

# Indian History of Textile and Apparel Sector

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**Abstract:** The Indian textile industry has a significant presence in the economy as well as in the international textile economy. Its contribution to the Indian economy is manifested in terms of its contribution to the industrial production, employment generation and foreign exchange earnings. It contributes 20 percent of industrial production, 9 percent of excise collections, 18 percent of employment in the industrial sector, nearly 20 percent to the country's total export earning and 4 percent to the Gross Domestic Product. In human history, past and present can never ignore the importance of textile in a civilization decisively affecting its destinies, effectively changing its social scenario. A brief but thoroughly researched feature on Indian textile culture.

India has been well known for her textile goods since very ancient times. The traditional textile industry of India was virtually decayed during the colonial regime. However, the modern textile industry took birth in India in the early nineteenth century when the first textile mill in the country was established at Fort Gloster near Calcutta in 1818. The cotton textile industry, however, made its real beginning in Bombay, in 1850s. The first cotton textile mill of Bombay was established in 1854 by a Parsi cotton merchant then engaged in overseas and internal trade. Indeed, the vast majority of the early mills were the handiwork of Parsi merchants engaged in yarn and cloth trade at home and Chinese and African markets.

The first cotton mill in Ahmedabad, which was eventually to emerge as a rival centre to Bombay, was established in 1861. The spread of the textile industry to Ahmedabad was largely due to the Gujarati trading class.



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## INTRODUCTION

The textile industry occupies a unique place in our country. One of the earliest to come into existence in India, it accounts for 14% of the total Industrial production, contributes to nearly 30% of the total exports and is the second largest employment generator after agriculture. Textile Industry is providing one of the most basic needs of people and the holds importance; maintaining sustained growth for improving quality of life. It has a unique position as a self-reliant industry, from the production of raw materials to the delivery of finished products, with substantial value-addition at each stage of processing; it is a major contribution to the country's economy. Its vast potential for creation of employment opportunities in the agricultural, industrial, organized and decentralized sectors & rural and urban areas, particularly for women and the disadvantaged is noteworthy. Although the development of textile sector was earlier taking place in terms of general policies, in recognition of the importance of this sector.[1,2]

The textile industry is undergoing a major reorientation towards non-clothing applications of textiles, known as technical textiles, which are growing roughly at twice rate of textiles for clothing applications and now account for more than half of total textile production. The processes involved in producing technical textiles require expensive equipments and skilled workers and are, for the moment, concentrated in developed countries. Technical textiles have many applications including bed sheets; filtration and abrasive materials; furniture and healthcare upholstery; thermal protection and blood-absorbing materials; seatbelts; adhesive tape, and multiple other specialized products and applications. The Indian Textile industry has been undergoing a rapid transformation and is in the process of integrating with the world textile trade and industry. This change is being driven by the progressive dismantling of the MFA and the imperative of the recently signed General Agreement Trade & Tariff. In this bold, new scenario, India has to move beyond its role of being a mere quota satisfying country.[3,4]

The history of textile is almost as old as that of human civilization and as time moves on the history of textile has further enriched itself. In the 6th and 7th century BC, the oldest recorded indication of using fiber comes with the invention of flax and wool fabric at the

excavation of Swiss lake inhabitants. In India the culture of silk was introduced in 400AD, while spinning of cotton traces back to 3000BC. In China, the discovery and consequent development of sericulture and spin silk methods got initiated at 2640 BC while in Egypt the art of spinning linen and weaving developed in 3400 BC. The discovery of machines and their widespread application in processing natural fibers was a direct outcome of the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries. The discoveries of various synthetic fibers like nylon created a wider market for textile products and gradually led to the invention of new and improved sources of natural fiber. The development of transportation and communication facilities facilitated the path of transaction of localized skills and textile art among various countries.[5,6]

## DISCUSSION

There are some career options and work environments in the field of textile design that need you to be aware of. To become a skilled textile designer, you need professional education in fashion, art or design. Through proper training, prospective textile designers gain knowledge of the entire fabric design process. They learn to analyse and understand the various textile properties, such as weight, material, flammability and durability and how the textile will be used, then base their designs on these factors. More importantly, a textile diploma teaches them how to utilize textures, patterns and colour through experimentation with printing, dyeing, manipulation and embellishment techniques. There are usually two techniques used in textile design – one is painting, and another is art based techniques. A diploma teaches you to work in both categories. For a textile designer apart from good education, it is also essential to make the right connections. [7,8] The goal is to establish a beneficial relationship with clients and other people in the industry. As a textile designer, you can use your creative flair and ability to generate ideas and concepts to match a brief to find work in the textile industry or to set up your own business.

