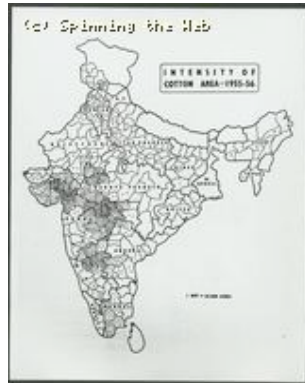




India



India could be called the 'cradle of cotton' since it is in this country that domestic cotton cultivation and manufacture into clothing really began.

The civilisation of the Indus Valley dates back to 3000 BC and it is here, around the towns of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (now both in Pakistan), that remnants of homespun cotton garments, bone needles and wooden spindles have been discovered dating back to that time.

There is also evidence of early cotton trading abroad by India because 'fragments of cotton material originating from Gujarat have been found in the Egyptian tombs at Fostat, belonging to 5th century A.D.' and cotton textiles were exported to China during the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-906) via the silk route which ran between China and

Byzantium (Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Albania etc).

India exported chintz (hand painted cotton fabrics) to Far Eastern and European countries before the Europeans arrived in the sub-continent. As well as chintz, and muslin (a fine thin cotton fabric), brightly coloured brocade (a fabric either made from silk or a blend of cotton and silk) was also popular and fashionable in India. Brocade designs (or nakshas) were manufactured from cotton thread patterns made by skilled craftsmen called nakshabanda.

In 1608 the East India Company set up a trading centre at Surat, the main outlet for textile manufactures from Gujarat, a province on the northwest coast of India; and in 1615 permission was granted by the Mughal emperor for the Company to build a textile factory at Surat. Other trading centres were established at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras (the three 'presidency' towns).

Indian chintz and muslins (from Dacca or Bengal) soon became an important part of East India Company trade. The cheap, pretty, brightly coloured fabrics proved to be so popular in England in the early 18th century that the British woollen and silk trades were seriously affected. The brocades had attractive Persian inspired floral motifs or patterns of blossoms until the 19th century when they began to reflect the English wallpaper designs favoured by the British Raj.

However, once the Lancashire cotton industry was established, India was seen a large potential market for cotton fabrics. Indian textiles were popular and inexpensive and had provoked complaints from British traders in 1788.

To put an end to Indian competition and to open up Indian markets to British textile manufacturers, 'import duties on east Indian piece-goods ['fabrics made and sold in standard lengths'] were increased thrice in 1797, 1798 and 1799, and nine more times between 1802 and 1819, being reduced only in 1826 those imports [had] reached their peak value in 1800 and their peak quantity in 1802 thereafter they declined sharply' (Farnie.D.A. 1979). The muslin manufacturing industries of both Lancashire and Scotland continued to grow and the bottom was effectively knocked out of India's textile trading market.

Between 1814-1843 India was established as Britain's largest export market; that market peaking 1844-1886 and continuing to expand until 1913. By the 1790s India had been eclipsed by Lancashire for calico exports and by the USA in 1821 for raw cotton production.

In the 1820s India was importing more cotton goods than she exported: muslin from Lancashire and Scotland and calico from Lancashire. A majority of Indian imports were 'grey goods' (white/plain unbleached calicoes) because, except for Turkey Red, 'Britain could not compete with the dyeing and printing industry of the East' (Farnie.D.A. 1979). Calico exports first exceeded those of muslins in 1818.

Although almost the whole population wore cotton clothing, the Indian market was affected

by consumer poverty, the persistence of the Indian cottage industry in cotton production/manufacture, and the ability of Indian handloom weavers to produce the finer fabrics preferred by Indian women.

Despite protests from Lancashire weavers India began to import cheap mill spun yarn from England in 1817. During the 1860s the Bombay cotton spinning mills slowly began to reduce English yarn imports. However the Indian cotton market continued to expand as India became a distribution centre for Lancashire yarn and calico to markets which lay around the shores of the Indian Ocean.

India increased imports of Lancashire piece-goods twice as quickly as anyone else between 1820-1886 and half as fast again between 1887-1919. Any decrease in Indian market demand inevitably affected the English cotton trade situation and proved a contributing factor to a number of depressions in the 19th century English cotton industry.

In India the cotton economy was closely linked to the agricultural economy and was therefore subject to fluctuations caused by poor harvests or the length of the monsoons. India exported raw cotton to England but it was of a short stapled variety, unlike the medium stapled variety produced by the USA; and import duties favoured the higher quality long stapled West Indian cottons between 1798-1828.

Import duties remained a means of increasing British competitiveness and decreasing Indian competitiveness when occasion demanded. India was always essentially seen as an export market for calico rather than as an import market for cotton.

Further Reading;
The English Cotton Industry and the World Market 1815-1896. (Farnie.D.A. 1979).

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