

Mahatma's legacy: Khadi sales spike

FEATURE

KHADI

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Known for natural lustre and rough texture, Khadi strands of late have turned livewire in more ways than one, due to increasing footfalls at khadi, growing sales and demands for technological upgradation, decent payment and working environs to weavers and bridling cost of the fibre. Debates veer around whirring wheels of Charkhas. Leading from the front, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had launched Khadi promotion blitz in his talk shows on radio, waves a year ago, says the sales have almost doubled and more and more people purchase Khadi items now. Disputing the government's claims, many say hype was being created by raising bogey of sales. Khadi and village industries top rung officials, keeping track of its sales and purchases across the country, wave ledgers to assert that purchases might be even higher than what had been collated by them so far.

In "Mann ki Baat" last year, Mr Modi had called upon people to buy at least one Khadi garment. He recently recalled the appeal had made an impact and sales have almost doubled and said it was not accomplished through advertisements, but it is the manifestation of immense power of masses and "what an experience". He made it clear that he was not asking people to become totally "Khaddhar dhari" but everyone must purchase some item of Khadi in coming Diwali. Mr Modi added that Khadi rebate programme, which starts on October 2 for a month, must be encashed by all and they should also patronise handlooms.

The Khadi craze was evident on this year October 2 when outlets across the country clocked one day sale of Rs.20 crore. As a mark of obeisance to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, 48 offices of Khadi and Village Industries Commission remained open and 7050 sales outlets made brisk sales. The Khadi Bhandar at Regal building, here, touched sales worth Rs.80 lakh on the Gandhi Jayanti day.

This has resulted in growth of Khadi sales and consequent growth in production. Union Minister for MSME Kalraj Mishra said that after the PM's appeal, growth in sales rocketed to a 17.55% from October 2014 to March 2015, which is an almost three fold increase when compared to the previous corresponding period. After the appeal, growth in production increased by almost 6 times to 31.1% from October 2014 to March 2015 over the previous corresponding period. In 2014-15, Khadi production has reached Rs. 880 crore registering an increase of around 8.5% over 2013-14.

CEO and Commissioner, KVIC, Arun Kumar Jha says the sale of the Khadi Gram Udyog Bhawan, New Delhi, the departmental flagship outlet of the KVIC increased around 125 per cent in subsequent fortnight soon after the PM's talk show. The total increase in sales during the period from October 2014 to March 2015 was around 68 per cent in value terms. The sale of Khadi which was at Rs.5.47 crore during the period October 2013 to March 2014 jumped to Rs.9.19 crore. According to him, the sale of readymade items of Khadi Gram Udyog Bhawan, Connaught place, increased phenomenally and the increase was around 86 per cent. All India sale of Khadi which was Rs.581 crore during the period October, 2013 to March, 2014 jumped to Rs.750 crore during the period of October 2014 to March 2015. The

increase was around 31 per cent upto March alone

According to official sources, the government introduced Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme giving full flexibility to the Khadi Institutions to organise their production & sales activity in the best way they considered appropriate. The MDA provided much needed boost to the Khadi programme. The government provided Rs. 324.64 crore for supporting Khadi Institutions (KIs) under various schemes during 2014-15 which is an increase of around 36% over and above the support provided by the Govt. in the preceding year i.e. 2013-14 which stood around Rs. 239.17 crore.

Khadi, officials say, the proud legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and potent tool of national freedom, is “ethical as well as ethnic” adding its USP is natural, hand crafted, eco-friendly, bio-degradable and non-exploitive fibre. It is a cloth woven by hand using handspun yarn only. Natural fibres namely cotton, wool and silk are used in the production. Khadi is identified by the direction of twist in yarn. In Khadi yarn twist direction is “S”. Usually it is called left twist or anti- clockwise twist.

Currently, there are 1.42 lakh weavers and 8.62 lakh spinners in the country and many demand decent returns to their skills. An estimate says that 9.60 lakh charkhas and 1.51 lakh looms churn out Khadi. Delhi University Professor of Mathematics, Vinod Tyagi, who still weaves Khadi on charkha and gives company to his mother in this task, says that the Khadi items have become “very costly” and the price of a dhoti is like “ladies’ decent cotton dhoti”.

Chennai based Ethiraj Gopal, an avid supporter of Khadi, says that it should be more trendy and quality be refined further to retain its crease for many days once it is starched properly. Mr Gopal, an advocate by profession, said that he travels around the country and feels that KVIC should make inroads in upscale markets and hotels for sale of traditional food items –organic eatables as it has sales potential and it would protect country’s ethnic food, having both medicinal and taste qualities. Many people also call for strict monitoring of the Khadi quality to checkmate entry of spurious Khadi and other KVIC items. Both on the khadi prize and quality, KVIC CEO said that they were implementing stringent norms to give Khadi brand only to quality products and "once sales volume increases, prices will come down".