Once you have professional training in textile design, doors for a promising career opens. Apart from the field of textile and clothing, you can also foray into other industries of merchandising, marketing production and fashion journalism.[9,10]

The record of ancient and medieval Indian textiles exists mostly in literature and sculpture. There is archaeological evidence of a cotton textile industry at Mohenjo-Daro in the Indus Valley around 3000 B.C., and a few fragments survive from much later periods. Most of the extant textiles are dated after the seventeenth century, because the monsoon climate has been very destructive to early specimens. The Greeks with Alexander the Great wrote of the fine flowered muslins and robes embroidered in gold they had seen in India. They may also have seen the cotton fiber that grew on trees.[11,12]

A handbook of administration, the Arthashastra, tentatively dated to the third century B.C., dealt with methods for distributing materials to spinners and weavers whether the workers were guild members or worked privately at home. At that time few occupations were open to women. Indeed, women who elected not to marry were not allowed to hold jobs. However, weaving was permitted to widows and retired prostitutes. The Arthashastra gave the penalties for fraudulent practices and listed the taxes to be paid by weavers. Among the textiles mentioned were white bark cloth from Bengal, linen from Banaras, cottons from south India, and several kinds of blankets, the best described as being slippery and soft.[13]

In ancient and medieval India the textile industries were politically controlled, and if a ruler was favorably disposed towards the arts, weaving prospered. Differentiation was made between the rural textiles woven for the masses and those made in state workshops for royalty and the well-to-do in other countries. The best workmanship was found in the ritual hangings for temples, and even in modern times it has been considered preferable to destroy worn ones rather than allow them to fall into foreign hands.

Few good commentaries survive from the early medieval period (900- - 1200 A.D.) when terms were used inconsistently. Fabric names apparently represented the places where they were woven, and details about weaving techniques were scanty.

The Muslim period in India extended from around 1200 A.D. to 1760 when the British took over. A succession of sultans controlled most of India until Genghis Khan attacked early in the thirteenth century and Tamerlane invaded in the late fourteenth. Marco Polo left detailed accounts of the people and industries

of the coastal regions of India in the late thirteenth century. He mentioned seeing on the Coromandel Coast the finest and most beautiful cloth in all the world-buckrams like the tissues of spider webs, and he observed dyeing with indigo in the great textile center of Cambay and spinning of cotton in Gujarat. Under the Sultan of Delhi (1325-1351) price controls for food, cloth, and other commodities were initiated to help fight inflation. A permit was required to buy silks, satins, and brocades, and only the well-to-do were allowed to have them. The sultan employed four thousand silk weavers who made robes of honor, hangings, and gifts of gold brocade for foreign dignitaries.[14]

Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan, founded a new and important dynasty, the Mogul, in 1526. A series of great rulers-the greatest Akbar who ruled for the second half of the sixteenth century-governed a glorious empire where the textile arts flourished until the late seventeenth century. Some of the best accounts of Indian textiles were written by European ambassadors to the Mogul courts. Fabulous horse and elephant trappings, as well as the apparel, pillows, and wall hangings, were remarked upon. A king always wore a garment but once. There were marvelous gold brocades called kimhabs, or kincobs, from Banaras. Writers proclaimed on the sheerness of Dacca muslins, called evening dew, running water, or sweet-like-sherbert. Seventy-three yards, a yard wide, weighed only one pound. By comparison, the finest Swiss cottons ever made were at best sixteen or seventeen yards to the pound.

