

# Gandhi's Khadi Is Practical After 100 Years In Poor Nations

AUTHOR

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**Abstract:**

*Mahatma Gandhi, Introduced Khadi ,Hand Woven Clothes, Around 100 Years Ago Both To Challenge British Imperialism As Well As To Augment Income Of Poor People. Even 100 Years Ago, Khadi Was Considered Anachronism In Age Of Modern Machinery. However, If One Honestly Analyses The Economic And Business Model Of Khadi, After 100 Years It Is Still Practical For Increasing Income Of Poor People And Providing Employment Thus Challenging Modern Industry.*

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## I. Introduction

Industrial revolution with advent of technology and machinery has increased productivity tremendously thus increasing prosperity and reducing poverty. So any suggestion that perhaps hand made goods replacing machinery with human labour is bound to be seen as absurd and ridiculous.

However in underdeveloped countries of world even in 2020 almost 50% of population is still engaged in agriculture in a primitive way. And agriculture is a seasonal occupation, with long periods of lack of work and income. It is hence possible to increase the income of this group by resorting to traditional handmade production of clothes, shoes and other items during the slack season of agriculture.

Mahatma Gandhiji introduced Khadi, or handwoven, clothes precisely for this reason 100 years ago. Besides of course it was an independence struggle against foreign machine made clothes. While Khadi was considered absurd even 100 years ago, an out of the box thinking approach will reveal that Khadi is relevant even today 100 years later in at least 100 poor nations of world where agriculture is occupation of nearly 50% of the population.

This paper presents an Out of the Box thinking approach that postulates the validity of Khadi after 100 years of its introduction by Mahatma Gandhiji.

### What is Khadi?

Khadi is hand spun and hand woven cloth promoted by Mahatma Gandhiji as a tool for self-sufficiency for the freedom struggle of the Indian sub continent. Besides being a tool of freedom struggle Khadi was also meant as a production means to create employment and provide income to poor thus reducing poverty. The first piece of Khadi was made in 1917-18 in Sabarmati Ashram.

After the first world war of independence domestic textile industry was replaced by modern textiles from Britain and this impoverished India. Thus Khadi was both an independence struggle against modern British textiles and also a tool to increase incomes and enhance employment.



Of course Khadi was seen as anti technology and anti industry even 100 years ago. And hence Khadi has always had its detractors for past 100 years. In fact Charlie Chaplin the great entertainer tried to dissuade

Mahatma Gandhi from Khadi but ended himself making the movie *Modern Times* about modern industry inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.

In India today Khadi is still relevant in India. The Khadi and Village Industry Commission(KVIC) is charged with the planning, promotion, organisation and implementation of programs for the development of Khadi and other village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development whenever necessary.

In 2021-22 the turnover of KVIC was Rs. 1.15 lakh crore(1.15 billion rupees) and thus registering growth of 20% from previous year. Compared to the year 2014-15, the overall production in Khadi and Village Industry sectors in 2021-22 has registered a whopping growth of 172% while the gross sales during this period increased by over 248%. During the financial year 2021-22 Khadi and Village Industry Commission employed around 16 million people across India. The fact that the turnover of KVIC is 0.5% of India's GDP or 1.15 billion rupees proves that Khadi is relevant today. Of course,

### **Who is Gandhi?**

Nobel Laureate Albert Einstein said about Mahatma Gandhiji "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever walked on earth in flesh and blood." Mahatma Gandhiji is considered father of nation in India and is credited to have been chiefly responsible to win freedom for India. He is considered the greatest Indian ever. In fact it would not be entirely wrong to say that he is one the greatest person ever in the history of humanity in entire world.

He is regarded as saint and politician. In some ways he was also an economist who championed village industries. Thus he was a saint, politician and an economist. There have been saints as great as Mahatma Gandhi – Jesus, Mohammad and Buddha. There have been politicians as great as Mahatma Gandhiji – Lenin, Mao, Churchill, Lincoln, Mandela. There have been economists as great as Mahatma Gandhi – Smith, Keynes, Freidman and Malthus. However there is hardly anybody ever in history of humanity in entire world who can claim to be as great a saint, a politician and an economist as Mahatma Gandhiji.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an Indian lawyer and anti-colonial nationalist who employed non-violent resistance in the campaign for India's independence from British rule.

Born in 1869 in Gujarat, India, Gandhi studied law at the Inner Temple in London. After unsuccessfully attempting to practise in India, he moved to South Africa in 1893, where he stayed for 21 years. It was in South Africa that Gandhi first used tactics of non-violent resistance to campaign for civil rights. This activism gained Gandhi the title *Mahatma*, meaning 'great soul'.

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915 he led campaigns to improve the lives of India's peasants, farmers and labourers. He also popularised his concept of non-violent resistance, which became known in India as *satyagraha*, a Sanskrit and Hindi word meaning 'holding onto truth'. It includes civil disobedience methods such as boycotts and strikes, but also the complete rejection of any form of violence, even in self-defence. Gandhi showed his support for India's rural poor by rejecting Western dress for the traditional dhoti and living a simple and self-sufficient lifestyle. He also frequently practised fasting as a means of self-reflection and political protest.

Gandhi became involved in Indian politics in 1919 and aligned himself with the Indian National Congress. He became leader of the Congress in 1921, but chose to retire from the party in 1934 when his colleagues failed to fully embrace *satyagraha*. However, Gandhi remained committed to the fight for independence and was imprisoned from 1942 until 1944 for demanding British withdrawal from India.

