

# News Flash

## Declare National Khadi Day

BB Nagpal



Mahatma Gandhi spinning a *Charkha*

Throughout the month of August which is an important part of the year as we attained independence on 15 August 1947, our thoughts go towards the momentous events which led up to Freedom, the joy and the pain, the exuberance as well as the anguish

But all this also reminds us of the one man who led the country in a non-violent struggle, Mahatma Gandhi. And we are reminded of the lines he wrote in 'Harijan' in 1938: "For me, to wear Khadi is to wear freedom."

Khadi is undoubtedly the national fabric of India, produced in her villages spread throughout the country, each lending its special attribute to the finished fabric.

**Sunaina Suneja, who began to design and improvise with khadi in the 80s, has now suggested in a letter to the Khadi and Village Industries Commission that one day in the year should be declared as National Khadi Day and encouraging people to wear Khadi on that day.**

By declaring a National Khadi Day, the nation would be paying tribute to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, ( "It is not enough to say that hand-spinning is one of the industries to be revived. It is necessary to insist that it is

the central industry that must engage our attention if we are to re-establish the village home": Mahatma Gandhi) as it will:

- Be in keeping with Mahatma Gandhi's Talisman ('Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away': Mahatma Gandhi), and empower large numbers of craftspersons involved in the production of khadi, including charkha makers, spinners and weavers.
- Create an awareness of the craft process which is intensively labour oriented, and of the craftspeople who have been perpetuating it over millennia (terracotta whorls have been found in Mohenjodaro which indicate spinning activity in this ancient civilization). ('The Charkha supplemented the agriculture of the villagers and gave it dignity. It was the friend and the solace of the widow. It kept the villagers from idleness. For the Charkha included all the anterior and posterior industries- ginning, carding, warping, sizing, dyeing and weaving. These in their turn kept the village carpenter and the blacksmith busy. The Charkha enabled the seven hundred thousand villages to become self contained. With the exit of Charkha went the other village industries, such as the oil press": Mahatma Gandhi)
- Create awareness of its all-season appeal being a natural, eco-friendly fabric in a world that is increasingly more environment-conscious

- Establish its versatility as a fabric for fashion anywhere in the world.

The United Nations has declared October 2<sup>nd</sup>, as the International Day of Non-Violence . Mahatma Gandhi launched his Satyagraha movement on September 11, a date which is today synonymous with a heinous act of violence. As one more positive gesture in promoting peace and keeping in mind the philosophy behind khadi, the fabric of freedom and ahimsa, Sunaina has suggested that September 11 be declared National Khadi Day.

Sunaina Suneja plunged into the world of fashion in the early 80s. Earlier her mother, Raj Suneja, had opened Raj Creations, the first boutique in New Delhi in 1967 at a time when none other existed.

As she delved deeper into the magical and legendary wealth of Indian textiles, she realized her own personal need to learn more about their origins and she researched several, namely, jute, indigo and khadi. These have all resulted in major exhibitions over the years.

She reflects on her work with khadi starting in the 80s and in her words: “That was when I began to wonder about the origins of khadi and consequently, I began to read and research. I had already read Gandhiji’s Experiments with Truth and referred to it first. It led to writing a few articles.

“In the meantime, a few years passed and so did the newness of khadi. And I realized it had become a victim of fashion’s whimsical nature, my very first experience with the ups and downs of a fad. But by then, I had read enough to convince myself – and maybe anyone who cared to listen!- that khadi deserved more than a few years of eminence; its historic significance, in my eyes, was so great that it needed to be nurtured and worn by every caring Indian. And I guess I became a ‘khaadiian’. In an article written for the Hindustan

Times in 97 as India prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary, referring to khadi as the 'national fabric of India'.

Sunaina organizes presentations on "Khadi, the concept" for groups resident in Delhi and has participated in several events overseas where she has promoted the fabric.

Sunaina holds a khadi exhibition at her outlet in Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi annually between August Kranti Day and Independence Day under her label, August Khadi.