European settlements appeared in India in the latter part of the Mogul period. Motivated by the desire to break the spice trade monopoly held by Venice and the Arabs, Vasco da Gama found the sea route to India by sailing around Africa in 1498, and by 1510 the Portuguese had jurisdiction in Goa on the west coast of India. For a short time they controlled the Asian trade by taking over the port of Malacca (near Singapore), where they met trading junks from China. The Portuguese carried pintados (painted cottons) east from India to trade for spices.[15]

Indian textiles were more important to the Dutch and the English than to the Portuguese. The Dutch East India Company was chartered in 1597, the East India Company in 1600. Their ships went first to India with bullion to exchange for the cotton textiles that could be

bartered for spices in the Malay Archipelago. Eventually, the Dutch gained a monopoly in Indonesia, with trade centered in Java, and the English withdrew to India to establish trading stations known as "factories." One of the intentions of the East India Company was to sell English woolens in Asia, but broadcloth was never more than a novelty in India. By 1649 the British were sending chintz (see chapter 4) and cheap cotton calico to England. Much was for reexport to America, the Near East, West Africa, and the slave plantations in the West Indies. A four-cornered trade developed. The East India Company shipped calicos to London where they were sold to the Royal Africa Company. The latter shipped them in turn to West Africa as guinea-cloth to be bartered for people. These slaves, and any remaining cloth, were shipped to the West Indies and exchanged for sugar, cotton, and tobacco—all cargoes bound back for England.

### Contemporary Indian Textiles

Where tradition, not fashion, rules, concentration on the aesthetic can prevail instead of mere change. Indian textile heritage has been preserved by the woman's sari, which often exhibits fine weaving, delicate textures, beautiful colors, and rich patterns. A formal sari might be of silk (or a cotton called jamdani), brocaded in floral patterns formed with many tiny bobbins, each holding a different color. An everyday sari could be a simple striped or checked cotton or a solid made iridescent by having the warp of one color, the weft of another. Sometimes saris are exquisitely block printed with gold or silver floral sprays or show all-over spot patterns of tie-dye. Ikat is used for traditional diamond or trellis patterns.

Embroidery is important in India and there are many regional styles. Sometimes it is the work of village women; other times it is done by male professionals. There is a vast difference between the work that reaches western markets and the fine embroidery, important for its symbolism, that was made for the courts and temples of old India.[16]

Phulkari (flower work) is a specialty of Punjab embroiderers. Bright-colored floss silk is worked on cotton with a darning stitch. Phulkari is sometimes combined with the mirror work that originated when blue and green beetle backs were sewn onto wedding garments of the hill tribes of southern India. Orthodox

Hindus disapproved the practice and so pieces of mica were substituted. Eventually the mica was replaced by bits of glass or mirrors.

A type of chain stitch is worked with a hook in Gujarat to make birds, animals, humans, and flowers in bold colors. In the valley of the Ganges plant designs are worked in white on soft fabrics using satin stitch, and near Bombay running stitches make delightful animal figures on loosely woven cotton. The cross stitch is popular all across India.[3]

Carpets are still made in India, as they have been for hundreds of years. Most are made with knotted wool pile on a cotton back. Patterns are strongly Persian but show a preference for naturalistic plants and animals.

### The shawls of Kashmir

In the nineteenth century a Kashmir shawl was one of the rarest and most beautiful gifts that could be offered to any woman. The romantic appeal was enhanced by descriptions of the Vale of Kashmir, known as one of the dream spots of the earth. Isolated by the Himalayas, too remote to be of much interest to the conquerors who passed back and forth across Asia, Kashmir served for hundreds of years as a resort for India's nobility.

