

ANALYZING THE NEED AND DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION IN INDIGENOUS INDUSTRIES OF INDIA

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Introduction

Most actors today agree that our modern society has to develop in more sustainable ways. This includes how we produce and consume clothing, shoes, accessories and other textiles. Virtually all major clothing companies in Sweden today have a work in progress in the area of sustainability, particularly in the production phase, but also increasingly at the user level to encourage increased reuse and recycling. At major clothing companies, CSR managers and sustainability heads today openly discuss how they work to realign their business models, production processes and store concepts towards improved sustainability. Sustainable fashion refers to clothing that is designed, manufactured, distributed, and used in ways that are environmentally friendly. The word sustainable is defined as “*capable of being sustained.*” Therefore, a sustainable fashion industry is one that must operate in ways that can continue working for years and decades to come.

Unfortunately, this is not true of today’s dominant ‘fast fashion,’ which refers to clothing that’s intentionally designed to be consumed quickly at cheap prices, leading shoppers to view clothes as being disposable—wearing them just a few times before throwing them out or moving on to newer and trendier cheap clothes. The fast fashion cycle is far from sustainable, because it depletes the Earth’s natural resources at exponential rates, exploits workers around the world, and results in an overwhelming amount of waste. In contrast to traditional fashion houses that only have a few seasonal collections per year, fast fashion brands may churn out as many as one new collection per week (or more) in efforts to drive continuous, mindless consumption. We have known this for decades: most of our clothes are made in countries in which workers’ rights are limited or nonexistent. In fact, production sites are regularly moving locations, on the lookout for ever cheaper labour costs. We often hear company owners saying that “for these workers, it is better than nothing”, “at least we give them a job”, and to a certain extent, they are right. But it is also right to say that they are exploiting the misery and taking advantage of poor populations who have no choice but to work for any salary, in any working conditions. Even the European

Parliament is using the term “slave labour” to describe the current working conditions of garment workers in Asia.

We know that if working conditions improve in one country, companies will just move to another. We believe that we cannot expect much from the corporate world or from governments if consumers do not push for a change.

Industrial units are generally classified between small-scale, medium scale and large scale units; considering their size, capital resources and the number of labourers engaged upon. Small scale industries are mostly located in urban centres as separate units, but the cottage industries are normally associated with agriculture and provide subsidiary employment in rural areas; Small scale industries produce goods with mechanized equipment, partially or fully, but the cottage industries involve activities mostly by hand and are performed primarily with the help of household workers. In India, the small scale industrial sector has been growing at a very rapid scale. Industrial Policy Resolutions, 1948, 1956 and more particularly the Industrial Policy Statement, 1977 have offered a special favour for the development of small-scale industries in India. Initially the fixed capital investment limit of the small scale units was restricted to Rs. 5 lakh and later on the limit was raised to Rs. 10 lakh for small scale units and Rs. 15 lakh for ancillaries in 1975.

Background

The **economic development in India** followed socialist-inspired politicians for most of its independent history, including state-ownership of many sectors; India's per capita income increased at only around 1% annualised rate in the three decades after its independence. Since the mid-1980s, India has slowly opened up its markets through economic liberalisation. After more fundamental reforms since 1991 and their renewal in the 2000s, India has progressed towards a free market economy.

Prior to India's Independence, from the period of 1900 to 1947, per capita income in India had either declined or stagnated. Post-Independence, Jawaharal Nehru demonstrated his willingness to compromise socialism for the perceived benefit of the country to provide financial incentives for the expansion of private enterprise. However, after the crisis of 1957, India turned towards import substitution industrialization and introduced foreign exchange. The Nehru-Mahalanobis approach, often referred to as the Second Five Year Plan, emphasized the development of basic and heavy industries as a means of accelerating economic growth. These included steel, copper, petrochemicals, paper, coal, and oil.

Mahalanobis strived for India to reach autonomy, ridding any outstanding debts. Critics disagreed with this approach, stating that World Bank's claim of Indian export prospects being low were falsified and due to India's inward-looking strategy, the growth opportunity of the world economy was missed. Nonetheless, over 1950–1965, India's acceleration of per capita income growth had increased an average of 1.7%, a value not exceeded since. The progress of economic changes in India is followed closely. The World Bank suggests that the most important priorities are public sector reform, infrastructure, agricultural and rural development, removal of labour regulations, reforms in lagging states, and HIV/AIDS. For 2018, India ranked 77th in Ease of Doing Business Index. According to Index of Economic Freedom World Ranking an annual survey on economic freedom of the nations, India ranks 123rd as compared with China and Russia which ranks 138th and 144th respectively in 2014.

