettable that the provincial legislatures have not yet followed this up by similar legislation, in the absence of which, the Act remains ineffective.* Numerous local bodies have exempted Khadi from octroi duty or the terminal tax. Khadi has also been making headway in Indian States. The success which has attended the efforts of the Mysore State in developing Khadi production is remarkable. The Baroda State is evincing commendable interest in Khadi and has placed at the disposal of the All India Spinners'

* The Government of India has now prepared Draft of a model Bill named "The Sale of Khadi Bill". The Bill was referred to the All India Khadi and Village Industries Board which has suggested certain material amendments. The Bill is still under scrutiny. This bill seeks to enlarge the scope of the previous legislation by licencing trade only by approved persons or agencies.

Association funds and facilities for the encouragement of the production of Khadi within its territories. The Bhawnagar State is giving keen attention to the self-sufficiency programme and defrays the expenses of the workers engaged in this activity in the State.

The high price of Khadi is the crucial difficulty in the way of its propagation. Naturally there has been continuous effort to reduce as much as possible the disparity between the price of Khadi and that of mill cloth. The measure of success in this direction can be judged from the fact that whereas a piece of plain Khadi sold at Rs. 0-6-9 per yard in 1924, much superior Khadi of the same size is now available at three annas per yard. Deducting the price of raw material, the fall in the price of finer Khadi is still larger. The price of Khadi is made up mostly of wages when the raw material is excluded. It is the contribution of these wages which constitute practically the sole object of khadi. No reduction in price at the expence of wages can, therefore, be welcome. The decline in price that has, however, been secured is largely by increase in efficiency and economy in overhead charges.

With the passing of the following resolution by the All India Village Industries' Association in August 1935, with regard to the wages paid to the artisans, a new chapter opens in the history of Khadi:

“Whereas the object of the Association includes bringing about the moral and material advancement of the rural population by encouraging the revival of dead and dying industries, the Board of Management desire that for all commodities produced or marketed under the aegis of the Association, each workman, should receive a minimum wage calculated on the basis of eight hours' efficient work sufficient at least for his (or her) maintenance in accordance with a scientifically prescribed scale of minimum food requirements; and it would be the duty of all connected with the Association to see that the workmen engaged in the industries promoted by them

actually receive remuneration never less than the scale herein prescribed, always bearing in mind that as and when circumstances permit, there should be a progressive rise in the scale so as to reach standard enabling a worker's family to be properly maintained out of the earnings of its working members."

The views recently expressed by Mahatma Gandhi in various issues of the "Harijan" on the question of a proper wage and its inter-relation with the price of goods, are the genesis of the resolution and create an essentially new basis for social economics which is more in keeping with the cult of Khadi than the economic conceptions to which we are accustomed. Of Gandhiji's economic philosophy, the starting point as well as the goal, are the wellbeing of living human beings of the world rather than an abstract economic man or proud statistical records of speed, production and accumulation.

When the Congress, through the All-India Khadi Board and, later on, the All India Spinners' Association, assumed the function of producing and selling Khadi, it created a special market for selling this cloth. Moved by patriotic fervour and by strong feeling for the poor roused by Gandhiji, people were induced to pay the prices of Khadi ruling in those days. But there was pressure from all sides to make Khadi cheaper. There was also the competition of the private producers for whom cheapness of production was a much more important consideration than the standard of the workers. The All India Spinners' Association had to adapt the basis of production which developed in these conditions.

The stern and ruthless economics of competition compels the artisans to accept wages insufficient to provide the barest maintenance just as, earlier, it drove his goods out of the market. We had so far tried to restore to his goods their legitimate place, but had neglected to do the same for himself. Gandhiji has, however, pointed the finger of rebuke at this neglect. The essence of the new thought is that the A. I. V. I. A. and the A. I. S. A. have to

lay out their activity in terms of the human needs of the workers engaged in the handicrafts and that they have not to follow the easy path of using their helplessness in the interests of the market for Khadi and the village products. So far everything has been made to subserve the uncontrolled and non-human forces of the market. Now it is said, let the market be re-shaped to suit the ends of humanity. Not what will succeed at the moment, but what will serve best ultimately is the slogan of the future.

Rendered in concrete terms, the change which is contemplated amounts for the present to raising the wages of the spinners to a minimum of about three annas for a day of eight hours. The present rates differ considerably in various centres as also the standard of living of the artisans. The minimum rates may differ still on account of the variations in the cost of living, but they will be so adjusted as to ensure a uniform minimum standard throughout the country for a particular occupation. This radical change which the resolution introduces in the commercial side of Khadi had, at the outset, started many of the workers in the Khadi movement, but as they catch its deeper significance, the enthusiasm for it grows.