Woolen blankets and shawls were woven and exported to the Roman Empire, but the Kashmir industry became famous after Zain-ul'Abidin (1420-1470 A.D.) brought in Turkestani and Persian weavers. By the sixteenth century shawls were being hoarded as forms of wealth, and in the late seventeenth Western visitors reported seeing men wearing large decorative scarves across their shoulders. Toward the end of the eighteenth century European and New England ladies discovered "India" shawls; the soft fabric draped beautifully, the colors shimmered, and the pine patterns spoke of the mysterious East. Discerning ambassadors and sea captains carried them home, and a fashion took hold. Napoleon's officers in Egypt sent them to their French ladies around the turn of the century. Josephine owned three or four hundred Kashmiris.[8]

### Fibers and Yarns

The fiber, called cashmere (after the old spelling of Kashmir) or pashmina (de-ri-ved from the Persian

pashm), was combed from the undercoat of the Tibetan or Central Asian goat. The goats were not raised in Kashmir; the fiber was imported from nearby Tibet. Other fiber, molted from wild sheep and goats of the high Himalayas, was specially prized for so-called "ring shawls," so fine they could be drawn through finger rings. Women picked and sorted the pashmina, then spun it into 2,500 yard lengths on crude charkhas (see Figure 2.5). The yarn went to the dyers who used some 300 tints in Mogul times, but only about sixty by the beginning of the nineteenth century, when indigo, logwood, carthamus, saffron, and cochineal were among the dyes identified by Western visitors. The delicate colors were made fast by the special waters of Dal Lake.[10]

### Making the Shawls

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, shawl weaving involved several specialists. The warp maker cut the yarns into three and one-half-yard lengths and plied them. Then the warp dresser sized the yarns with rice water and the warp threader prepared the loom. The pattern designer made the design in black and white, and he and the colorist dictated the colors and numbers of threads to be used to a scribe who wrote it down in a kind of shorthand.<sup>2</sup> The weavers wound their weft yarns on many bobbins, small pieces of wood with ends charred so as not to damage the weaving.

Tilikar (or kani) shawls were made in interlocking twill tapestry, a technique that probably originated in central or western Asia. Each shawl was woven very slowly, face down on a single horizontal loom by one, two, or three weavers. As demand grew, several looms and weavers were employed to make one shawl, a patchwork, easily identified because it would not lie flat [12]

After weaving, the shawl was turned over to the cleaner who cut loose threads, and then it went to the mender, the rafugar, who touched up with needlework. The shawl was registered and a tax assessed. Then it was washed, stretched, and packed for export. Prices could be as high as several thousand dollars if the shawl were large and intricately woven. The brokers and the tax collectors, not the weavers, made the profits; the weaver was often the first to die in a famine.

In 1803, an enterprising Armenian representing a Turkish firm in Constantinople introduced the *amli* (embroidered) shawl. One could be produced at a third the cost of a *kani* and at first they were not taxed. The early ones were exquisitely worked, but by the late nineteenth century embroidery degenerated to cheap and coarse chain stitch designs on rough cloth.

### Shawl Design

There are several stories giving the origin of the cone design associated with Kashmir shawls. It is at least as old as sixth century Egypt and Sassanian Persia, where it appeared as a curled leaf motif, and it is very common today. One theory is that it derived from the cone of the date palm and symbolized fertility and renewal of life in ancient Chaldea. Another theory dates the motif to the Mogul Emperor Babur who wore in his turban a jeweled ornament, almond shaped with an aigrette of feathers.<sup>3</sup> A weaver purportedly copied it and started a fad. The motif has been said to represent the picturesque windings of the Jhelum River, the side impression of a fist (fist palm), a little onion (in Venice), the Persian sacred flame, the wind-blown cypress, a mango (Hindu Kairy), a *butha* (or *buta*, a general Indian name for flower), and a cone or a pine. In the West it is called a paisley.

Kashmir shawl designs were mostly floral until the middle of the eighteenth century, when they began to take on the characteristic cone arrangements. Cones were rather short and fat until the 1830s, when they became elongated with slender tips. By the 1850s they were almost abstract scrolls. Many shawl designs originated in Europe, and at one time Frenchmen went to Kashmir with the purpose of improving the patterns.