KVIC was established in 1957 to leverage the unique characteristics of Khadi, the fabric of freedom, for economic upliftment of rural artisans and integrating the Khadi programme with the planning process of the country. Assigned to KVIC were social objective of providing employment and economic aim of producing saleable articles. Many say when the KVIC was established, its main objective was to develop village and Khadi industry but instead of vehicle of development, it has become a regulatory body sans textile engineers, marketing experts, designers and quality testing laboratories.

Officials say that in 2014-15, 2,223 institutions were engaged in the implementation of Khadi programme under KVI Sector. During this period the production of Khadi was around Rs. 879.98 crore and 11.06 lakh people were engaged in the activity. The production of Khadi in quantitative term was around 95.19 million sq. metre which is merely 0.15% of the entire textile production of the country. If compared to Khadi, Wool and Silk Sector of the country which is the traditional textile sector, the contribution of Khadi sector is over 11%.

In terms of the Khadi production in 2014-15, U.P produced 25.23 per cent of total production and its value was pegged at Rs.222.01 crore vis-a vis other states like TN -10.72 per cent, Rs.94.33 crore, WB 13.27 per cent, value Rs.116.74 crore, Haryana 9.67 per cent, value Rs. 85.15 crore, Rajasthan 5.82 per cent, value Rs.51.18 crore. Figures include production of Khadi –Cotton, Woolen and Silk.

Officials say schemes under Khadi include KVIC supported development of Khadi programme through various Central Sector schemes- Market Development Assistance (MDA), Interest Subsidy Eligibility Certificate (ISEC) Scheme for Khadi and Polyvastra, Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI), Khadi Reform and Development Programme (KRDP), Workshed Scheme for Khadi artisan, Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana, Khadi Karigar Janashree Bima Yojana (JBY)), Strengthening Infrastructure of Weak Khadi Institutions and Assistance for Marketing Infrastructure Under the Raw Material Management scheme, in order to ensure quality raw material for the new model Charkha programme, the KVIC has set up six Central Spinning Plants (CSPs) at Kuttur (Kerala), Chitradurga (Karnataka), Sehore (MP), Etah & Rae Bareilly (UP) and Hajipur (Bihar).

The total installed capacity of these plants is 4100 tonnes per annum and the production in 2014-15 was around 2700 tonnes. KVIC set up these plants in late 80s and early 90s with average investment of around Rs. 6.00 crore. The present investment to set up a new plant of the existing installed capacity is around Rs 12.00 crore however, these plants also have problem in their economy of scale as a CSP should have installed capacity of 2000 ton per annum per plant. Under its marketing initiatives for brand production, the KVIC developed three brand names “Khadi”, “Sarvodaya” and “Desi Aahaar”. While the Khadi showcases premium and export oriented KVI products, “Sarvodaya” serves to fulfil the needs of Fast Moving Consumers (FMCs) to domestic market segments and “Desi Aahaar” is meant for marketing organic food items. Experts say that the Khadi should be a single brand and that should be promoted instead of three brands.

“Like swaraj, khadi is our birthright, and it is our life-long duty to use that only. Anyone who does not fulfil that duty is totally ignorant of what Swaraj is. We cannot claim to have understood the meaning of swaraj till khadi becomes as universal as currency.”, Mahatma Gandhi had said on promotion of Khadi. Amid these fast growing developments and leapfrogging aspirations, the Khadi sector faces a slew of challenges like limited technological upgradation for optimising process of value addition with assured quality, no scheme to strengthen and support production infrastructure of institutions/units, no scheme available to provide long term design developmental input, competition from Multi Nationals and Corporates, inadequate technical manpower, lack of resources for aggressive advertisement and promotional campaign and absence of enabling scheme to set up flagship stores.

Experts say developmental supports are needed for khadi and proposals inter alia are engagement of technical manpower to carry out technological upgradation of tools, implements and other productive infrastructure for optimising the process of value addition with assured quality, innovation in design and development of trendy products by engaging renowned designers from National design institutes. They say there is an urgent need to develop distinctive items with focus on younger generation which would also attract high street fashion designers for production of items having high demand and good returns, strengthening of marketing network available in the Khadi sector by totally revamping and modernising to

enable them to compete with best in trade by providing all requisite facilities including information, knowledge and expertise.

According to them, the sector must involve prominent individuals and bodies who have shown interest in Khadi encouraging them to adopt areas, products, traditional industries clusters, arrange marketing and popularize Khadi and Village Industry products. The experts also seek opening of designers stores in select cities abroad to showcase and promote Khadi and Village Industries products there in a sustainable manner. They advocate setting up of a professionally run organisation to fully realise the marketing potential of the products produced in the sector by creating a demand pull situation.

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