

"KHADI IS A HARBINGER OF PEACE AND AN ICON OF OUR FREEDOM AND NATIONAL EXISTENCE"

By SHRI V. K. SAXENA,
HON'BLE CHAIRMAN, KVIC

IN MILLENNIUM POST, NEW DELHI – SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2016

millenniumpost
New Delhi, Saturday, February 20,
2016

A CORNERSTONE OF MODERN INDIA

V.K.Saxena tells how Khadi is a harbinger of peace and an icon of our freedom and national existence

Production of Khadi is by far the largest rural productivity programme in the world, wherein thousands of families directly reach their produce to the consumer without the menace of middlemen or complex marketing apparatus. It provides the rural communities a high value for their effort while providing the consumers a great value for money. For the nation, it is undoubtedly an invaluable asset of heritage

We are increasingly talking about building a modern nation. While it is important to develop infrastructure, scientific spirit, technical strength, military might, artistic excellence and all those diverse faculties that characterise modernity, it is more important for us to recognise our foundational capacities, going forward. A nation owes much to the grain it is made of. And building a dream depends much on the foundations that have stayed with us for long.

Even after centuries of British rule, we as a nation remained distinctly grooved to the cultural and traditional ways of lives. Mahatma Gandhi was quick to perceive that our future lies in our core strength at the grass root level and that it cannot be built on a foundation of imported values. In the year 1920, in the middle of British imperialism in India, Gandhi ji launched "Khadi" as a political weapon of nationalism within the Swadeshi Movement. By calling it "the livery of freedom", he brought the eternal symbolism of self-sufficiency to India. He demonstrated to the British that India can sustain on its own while at the same time, gave the pride to Indians that they are free to weave the prosperity of their own lives from the fabric of their daily lives.

Khadi and the village productivity became a grand source of nationalism and India demonstrated to the world that our society is uniquely founded on the efforts and contributions of the rural masses. As such, Khadi came to be known not just a piece of cloth. It came to be a harbinger of peace and an icon of our freedom and national existence.

After Independence, the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) was established as a statutory body by the Government of India under the KVIC Act 1956. This was a tribute to the power of self-sufficiency that built a nation. A nation with a



Representational image

huge human resource that was willing to work but was bereft of economic resources had to channelise the collective human power and talents to produce useful national products while also supporting individuals to earn a livelihood and prosper. And India could never have pursued anything more significant and suitable than this aspiration of encouraging Khadi and Village Industries.

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Over 5,000 institutions and 30,000 societies form the vast network machinery are implementing the objectives and programmes of KVIC in India. Over 12 lac people are engaged in productive activities under KVIC's various schemes, a majority of which (over 80 percent) are women. KVIC generates over Rs. 31,000 crores, a major part (40 percent) of which flows back to the rural communities as livelihood support.

At a time now when the world is talking very seriously about the

ill effects of climate change and the enlarging carbon foot prints of industrialisation, India needs to establish on the world stage zero carbon footprint of Khadi industry, against the inadequately studied environmental harm being done by the synthetic textile industries. Based on estimated annual global textile production of over 60 billion kilograms (KG) of fabric, the estimated energy and water needed to produce it is 1,074 billion KWh of electricity (or 132 million metric tons of coal) and between 6 – 9 trillion liters of water. The synthetic textile industry is one of the largest green house gas emitter, amounting to about 1/20th of the total carbon produced. However, Khadi is hand spun and hand woven, using no electricity in the process of production. It is completely organic and carbon neutral. In many ways than one, Khadi should occupy a coveted place in the fabric industry as the yarn of future. This is the fundamental basis on which, we need to take Khadi to the global stage and demonstrate its modern relevance and future role for a cleaner and sustainable world.

Prime Minister in his recent "Mann Ki Baat" has rightly said that "We want to establish Khadi Gramudhyog network in the villages of India. Khadi has the potential to generate employment for millions." With this background, KVIC has an onerous responsibility of engaging the poorer and rural masses

in productive employment. KVIC has thus been mandated to serve as one of the main vehicles for rural development in India, by way of creating, promoting, encouraging and sustaining village enterprises of a very large diversity, among which, Khadi is the prime product.

One of the main missions of KVIC is to generate employment in the rural areas. Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) is an important platform of KVIC, under which a nominal investment by rural communities will entitle them to institutional funding to enable and empower them to start village industries. Over 2 million employment opportunities have been created by PMEGP since its inception in the country. One of the main contributions of the employment schemes of KVIC is to halt the urban migration of rural people, thereby encouraging the indigenous talent to prosper in rural areas.

Besides the many programmes and initiatives being pursued by KVIC, my current aspiration as the Chairman of the Commission is to revive sick village industries, double the sales and develop a mechanism for providing higher remuneration to the artisans. We also wish to utilise solar energy to run the weaving units, thereby reducing the dependence on physical labour. Bringing insurance to weavers, including them in a reliable network of health services, enhancing their educational capacity and bringing recognition to them and their efforts in the global mainstream of life are the most coveted objectives we are presently pursuing in KVIC. In all, the Khadi and Village Industries are increasingly proving their high relevance to modern India and the modern world as one of the most sustainable socio-economic models developed in human history.

(V.K.Saxena is Chairman, KVIC.
The views expressed are personal.)