Famine struck Kashmir periodically, but never devastated the weavers as completely as in the 1870s when the Franco-Prussian War closed the French market and the fashion for Kashmir shawls died.[15]

### RESULTS

The cotton industry has always occupied a honored place in Indian industrial system. India is the accredited birthplace of cotton manufactures. Certain passages in Rig Veda, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas, etc. indicate the antiquity and flourishing state of the industry from the prehistoric times. Ray, explains that ancient Indians were using dyes such as indigo, lac,

turmeric, madder, resins and red ochre. Varahamihira (500 AD), in his celebrated Brihat Samhita, refers to mordants such as alums and sulphates of iron to fix dyes on textile fabrics. During the Buddhist period, the Indian cotton fabrics were exported worldwide, according to the records of various travellers and ambassadors a few centuries ago. The industry was fortunately not much affected by the wars and rebellions during the Muslim invasion, as this was relatively short, and was patronized by the Mughal emperors, who were lovers of luxuries and fine articles. Dacca, Masulipatnam, Madras, Gujarat, Ahmedabad and Banarasi emerged as prominent textile centres. Indian cotton fabrics were known for their fine quality.[13]

Indian fashion scenario is known for its cultural heritage, elegance, and colourfulness. It brings out the subtlety and beauty which has sustained through innumerable decades. For not only is it comfortable, sophisticated and aesthetically beautiful but it has also evolved over time. Making a sweeping surge into today's global scenario, the fashion industry in India is an amalgamation of dynamic conventions. From ethnic to western, salwar kameez to high-street fashion; fashion industry in India has definitely gone through a milieu of transformations. Needless to say, the fashion industry in India has been advantaged by thousands of years of rich tradition behind it and the knowledge as the vogue of sewn garments have existed in India ever since ancient history.

The textile industry in India is among the largest segment of India's capital goods sector. As per the report published by Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), India is the second largest exporter of textiles in the world. Furthermore, favorable demographics and rising income levels are believed to be the key growth drivers of the Indian textile and apparel sector in the coming years.

The fashion industry in India covers a wide range of clothing from ornate clothes designed for wedding ceremonies to casual wear. The Indian traditional techniques of embroidery like **Crewel**, **Chikhan**, and **Zardosi** have paved their way into the international forefront of fashion runway portraying Indo-western clothing in a fusion of the best of East and

West. Apart from these, India also represents a unique blend of sarees woven in silk and cotton like **Kanjivaram**, **Mysore**, **Pochampalli**, **Jamdani**, **Blucher**, **Pithani**, **Benarasi**, **Bandhini**, **Sambhalpuri** etc.[11]

In the 5th century BC, Herodotus, a Greek historian elucidated the productiveness of the quality of cotton clothes in India. The Fashion scenario in India has an interesting history to ponder upon, let's look at the transformation of Indian fashion industry through the ages:

**Ancient Civilization:** Dating back to the Mohenjo Daro civilization, the earliest preliminary version was found in the statue of Mother Goddess wearing a piece of cloth around her waist. Her torso was covered with jewels. Apart from this era, the ancient Vedic literature states the existence of Phataka made from leaves and barks. The 11th Century B.C Rig Veda states the existence of Paridhan (dyed) and Pesas (embroidered) garments and traces the development of refined fabricating techniques of apparels during the Vedic age. By the 2nd century AD, the muslin clothes produced in the southern part of India were merchandised to the Roman Emperors. The evolution of stitched and tailored garment in India is traced even before the beginning of the 10th Century AD which was further proposed around the 15th century by the Muslim empires of India.[9]

**Impact of British Raj:** The advent of British Raj in India encouraged the British industrial cloth in India. With this, the development of Khadi, a hand woven material was boosted in India in order to lessen the dependency of Indians on the British Industrial goods.

**The 1920s:** 1920s is also known as the 'Roaring Twenties' in the fashion parlances. This decade is also termed as the 'Charleston Era' in the Fashion world. In this era, women discarded restricted fashion and switched over to comfortable clothes like skirts and trousers. As part of this trend, Eton cropped hairstyle came into vogue. Cholis in India started appearing like the shimmering glitz and flash of Charleston dresses. These dresses were long sleeved and were made using lace, satin, cotton or silk. Sarees with long sleeve and mid-sleeve blouse also became quite popular around this time.

**Post Wall Street Crash or the 1930s:** The Wall Street Crash also known as Black Tuesday was the most devastating stock market crash in the history of the United States. The Post Wall Street Crash is the era of the 1930s. This era marked the emergence of the Bonnie and Clyde (Bonnie Elizabeth Parker and Clyde Chestnut Barrow, American Criminals) look in the fashion world. This particular look signified a daring and flamboyant attitude. This look became quite popular in the US, India and across the world where Hemlines descended to mid-calves and long collars, two-piece suits, and pinched waists dominated the fashion scene.

