

October-19



Dear Club Members,

"The music of the spinning wheel will be as balm to your soul"

"The spinning wheel is as much a necessity of Indian life as air and water"

"I have pinned my faith to the spinning wheel, on it, I believe, the salvation of this country depends."

With quotes like this I found it hard not to celebrate the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, born on 2nd October 1869. The Indian lawyer and political activist was a passionate believer in the power of the spinning wheel. The Charkha is a hand driven wheel, and cotton (and other fibres) are spun off the tip of the spindle. It was used for spinning yarn that was then woven in to cloth known as khadi. So central was the spinning wheel to Gandhi's vision of a self governing, independent India that the wheel features on the flag of India, and by law, the flag can only be made from khadi.

Control over textiles was one of the ways in which the British Empire exerted authority over India. The American civil war had pushed up the price of raw cotton, causing issues in the British cotton mills in Lancashire. As a result the British turned to India for the raw cotton, shipping it back to England, spinning it, and weaving it in to cloth. Some cloth was then shipped back to India, and sold at huge profits. Local production of cloth was strongly discouraged, and subject to taxation, where as British made, imported cloth was not subject to any tariffs. In addition Indian cloth could not be exported in to the British market.

Under the rule of the British Raj the yarn output of the handloom industry declined from 419 million pounds in 1850 to 240 million pounds in 1900. Similar policies stripped India of her wealth and prosperity. India's share of world income collapsed from 22.6% in 1700, (Europe's share at that time was 23.3%), to 3.8% in 1952.

Gandhi used the symbolism of going back to handspun, hand woven khadi as part of his rejection of the British empire. He generally wore a loin cloth with a woolen shawl in colder weather, and encouraged others to reject their Western clothing, and go back to a manner of dress from their pre-colonial culture. He spun nearly every day, and made it obligatory for members of the Indian National Congress to spin cotton, and pay their party dues in cotton thread. He also saw it as a way of raising the status of women in Indian society, this being work they could do at home. "I swear by this form of swadeshi (khadi) because through it I can provide work to the semi-starved, semi-employed women of India. My idea is to get these women to spin yarn, and to clothe the people of India with khadi which will take the impoverished women out of it."

Today khadi is still being woven from handspun cotton, and is something the Indian government is focusing on as a way of helping the poorest in Indian society as the cloth attracts a premium price.

As ever, I hope this letter is just a starting point, the work of Gandhi and his belief in non-violent protest is a vast topic. I've chosen to focus on khadi, and the importance that cloth played in the route towards Indian independence. I can't put cotton in a blend, as it just forms clumps, so instead I've chosen to use a form of silk that originates in India, and combine it with some wool from other countries that used to be in the British Empire. Khadi can be dyed any colour, but I've done for a blended neutral. I've also popped in a small bag of cotton for you to have a go at spinning. Even if you don't have a quill you can still spin this fibre on a standard wheel, I've included a link to some tutorials in the further reading section.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading-

Khadi-

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khadi>

https://www.mkgandhi.org/swadeshi_khadi/whatiskhadi.htm

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/Khadi-and-Gandhiji-looking-beyond-the-fabric/article15766513.ece>

History of cloth production In India, and the use of Khadi in the modern world-

<https://www.thebetterindia.com/95608/khadi-history-india-gandhi-fabric-freedom-fashion/>

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/india/articles/the-story-of-khadi-indias-fabric/>

Video showing the making of khadi-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OHbIQ90hfY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE4kxmevGkU>

Video on spinning cotton-

<https://www.hilltopcloud.co.uk/blog/august-non-wool-club-spoilers-spinning-hints-and-tips>

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label
25% Tussah Silk, 25% Polwarth, 50% 18.5 micron Merino