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From Khadi to fast fashion: The changing face of Indian textiles

The evolution of Indian textiles, from ancient civilisation to modern times, mirrors the profound political, economic and social transformations that India has undergone—from colonialism and nationalism to industrialisation, economic liberalisation, globalisation and consumerism. Each of these periods has influenced the way textiles are produced, garments are designed and clothing is consumed.

The textile industry has been one of the oldest pillars of India's economy and an enduring symbol of its rich cultural heritage, regional diversity and artisanal craftsmanship. Its origins date back to the Indus Valley Civilisation.

During the Mauryan period, textile production expanded considerably under a more organised administrative system. Cotton remained the dominant raw material for textile production, while linen, silk and woollen fabrics were also produced in different regions of the empire. These textiles were traded extensively within the Indian subcontinent and exported through well-established overland and maritime trade routes to Central Asia, Persia, Egypt and the Mediterranean.

The Gupta Empire further strengthened textile production through improvements in weaving, embroidery, dyeing and decorative techniques. Textile centres in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Kashmir developed distinctive weaving, dyeing, embroidery and printing techniques. Block printing, resist dyeing, ikat,

brocade, bandhani and fine silk weaving flourished under royal patronage, and these textiles were exported to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, East Africa and China through maritime trade.

The Mughal Empire marked the golden age of Indian textiles. Royal patronage encouraged the production of luxurious muslin, jamdani, brocade, velvet, silk, pashmina, chintz and richly embroidered fabrics. Textile centres such as Dhaka, Banaras, Ahmedabad, Surat and Kashmir earned global recognition for their textile craftsmanship. Techniques including zari embroidery, gold and silver thread work, block printing, floral motifs and intricate weaving reached exceptional levels of refinement.

The arrival of European trading companies, particularly the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British, further expanded international demand for Indian textiles. By the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Indian cotton, silk fabrics, calicoes, muslins and printed chintz had become some of the most sought-after commodities in global trade. However, the fortunes of India's textile industry changed significantly under British colonial rule. India was gradually reduced from being a leading exporter of finished textiles to a supplier of raw cotton for British industries.

During India's struggle for independence, textiles became powerful symbols of nationalism and self-reliance. The Swadeshi Movement encouraged the use of indigenous products while boycotting imported British textiles. Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on the spinning wheel (charkha) sought not only to revive rural employment but also to challenge Britain's economic dominance over India's textile trade. Following independence, the Government of India formulated successive Five-Year Plans to promote the expansion and modernisation of textile mills and introduced a range of policies, institutions and development programmes to support and protect the handloom and handicraft sectors.

The opening of the economy in 1991 brought greater exposure to international fashion through global media, organised retail and multinational brands, leading to significant changes in consumer preferences. In the following years, the growth of e-commerce further

expanded access to fashionable clothing across different income groups and geographical regions.

As competition intensified, both international and domestic fashion brands adopted shorter production cycles, giving rise to the fast fashion business model. This model significantly increased clothing production and consumption, resulting in greater textile waste and a higher demand for raw materials, water and energy. Today, synthetic fibres such as polyester, nylon and acrylic dominate the fashion industry because they are inexpensive, durable, wrinkle-resistant and well suited to mass production. However, most synthetic fibres are derived from petroleum, making them dependent on fossil fuels and energy-intensive manufacturing processes that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Unlike natural fibres, they are non-biodegradable and can persist in landfills and the environment for hundreds of years.

In addition, the washing of synthetic garments releases microscopic plastic fibres into rivers, lakes and oceans, where they accumulate in aquatic ecosystems, harm marine life and eventually enter the human food chain.

The textile industry contributes about one-fifth of global water pollution and around one-tenth of global greenhouse gas emissions. If current trends continue, these emissions are expected to rise by more than 50 per cent by 2030. The sector also generates approximately 7,793 kilotonnes of waste annually, of which 3,944 kilotonnes consist of post-consumer textile waste. Although a significant proportion is recovered through reuse and recycling, nearly 34 per cent is still disposed of in landfills.

Several chemicals used in textile dyeing, printing, bleaching, finishing and fabric treatment have been identified as carcinogenic. Prolonged occupational exposure to these hazardous substances through inhalation of chemical vapours and aerosols, or direct skin contact during handling and processing, increases the risk of certain cancers, respiratory diseases, skin disorders and allergic dermatitis, particularly in workplaces where occupational safety measures are inadequate. In several textile-producing regions of India, inadequate

treatment or improper disposal of textile effluents has contaminated water, soil and, in some cases, the surrounding air, posing risks to ecosystems and nearby communities.