**The 1980s to 1990s:** This era was characterized by expansion of Fashion schools in India which was tagged by an outbreak alteration to Fashion in Indian clothing. It also marked the entrance of women in the workforce at a huge pace. The 80s brought the advent of Disco with an introduction to some shimmery and glittery costumes, denim and leather biker jackets, and chiffon sarees in varied colors with a fusion of Indian and western clothing styles. The 1980s also marked the active participation of women in the Indian Fashion Industry and altering Indian attitudes towards multiculturalism.[5]

The 90s marked the arrival of full-sleeve salwar kameez, floral dresses, long skirts, denim, shades, and dungarees. The decades following the 90s are touted to be the era when Indians adopted more westernized concept in the fashion making bold and stylish choices.

**The 21st Century:** The beginning of the 21st century brought about a stable and clear picture of the Indian Fashion Industry. As women became independent, pants, short skirts, and bold costumes and fashion became more cosmopolitan than region specific. This transformation is majorly seen in the style of wearing blouses and sarees these days. Halter-neck, back-button blouses, high-neck blouses, Katori style and puffed sleeve blouses have become the first preference of women rather than the traditional style of blouses. Sarees are draped mostly in Gujarati style and it would be right to say that Indian fashion scene is greatly influenced by its film industry time and again.

**The era of Brands:** The market for branded clothes is emerging in India. An ever-increasing number of people are getting inclined towards branded garments as they provide quality affirmation. **Liberty shirts** were the main organization to offer shirts under its brand name in India amid 1950's. Since then, numerous national and global brands have built up themselves in Indian fashion industry. **Allen Solly, Van Heusen, Louis Philipe, Charagh Din, Raymonds, Arrow**, and so on are some driving national brands today. The branded attire showcases a growth as a result of growing demand for denim. Many global brands entered the denim business in India as Levi Lee, Seven Jeans, Pepe Jeans, and so forth. Branded attires mark a significant contribution to the evolution of Indian fashion industry.[7]

**Growing trend of Fusion:** The advent of fusion wear has revolutionized the Indian fashion scenario in many ways. The blend of contemporary, vintage and indo-western has become tremendously popular in last couple of years. Fusion wear celebrates the beauty of both the world and the Indian fashion industry. It has evolved to such an extent that top-notch fashion brands contain the same element in their collection. The fusion wear is gaining enormous popularity with the introduction of the long maxi with collars, hanky hems, cold shoulder maxi, crop-tops, heavy duty capes, and tunics. While, kurtas, lehengas, indo-western tops and spaghetti kurtas are turning lots of head. The fashion trend in India has been influenced by the foreign designers and brands who also introduced the concept of corporate dressing. The corporate style survives to date with an added element of modernity ensuing the fusion wear.[14]

## CONCLUSION

India is a land of multiculturalism and the massive diversity is reflected in the variation of traditional garments and the dressing styles that differ from one state to another, which is rare to spot elsewhere in the world. It has traveled from one subculture to another since ages and the traces of Indians being stylish can be discovered right from the times of Harappa and MohenjoDaro. With the advent of globalization, numerous changes have taken place in the Indian fashion industry.

According to a report by Economic Times, the Indian Fashion Industry marks a growth of USD 100 billion and at a CAGR of 8-10 percent offline, the online fashion segment is expected to grow by 15-20 percent over the next five years. The market for the fashion industry in India, especially for women, is quite lucrative in terms of scope and variety. Today, while the rapid growth of information technology popularised the corporate look, the revival of the ethnocultural look has become quite dominant leading to the popularisation of the traditional forms of art and crafts. Of late, the International fashion brands have begun to focus on the immense potential of this sector offering heaps of opportunities to the in-house fashion designers. Indian fashion industry has expanded to such an extent over time that it has now come at par with the international fashion industry and has become one of the most popular revenues generating industries of India.[16]

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