The fear is still lurking in the minds of a number of those connected with Khadi work that the rise in the wage cost following the introduction of the 'minimum wage principle' would raise the price of Khadi to such an extent as to cause a serious shrinkage in the demand for Khadi. The net result must be that, while the condition of some of the workers would be improved, many more would be thrown out of work and rendered practically resourceless. However plausible the argument may appear, it misses the purpose of the movement to encourage the sale in towns of village products, including Khadi. If those who wear Khadi consider that they do so at a sacrifice, let the sacrifice be large enough to cover the minimum cost of production of Khadi, i. e. to provide for the producers of Khadi a sufficiency of food and the barest minimum of other requisi-

tes of human life. If Khadi fails to do that, the users of Khadi would be taking out of the artisans much more than they would be putting back into them. Of such gross unfairness, no lover of Khadi would consent to be guilty, even if he has to incur a little more expenditure on his clothing requirements under the new arrangement.

The new wage policy is as long a step forward in terms of human progress with reference to our present position as the acceptance of Khadi by the Congress in 1922 was in relation to the wholesale and exclusive use of mill cloth at the time.

CHAPTER IX

THE TECHNIQUE OF KHADI

From the picking of cotton to the hand weaving and finishing of cloth, there is a long series of operations of more or less delicacy and calling for varying degrees of dexterity and experience. The character, shape and handling of tools as well as the class and pattern of goods differ widely in different parts of the country. The differences depend on and reveal a variety of tastes, aptitudes, habits, customs and social and economic conditions generally in the various tracts.

When in 1920, Khadi found place as one of the major planks in the Congress Programme for the attainment of Swaraj, the processes of Khadi were carried on in different parts in fixed and rigid forms sanctioned by tradition. There is evidently a great deal of common sense and mechanical insight embodied in the tools and the operations in traditional use. Simple as they are, they were well adjusted to the conditions in which they originated and developed. Of the marvellous ingenuity, skill and delicacy of touch and manipulation attained in earlier times, there is eloquent testimony in the glowing descriptions by numerous historians and travellers, of the incredible fineness, exquisite designs and un-surpassed beauty, richness and perfection of the fabrics produced and exported in

large quantities in those days. It appears, however, that about a century ago, the development of the art was arrested for which history has an explanation. We have sketched this explanation in an earlier chapter. In the years that followed, the art rapidly decayed. In the normal course, under the protecting care of a sympathetic national government, the advance of scientific knowledge would have infused fresh vigour into the handicrafts of the country and endowed them with considerable power of resistance against the competition of machine goods; but the peculiar political circumstances of the country forced Khadi and other hand-made goods into a position of serious disadvantage. Khadi was rescued from the condition of utter neglect to which it had been reduced, as the movement for the political emancipation of the country developed and gathered momentum. Under the fostering care that has been bestowed on Khadi during the past fifteen years, it has been reviving slowly. Although the craft of spinning yarn and weaving cloth by hand had fallen into desuetude in several parts of the country and although the internal exchange of Khadi had shrunk to very small proportions, while its external trade had long been dead, the Congress when it took up the propagation of Khadi, was not faced with the task of resurrecting an entirely forgotten art. Except in Chicacole in Vazagapatam Taluka, the higher branches of the knowledge were not being practised and the fairy fabrics styled as *Shabunam* and *Ab-i-rawan* whose names recall the elusive charm of the 'morning dew' and the 'running water' were available only as relics of a distant part. In its cruder forms, the craft had survived over large areas in the country; but it is interesting to note that the manufacture of Khadi was not being carried on at the same level in all the places where it was in vogue. One place excelled another in this or that point or process. To study and pool into a fund, the best in the widely scattered techniques and to disseminate it for general use was the first duty of the organization which the Congress brought into being for the purpose of the advancement of Khadi. It is even to-day an important function of the All

India Spinners' Association to act as a clearing house for such knowledge.*

As the Congress movement advanced, a demand for Khadi sprung up on all sides. It was mostly the demand of those who had long been accustomed to the use of high class machine-made goods, mainly of foreign make. The emphasis in the beginning had to be on quantity, on more cloth – let it be any sort of cloth. What in fact went by the name of Khadi at the time was a coarse grey piece of cloth produced without heed to wearing qualities, appearance, design or finish. Whatever quantities of the stuff were thrown on the market were avidly consumed. But Khadi could not be allowed to stay there. Under the stimulus of an insistent demand for a better class of goods and as a result of the assiduous attention devoted to the technique of Khadi by the All India Spinners' Association and its branches, yarn has become finer, has assumed increasing uniformity and picked up more and more strength; and cloth has improved in all directions in design, bleaching, colouring, printing, etc. Khadi had been struggling forward during these years. It has found its way, on merit or quality to the wardrobes of the most cultured members of society and occupies a place of pride in the most elegant drawing rooms of the country. Khadi has also carved fresh fields for itself and won the hearts of many who would have given no place to it there, in its earlier crudeness and coarse simplicity.