The industry's water footprint is equally alarming. Producing a single cotton T-shirt requires approximately 2,700 litres of water, while a pair of cotton jeans requires about 9,000-10,000 litres. Cotton cultivation consumes nearly 25,000 litres of water per kilogram of fibre, and textile dyeing and finishing require an additional 125-150 litres per kilogram of fabric.

Today, nearly 95 per cent of cotton cultivated in India is genetically modified Bt cotton. However, its widespread cultivation has raised concerns about pest resistance, rising input costs, increased reliance on chemical inputs to manage secondary pests, biodiversity loss and the growing economic vulnerability of smallholder farmers, particularly in rain-fed regions.

Addressing these challenges requires rethinking the way textiles are produced, consumed and discarded. A shift towards resource-efficient production, cleaner technologies and circular economy principles is essential to reducing the industry's environmental footprint. Equally important is encouraging consumers to make more informed and responsible purchasing choices. Extending the lifespan of garments through repair, reuse and recycling can further minimise waste and conserve natural resources.

Innovation in sustainable materials, cleaner production technologies and effective waste management will also play a vital role in reducing the industry's environmental footprint. Stronger environmental regulations and their effective enforcement are equally essential to ensure compliance with sustainable production practices. Alongside these environmental measures, preserving traditional textile crafts and supporting artisans is important for safeguarding India's cultural heritage and sustaining rural livelihoods. Ultimately, achieving a more sustainable and equitable future depends on the collective commitment of all stakeholders. The question is not whether fashion will continue to evolve, but whether that evolution will be guided by sustainability or driven by folly.

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AEPC pushes early launch of special scheme to ease fabric imports for garment exporters

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Germany, India, redefining bilateral partnership in competitive global economy: Ambassador

Germany and India are redefining the meaning of bilateral partnership in an increasingly competitive global economy, German Ambassador to India and Bhutan Dr. Philipp Ackermann said on Thursday, highlighting the growing importance of cooperation in renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, semiconductors and technology.

Speaking at the IGCC Industry Dialogue 2026 organised by the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce (IGCC) in New Delhi, the ambassador said stronger alignment between governments and industry was essential to drive economic cooperation and long-term competitive.

“Germany and India are redefining what bilateral partnership means in a competitive global economy,” Ackermann said, adding that collaboration in areas such as renewable energy, semiconductors and advanced manufacturing would help both countries shape the next decade of global competitiveness.

The dialogue also focused on the proposed EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Amardeep Singh Bhatia, Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), said the agreement could strengthen trade, investment and industrial partnerships while creating opportunities for German companies in sectors such as railways, pharmaceuticals and chemical engineering.

Green Hydrogen Directory 2026

The event featured the launch of the Green Hydrogen Directory 2026, a publication mapping German companies interested in India's green hydrogen sector.

According to IGCC, the directory is designed to help Indian and German stakeholders identify collaboration opportunities across the green hydrogen value chain and encourage technology partnerships and business exchanges.

Detailed presentation by Additional Secretary

The EU-India Free Trade Deal is often regarded as the "Mother of All Deals."

The chief negotiators of the deal, Darpan Jain, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of India, shared a very detailed and enriching presentation which categorically highlighted over a dozen sectors in which both sides can leverage the trade opportunities.

Jain emphasized alignment with India's trade policy objectives and the role of bilateral commerce in broader Indo-European strategic engagement.

Additional Secretary also detailed German export opportunities to India across transport, information technology, business services, Global Capability Centres, research and development, and professional services, with reference to actionable plans and projects that support enhanced bilateral trade.

Advanced manufacturing and digitalisation in focus

Opening the dialogue, Jan Noether, Director General of IGCC, noted that the chamber had completed seven decades of facilitating Indo-German business ties. He said companies from both countries were united not only by market opportunities but also by a shared commitment to energy transition, advanced manufacturing, digitalisation and emerging technologies.

A keynote session on energy transition was delivered by Dr Prasad Chaphekar, Director at the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. He discussed the evolution of India's hydrogen energy market and green methanol development, highlighting policy measures, pilot projects, safety standards and incentives aimed at accelerating adoption.

A panel discussion involving representatives from SECI, NTPC, EDAG India and KfW Development Bank examined renewable energy integration, green hydrogen, transmission infrastructure and energy storage solutions. Participants stressed the need for closer cooperation among policymakers, financiers, technology providers and industry to support India's clean energy goals.

Sonia Prashar, Secretary General, Federation of European Business in India (FEBI), outlined sectoral priorities and business community expectations from the agreement.

95% of European businesses interested in India

Prashar presented key findings from the FEBI Business Sentiment Survey, which detailed that 95% of European businesses are interested in trading with India. She also highlighted that a vast majority of the European businesses in India report profitability. And hence, India represents a strategic priority for European businesses rather than merely a potential market.