Although Gandhi welcomed Britain's exit, he wanted to maintain a united India where the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh peoples could co-exist. Therefore when Partition happened in 1947, Gandhi did not participate in any official celebrations and instead visited areas that were greatly affected by the ensuing violence.

While many people supported Gandhi and his teachings, some Hindus believed that he was too supportive of Pakistan and Indian Muslims. Such views led militant Hindu nationalist Nathuram Godse to assassinate Gandhi at an inter-faith prayer meeting in Delhi on 30 January 1948. Gandhi's death was mourned across the nation, with over one million people joining his five-mile-long funeral procession. Today, his birthday is commemorated in India as a national holiday and worldwide as the International Day of Non-Violence

### **Survey by Author**

In a survey commissioned by author in India, 50% of professionals replied that they were willing to buy Khadi clothes. However industry stalwarts were of the opinion that Khadi was not feasible.

### **MNREGA proves Khadi**

Indian Government has a flagship program for employment guarantee in rural areas called Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005. It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by

providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work

Another aim of MGNREGA is to create durable assets (such as roads, canals, ponds and wells). Employment is to be provided within 5 km of an applicant's residence, and minimum wages are to be paid. If work is not provided within 15 days of applying, applicants are entitled to an unemployment allowance.

In year 2022-23 Rs. 73,000 crore(0.73 billion rupees) was spent under MNREGA. Around 11 crore people were provided employment in the year and 289 crore person day of employment was provided.

This clearly proves that in rural areas there is seasonal unemployment. And there is demand for part time work that can create incomes. This can not only reduce underemployment but also increase income of poor people. So basically in rural areas in villages farmers are not employed for entire year. Isn't it obvious that these farmers could use their spare time engaged in some sort of village industry producing clothes, baskets, shoes, pens, anything actually.

This would take the pressure of population in urban areas and increase incomes in rural areas thus reducing unemployment and poverty in rural areas at same time. Of course this requires us to shift from machine based capital intensive manufacturing in crowded cities to human based labour intensive manufacturing in sparse villages.

### Percentage of Population in Agriculture

So basically we can deduce that if in a nation a significant proportion of population is still engaged in agriculture, Khadi is still relevant model of business and manufacturing. Now globally there are many nations where percentage of population engaged in agriculture is high. These are underdeveloped nations of world, where per capita incomes are low. Hence it is possible to have labour intensive production as labour is cheap compared to machinery. Let us examine percentage of population engaged in agriculture and incomes in various nations of world.

Percentage of Labour Force Engaged in Agriculture in Low Developed Nations in 2019		
Nation	Percentage Labour Force in Agriculture	Per Capita GDP in Purchasing Power Parity(2022 – IMF)
Burundi	86	800
Somalia	80	1300
Malawi	76	1600
Chad	75	1700
Niger	72	1400
Uganda	70	3000
Mozambique	69	1450
Ethiopia	66	3400
Tanzania	66	3400

Percentage of Labour Force Engaged in Agriculture in Medium Developed Nations of World in 2019		
Nation	Percentage of Labour Force in Agriculture	Per Capita GDP on Purchasing Power Parity
India	42	8200
China	25	21000
Indonesia	28	14600
Pakistan	37	6600
Vietnam	37	13000
Egypt	20	16000
Iraq	18	12400
Iran	17	18600

Percentage of Labour Force Engaged in Agriculture in High Developed Nations of World in 2019		
Nation	Percentage of Labour Force in Agriculture	Per Capita GDP on Purchasing Power Parity
USA	1.4	75000
UK	1.05	55000
Japan	3.3	48000
Germany	1.2	64000
France	2.5	56000
Italy	3.9	51000

Spain	4.0	46500
Portugal	5.5	42000
Netherlands	2.0	69000

Thus we can see that percentage of population engaged in agriculture varies between as less as 1 percent in UK to almost 86% in Burundi. So in nations where percentage of population engaged in agriculture is high it should be obvious that this population can move to labour intensive manufacturing, which can be called Khadi and Village industries.

In fact if you see that per capita incomes of nations is low where percentage engaged in agriculture is high. Hence it is possible to use them in labour intensive manufacturing such as Khadi and Village industry.

This is especially relevant since agriculture provides seasonal unemployment and periods of unemployment which can be used for labour intensive manufacturing of Khadi and Village Industries.

### **Khadi at 5% of GDP where percentage engaged in agriculture is 50% of population of nation**

Khadi has not been given adequate attention even in India, let alone other nations of the world. However as this paper has amply proved, Khadi is practical and offers hope of removing poverty.

In India Khadi and Village Industries creates 0.5% of gdp even as 50% of population is engaged in agriculture. Is it possible to increase this ten fold times. So can we aim that Khadi and Village Industries produce 5% of GDP in a nation where 50% of population is engaged in agriculture.

So here is a formula that is relevant and feasible. We can have a formula that

Percentage of GDP from Khadi and Village Industries = Percentage of Population in Agriculture/10

This formula means every nation should aim at generating from Khadi and Village industries a percentage of GDP equivalent to percentage of population engaged in agriculture divided by 10.

## **II. Conclusion**

Khadi is practical and can remove poverty in nations where significant amount of population is engaged in agriculture since agriculture only offers seasonal unemployment leading to under employment in the year. Hence there has to be world wide effort to deploy Khadi and Village industries for labour intensive production which can reduce poverty and provide employment to farmers. Khadi and Village industries should contribute substantially to GDP in nations where percentage of population engaged in agriculture is high.

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