The following is a very brief summary of the improvements

* These functions are now undertaken and discharged by the All India Khadi and Village Industries Board which "is responsible for preparing and organising programmes for the production and development of Khadi and Village Industries, including training of personnel, manufacture and supply of equipment, supply of raw materials, marketing and research, and study of the economic problems of different village industries. The Board will also function as a clearing house of information and experience relating to these industries." (From the resolution of the Government of India).

that have taken place in the production of Khadi since its adoption by the Congress :

- (1) **COTTON** :— The cultivation of tree cotton has been encouraged in some parts where ordinary cotton could not be grown, with a view to remove the burden of transport charges on the production of Khadi in those parts. The selection of an appropriate quality of cotton for spinning particular counts of yarn has been studied and propaganda is being carried on in favour of stocking suitable staples of cotton in season.
- (2) **GINNING** :— The Ginning Wheel turns out about 2 lbs per hour. An improved type is in use in Bardoli at present which gives an out-turn three times as high.
- (3) **CARDING** :— The Carding Bow has been transformed into a much more efficient instrument than it used to be. The smaller size makes it handier and the finer gut composed of 4 strands in place of 14 before, ensures more effective cleaning of cotton and a thorough separation of the fibres. The result is that the same cotton yields a higher count of yarn of better quality. Since successful carding depends on the quality of the gut more than on anything else, a special study of the process of gut-making has been made and considerable improvement effected.

A carding machine has been devised which gives much better results in point of production per hour as well as the quality of the material. It has been introduced in the Mysore State where it is giving satisfactory service.*

* Further improvements have been effected in carding processes and equipment. The Dhunai-Modia which has been evolved has been found to be more efficient than the earlier processes both in point of productivity and utility.

- (4) **SPINNING WHEEL:-** The Spinning Wheel combines in one sweep of the hand all the five operations in a textile mill, viz., Drawing, Slubbing, Intermediate, Roving and the final attenuation on a ring or a mule spindle. On the improved wheel, the Yeroda Charkha devised by Mahatma Gandhi during his incarceration in Yeroda (Yervada) prison, the spindle efficiency is considerably increased. The spindle gets a speed of over ten thousand revolutions per minute and yields about 450 yards of yarn of 20 counts per hour. This represents an advance of about 50 per centum on the old wheel, largely in use in most parts of the country. This progress was achieved in successive stages by continuous experimentation by many workers.

The wheel designed by Mr. Rajagopalan of Bangalore, marks a radical change in the method of spinning with the introduction of continuous feeding of sliver and a production of about 800 yards per hour.

A prize of a lakh of rupees was announced in May 1929 for the invention of a spinning wheel which can be handled conveniently by village folk, spin 2000 yards per hour and not cost more than Rs. 150/-. Several attempts have been made disclosing gratifying improvements in various directions. But none has so far satisfied all the tests. The model offered for competition by Messrs. Kirloskar Brothers is an admirable device compressing all the processes from carding to spinning; but it is handicapped by bulk and complexity. The multiple spindle wheel has

yet to prove its utility as an instrument suitable for use in the cottages of rural India.*

Side by side, the quality of yarn has improved steadily in twist, strength and uniformity, thus furnishing a sound basis for the weaving of durable cloth. The average count has been gradually rising.

- (5) **WEAVING:**—Efforts are being made in various centres to improve the preliminary processes by the introduction of more efficient devices. The strength, closeness and finish of the texture has improved very considerably. Qualities have been standardized. In the art of designing, remarkable progress has been registered. An amazing variety of pattern in the body and border of cloth has been introduced meeting all requirements and satisfying all tastes. The technique of dyeing and printing and handpainting has everywhere moved with long strides. Indigenous colours are also being tried.

Local artistic talent has responded magnificently to the impetus of the movement. Many fascinating patterns have been rescued from the oblivion of the past. New designs and original patterns of great beauty have been evolved. The arts of lace work and embroidery have also been enlisted to promote the variety and attractiveness of Khadi.

THE FUTURE

How far the vast potentialities of Khadi will be revealed in the years to come, in actual increase in the production and sale of

* The latest find in the search for the improved Charkha is the Ambar Charkha. Its spinning capacity is 1,200 yards to 1,800 yards an hour of 20's yarn. (For a further information about the Ambar Charkha, see the separate pamphlet published by the All India Khadi and Village Industries Board).