Another session on technology collaboration explored artificial intelligence governance, digital trade, semiconductor development and the growing role of German Global Capability Centres in India. Industry leaders agreed that deeper cooperation in technology and innovation would be essential to building resilient supply chains and competitive industrial ecosystems in the years ahead.

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Read more at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/us-israel-considering-land-blockade-to-cripple-irans-economy-report/articleshow/132766988.cms>

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ICE cotton recovers on weaker dollar, stronger export sales

ICE cotton futures recovered from their recent decline and closed yesterday back above the important psychological level of 80 cents per pound. Market sentiment strengthened, supported by a weaker US dollar, stronger-than-expected USDA export sales and ongoing weather concerns in key US cotton-growing regions.

The most-active December 2026 contract settled at 80.67 cents, up 1.14 cents, or 1.43 per cent. The contract recovered all of Wednesday's losses and finished the week with gains of 69 points.

Prices remained firm throughout the session, with the largest intraday pullback limited to just 12 points, reflecting steady buying interest rather than a volatile short-covering rally.

Trading volume increased sharply to 38,535 contracts from 27,393 contracts on Wednesday, indicating traders returned after the lightest trading session of 2026.

The US dollar weakened after the Federal Reserve left interest rates unchanged, making US cotton more competitive for overseas buyers and providing a strong tailwind for prices.

Market analysts said cotton had already been moving higher before the export report was released, suggesting the strong sales data confirmed an improving demand outlook rather than triggering the rally itself.

The USDA Weekly Export Sales report for the week ended July 23, delivered the strongest weekly sales in 17 weeks, with total net sales of 395,973 bales, including 387,798 Upland and 8,175 Pima bales. The exceptionally strong export report reinforced the view that global mill demand remains healthy, with buyers booking aggressively despite higher prices.

China's state reserve auctions continued to record 100 per cent sellouts, while ICE-certified stocks remained at a six-month low of 90,699 bales, reinforcing the tight nearby supply outlook.

Weather conditions remained supportive, with traders closely monitoring dry conditions in Xinjiang and persistent heat across West Texas, both of which could affect production prospects.

Outside markets also turned more supportive. Crude oil stabilised above \$80 per barrel after the previous session's sharp rebound, helping agricultural commodities maintain inflation-hedge buying. Broader financial markets also steadied following the Federal Reserve announcement, easing the previous day's risk-off pressure.

Technically, December futures reclaimed the 80-cent level and closed back above the 10-day moving average, producing a bullish reversal after Wednesday's breakdown. Immediate support is now seen at 80.00 cents, followed by 79.50 cents and 78.68 cents,

while resistance stands at 80.88 cents (Monday's high), followed by the 82.00-cent psychological level and then the recent high of 82.96 cents.

Overall, cotton quickly recovered from Wednesday's Fed-driven weakness as a softer US dollar, the strongest export sales in 17 weeks, continued Chinese buying, tight certified stocks and weather concerns restored bullish sentiment. Momentum has shifted back in favour of the bulls, with the market now watching whether strong export demand, weather conditions in West Texas and stable crude oil prices can sustain the rally.

This morning (Indian Standard Time), ICE cotton for December 2026 traded at 81.11 cents per pound (up 0.44 cent), cash cotton at 75.66 cents (up 1.39 cents), the October 2026 contract at 79.86 cents (up 0.45 cent), the March 2027 contract at 82.68 cents (up 0.43 cent), the May 2027 contract at 83.74 cents (up 0.43 cent), and the July 2027 contract at 83.40 cents (up 0.44 cent). A few contracts remained at their previous closing levels, with no trading recorded so far today.

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Vietnam, Cambodia to promote transport links, logistics cooperation

Vietnam and Cambodia recently agreed to promote transport infrastructure connectivity, border gate development, logistics cooperation and supply chains; facilitate trade and investment; and work towards taking bilateral trade to \$20 billion in the near future.

Vietnamese National Assembly chairman Tran Thanh Man held talks with Cambodian National Assembly president Samdech Khuon Sudary in Hanoi during the latter's official visit from July 27 to 29.

The two leaders pledged to accelerate border demarcation and marker planting while coordinating efforts to maintain a peaceful, stable and prosperous shared border, according to Vietnamese media reports.

They agreed to strengthen exchanges of experience in areas including lawmaking, institutional development and supreme oversight, while expanding cooperation between specialised committees, friendship parliamentarians' groups, women legislators and young parliamentarians.

They also pledged to enhance parliamentary oversight of bilateral agreements between the two governments and continue supporting each other at regional and international parliamentary forums.

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