Corporate India has come a long way since the government opened up the Indian markets for global competition in 1991. Fears that this would spell doom for the local industry were then strong. Entry of multinational companies (MNCs) in Indian markets stoked a fear of an end to the domestic entrepreneurial spirit. With their vast pool of resources, knowledge of multiple markets and a force of capable executives with proven track record in global markets, the MNCs were expected to rewrite the script of the Indian business. A decade and a half later, doomsayers have been proved wrong as not only have Indian companies tightened their stronghold on the domestic market, but they have also significantly increased overseas investments. Today, domestic companies have grown in size and scale. Growth in consumerism in the country and renewed thrust of the government on infrastructural development has augured well for the domestic industry. Local companies have gained enough muscle to carry out consolidation of their business on the global front. This has given rise to the corporate entities popularly known as Indian MNCs — Indian companies with production facilities located at strategic places.

Discussion

For many of us, fashion and clothing are an important part of life. The fast fashion industry has conditioned us to constantly feel the need to reinvent our style, follow new trends and buy new clothes. And constantly changing trends and cheap prices have boosted the production of clothing to massive levels.

On the other hand, climate change and sustainability are becoming increasingly important issues, as mass movements such as “Fridays for Future” show. The fast fashion industry is also reacting to these social changes and is trying to win buyers with green labels. But is this making any difference or is fast fashion still one of the dirtiest industries in the world? We took a closer look

at the various stages in the fashion production cycles to get to the truth about the environmental impact of fast fashion.

Overconsumption: Probably everyone knows this problem: Despite standing in front of an overflowing wardrobe, we still can't find anything to wear. Greenpeace found out that a staggering 40 % of our wardrobes are rarely or never worn. Due to constantly changing trends and new collections in the shops, our own clothes quickly go out of fashion and we get the impression that we need something new again. The offer of constantly new collections is huge: Between 2000 and 2014 the production of new clothing has doubled, and in 2014 for the first time the eye-watering mark of 100 billion newly produced garments was hit. This huge growth in the past two decades is partly due to big fashion chains that have increased their offering from two collections per year at that time to five or more. Fashion giant H&M even releases 12-16 collections per year and Zara also launches a new collection approximately every two weeks (equivalent to approximately 24 collections per year).

Waste Of Raw Materials: But it is not only the high consumption and huge production volume that are to blame for the negative impact the fashion industry has on the planet. The environmental impact begins with the cultivation of the materials used to make clothes – either natural fibers, chemical fibers or a mixture of both. But what exactly is so harmful about the processes involved?

1. **Natural fibers:** In the case of natural fibers, we speak of materials such as cotton, silk or wool. The most frequently processed natural fiber is cotton (used purely or most likely as a blend in 40 % of all clothing), which is grown in about 80 countries around the world. The main problem in the cultivation of cotton is the high water consumption used in cultivation. For example, 1 kg of conventional cotton needs about 11,000 liters of water. In addition, pesticides and insecticides are used in most cotton fields and two-thirds of the cotton grown is genetically modified. Cotton can also be grown more sustainably and without the use of pesticides: however, this "organic cotton" also consumes a lot of water and is sometimes harvested in developing countries under questionable working conditions.
2. **Chemical fibers:** 60 % of clothing produced is made from synthetic materials – mainly polyester, polyamide (nylon and perlon), polyacrylic and elastane. The most commonly used synthetic material is polyester. Polyester consists of polyethylene terephthalate (PET), of which the basic materials are petroleum, hard coal, limestone and natural gas. The production of polyester alone requires 98 million tons of crude petroleum every year. This currently corresponds to about 1 % of the oil produced worldwide. And the

trend is rising. If the fashion industry remains on this course, consumption could rise to 300 million tonnes of oil by 2050, and would be responsible for 26 % of human CO₂ emissions by 2050. Currently this figure is 10%, which is more than all international flights and sea shipments together (5 %).