Khadi depend on the play of various forces in the future. Several obstacles have stood in the way of the progress of Khadi. There is, in the first place, the comparative dearness of Khadi. The higher price of Khadi does appear to be a discouraging factor; but what really affects the minds of the consumers is not the fact that the price of Khadi is high, but that it is higher than mill cloth. During the war we paid for most commodities many times more than their present price because we had no alternative before us. It is a question of adaptation. If no mill cloth is available, the price of Khadi will no longer be felt as prohibitive. Against the price factor the durability of Khadi is an advantage which cannot be ignored. Even the price of Khadi can be brought down considerably by bringing to bear on the processes of Khadi production, all the influence of scientific knowledge to the extent it is applicable to a cottage industry.

It has to be admitted that such increase in efficiency as has so far been obtained is due to simple variations in and a rational rearrangement of the existing tools. The whole field of mechanical aids developed in modern times, remains unexplored so far as this handicraft is concerned. Prolonged experimentation is required which cannot be carried on without facilities and financial help such as the State provides in other countries. The magnificent progress Khadi has already made in quality, bears a promise of the much greater things that remain to be achieved in this direction. But its fulfilment depends on the measure of national effort which may be forthcoming. The advance of Khadi has also been hampered by inadequacy of resources and paucity of suitable workers for organization of this type of work. If more than a hundred crores are required for financing mill cloth, should not even a quarter of this be devoted to nursing back to life the dying industry of Khadi? A gigantic organization is needed with thousands of enthusiastic and capable workers who can identify themselves with the lives of the villagers and put their shoulders to the accomplishment of this uphill task.

The neglect experienced by Khadi at the hands of the State is not inexplicable. As the Government becomes more responsive to the wishes of the people and Indian political opinion becomes more effective, facilities for the expansion of Khadi should increase. The material handicaps of Khadi are serious enough. But far more formidable hinderances in the way of Khadi, are of a subjective origin. They are of varied character. There is an insufficient awakening of the sense of social justice generally. There is the self-complaisance of the upper classes on the one hand and the apathy and inertia of the poor and the down-trodden on the other. Ignorance of the great economic and social value of Khadi is coupled with a lack of faith in the capacity of Khadi to hold its ground against mill cloth.

When the conscience of the better-placed section of society is disturbed by the thought that the glitter and grandeur of the cities they inhabit, stands on the ruin of millions of homesteads in the villages and that every single comfort they enjoy, is created out of the privations of numerous poor families in rural areas, the enthusiasm for Khadi will grow. The idea of brotherhood of man has not yet come home in the sense that every one who has enough to eat has a responsibility for all who have not and that a pice of superfluous expenditure in the face of want is a sin against humanity.

The outlook is, however, rapidly changing especially of the youths of the country. The feeling is growing that the existing economic arrangements involve large scale exploitation and tyranny and that something will soon have to be done for the semi-starved and the semi-naked mass of people in the villages. On the other hand, the Congress movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi has brought unprecedented mass awakening; and among the poor is being born a new self-respect and a new consciousness of their right to work and to have a decent life. More

and more of the intelligentsia and of the people in places of responsibility and power, will have to exert and search for some solution of the problem of Indian poverty and for ways of mitigating the present hardships. The minds of many will inevitably run in the old groove towards industrialization but as inevitably they would return to the handicrafts when the impossibility, in the existing circumstances of absorbing the huge population of the country in mechanized agriculture or large scale industry is perceived.

The huge capital that would be needed for the industrialization of India is not available; and even if it were, there would not be enough markets on this planet to absorb all the goods thrown up by an industrialized India. Khadi has, therefore, a great opportunity and a big place to fill in the life of the Indian nation.

What is necessary is to prepare the ground by carrying the message of Khadi to every door and make everybody see the supreme importance of Khadi for the economic, moral and spiritual regeneration of India. It is also necessary to remove the superstition about the sanctity of competition and about there being some special merit in the ability to withstand competition irrespective of all other consideration. Competition is not a perpetual principle of economic life or the only basis for production. There may be co-operative production, there may also be production for self-sufficiency. A civilized traveller may have no chance in a cannibal country, yet his life is not considered less worth preserving on that account.

Bad coins drive out the good. Adulterated stuff displaces genuine articles. But that does not win approval for bad coins or adulterated goods. The test of Khadi lies not in its strength to survive an unequal and wholly unnecessary struggle for existence, but in its capacity to promote the well-being of the people of the country. The prejudice against Khadi will diminish as appreciation of these facts increases.

Judging by all the signs, market-Khadi has a bright prospect, which depends on public support, State aid and intensive country-wide propaganda. But whatever happens to this section of Khadi production, the self-sufficiency programme in Khadi has a great future and a wide scope before it.

खादी-साहित्य

अभिन्न विचारों से परिपूर्ण और योजनाओं से समन्वित खादी-साहित्य का अध्ययन कर देश के ग्रामोद्योगों का प्रचार कीजिये और ग्रामीण भाइयों को अधिकाधिक रूप में रोज़ी दीजिये। पुस्तकें मँगा लीजिए :-

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