

"Interwoven Histories: Exploring the Rich Tapestry of India-Africa Textile Trade and Cultural Exchange"

Textiles from ancient civilizations to modern global commerce networks weave complex historical threads that act as physical records of human advancement. These fabrics are the pinnacle of artistry, inventiveness, and the intricate web of cultural interactions that have woven societies together through the ages. These fabrics' complex warp and weft patterns capture the universal human experience, forming linkages of self-awareness and community while simultaneously defining cultural identities.

Examining the textile business provides a different perspective on history. For example, the fascinating histories of Africa and India are based on their dynamic social connections and interactions across cultures. This common history foreshadows future developmental paths and serves as a foundation for current partnerships and cooperation.

African textile manufacture has long been an area of interest for India, as evidenced by historical documents such as the 'Periplus of the Erythraean Sea'. Textiles from the fourth century BC from Gujarat have been discovered on Socotra Island, Yemen, providing more evidence for the historic trade routes that connected India and Eastern Africa. These results highlight the long-lasting impact of India on African textile customs.

Beyond its effects on the economy, trade strengthens a sense of communal identity. Indian traders from Arabia, the Ottoman Empire, Europe, and India promoted Indian textiles, which became popular throughout Africa because of their exquisite designs and high quality. Throughout Africa, famous textiles such as Madras Bleed, Kanga, and Kitenge became well-known. On the other hand, Indian textiles were gradually assimilated into African culture, and their acceptance changed with time.

Indian textiles have established a distinct identity by the time of Portuguese exploration, signifying affluent position. However, they also evolved into emblems of individualism and resistance for common people and former slaves, who appropriated them as status symbols.

Notwithstanding the significant influence of Indian textiles, local manufacturers in areas such as Kilwa have challenges related to visibility and recognition. A class divide was unintentionally reinforced when some groups, most famously the "Bombay Africans," began acquiring luxury goods from India.

As we move forward to the present day, the textile tie between Africa and India is still strong. Indian textile companies have established a strong presence in African markets, with cities such as Jetpur emerging as important centres for manufacturing textiles customised to suit African tastes. Numerous Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and trade agreements, including

those under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), Structural Adjustment Policy (SAPs), and the Agreements on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) of the World Trade Organisation, further highlight the depth of this relationship.

Essentially, textiles are carriers of history, culture, and identity rather than just being materials. Deeper economic connections and cross-cultural interactions are anticipated in the future because of the interwoven fates of Africa and India, which are based on a shared textile legacy. Textiles continue to be an essential element connecting these two regions' interwoven stories as they travel further.

*Views are personal



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