

Sarthak's edit

Original Act doesn't envisage sweeping KVIC powers

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) asserting its rights as the certifier of what is genuine khadi—both the spinning of the yarn and the weaving of the cloth have to be done by hand, without the use of electricity—appears to be a good idea since strict certification rules, and compliance, are required to maintain the purity/standards of a brand; if machine-made fabric is to be called 'khadi', for instance, khadi will lose its USP. But, as the recent fight with ethnic-wear retailer Fabindia suggests, the khadi regulations are quite stifling and look like they are going back to the old licensing regime, as a result of which rural artisans will be the biggest losers. There is also the issue of whether such brand rights were envisaged by the original KVIC Act of 1956 that seemed a lot more benign, with an emphasis on promotion of khadi products, providing training to artisans, financial and marketing support, ensuring supplies and setting up common service centres, etc. To be sure, it did talk of setting quality standards “including issue of certificates or letters of recognition”, but what emerged in the Khadi Mark Regulations of 2013 were a lot more stringent.

Ensuring a product is genuine khadi is one thing, but asking producers—see the eligibility criterion for registration of new khadi institutions—to submit a list of 25 charkha spinners and five handloom weavers seems very bureaucratic; and when you add to this, the need to keep a raw-materials register indicating the source and quantity of raw materials along with a conversion-register, it gets positively stifling—since the original Khadi Act talks of the need to “encourage and promote research in the technology ... including the use of non-conventional energy and electric power, with a view to increasing productivity”, it is also not clear what the strict Khadi rules are seeking to enforce. But when these rules are applied to sellers of khadi products—such as Fabindia and others—the picture gets even messier. Each of these institutions are to “display count of yarn ... name of the producing institution, year and place of production and such other information ... and also keep the record of the physical construction details of ends per inch, picks per inch and width”. Standing order 1724, issued in February 2014, has a Khadi Mark Protocol which talks of each product needing to bear the Khadi Mark registration number of the institution—since retailers of khadi products will have to put their own

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Saturday, 18 February 2017 00:00 -

tag also, this means two tags need to be put on each product. Apart from the fact that KVIC needs to get clarity on whether the term khadi should be broad-based—the original Act does talk of using R&D and electric power—it needs to keep in mind that if village products are to be sold in large volumes, many of its rules need to be completely scrapped.