Water Pollution Due To Microplastics (During Use): But it is not only the production of chemical fibers that is harmful to the environment. Another problem of synthetic materials is that they are very difficult (or often impossible) to biodegrade. This has serious consequences for oceans and inland waters. The fashion industry is responsible for 35 % of the microplastics in the sea and is the main source of microplastics in the oceans. When polyester clothing is washed, tiny fibers are detached, which then end up as microplastics in the wastewater and consequently also in the rivers and oceans of the world. Since microplastics are not biodegradable, it becomes dangerous especially for animals. But microplastics are also increasingly problematic for humans. As long as animals absorb microplastics through their food, microplastics will also get into our food-system and thus into our bodies.

Garbage : As mentioned earlier, the fashion industry now produces more than twice as much clothing as it did in 2000, and even though consumption has increased, not all garments that are produced find their way to buyers. What really happens to unsold garments after they have left the stores is hard to find out and the fashion giants don't give much information about it. If you trust insiders, though, it would seem that every 5th piece is not sold. Apart from the sale in outlets and the recycling of filling materials, it is assumed that most of the clothes are burned. This would result in significant CO₂ emissions. It's shocking to think that 80 % of all clothes sold end up in residual waste sooner or later. Only 1 % is fully recycled.

Labour laws are one of the most complex and hotly debated issues in India. A labour surplus economy, such as India, should be protective of its workers but laws solely guided by this principle makes it difficult for businesses to operate. This hinders expansion of the business causing limited employment opportunities, effectively making both parties, i.e. employer and employee worse off. In India, labour is a subject of the concurrent list and hence has both central and state governed laws. The earlier labour laws were archaic and in need of the serious update that the new labour legislation by the Centre has provided.

As most of the earlier central labour laws were based on the size of firms, they created a perverse incentive structure wherein firms preferred to remain small. For instance, the Industrial Disputes Act (IDA), 1947 (Chapter VB) mandated firms with more than 100 employees to get permission from the Government before retrenchment of employees, while firms with less than 100 employees were exempted from the need to get this permission.

Given the transaction costs inherent in complying with such regulations, naturally a large majority of firms preferred to stay below the threshold of 100 employees. Similarly, firms avoided coming under the Factories Act by keeping their number of workers below 20 (10 without power). Economic Survey 2018-19 mentions that dwarfs (i.e., firms that are both small and older than 10 years), dominate the Indian economy, holding back job creation and productivity. While dwarfs account for half of all the firms in organized manufacturing by number, their share in employment is only 14.1 percent and slightly less than 8 percent in Net Value Added. Small size of firms means that the firms cannot take advantage from economies of scale, which is key to competitive markets such as exports.

Sustainable Fashion is the need of the hour and the fashion industry is finally trying to pull their weight by altering and introducing more sustainable collections, collaborated efforts and labels. This approach is very much needed because of the amount of harm the fashion industry does to our environment. It is also beneficial for us since we get to consume organic and natural products. On the account of World Environment Day, we are here to educate you and help you understand the concept of sustainable fashion as a whole.

Sustainable Fashion is a concept of Eco-friendly fashion and it is typically based on three important parts of sustainability — reduce, reuse, and recycle. The concept promotes an alternative way of clothing and a strong expression of lifestyle and personality of the wearer. It is based on the traditional concept of sustainability. By making a conscious choice of selecting organic fibres such as cotton or hemp we can reduce our carbon footprint while reducing the amount of chemicals you bring into your life.

Production of the sustainable goods is ethical and all the products are produced under safe working conditions which means that the company you are purchasing clothes from care about their employees and eventually you. If you play your part and go organic, you should invest in renewable fibres that are non-toxic, more durable and timeless.

Sustainable Lifestyle Brands

1. **Fab India** is the largest private platform for products that are made from traditional techniques, skills and hand-based processes. With over 55,000 craft based rural producers to modern urban markets, thereby creating a base for skilled, sustainable rural employment, and preserving India's traditional handicrafts in the process. Their products are natural, craft-based, contemporary, and affordable.

2. **The Jodi Life** is a 100% natural Indian textile brand that uses the artisanal process of hand-block printing. They put emphasis on working with the artists that hone their craft and techniques really well. Their capsule collection focuses on colourful and unique pieces with a strong emphasis on prints.
3. **Cotton Rack** is a grounded and socially responsible ethical lifestyle brand. Their contemporary style satisfies our modern needs without losing the traditional essence. A brand that brings back the original glory that this homespun and handwoven fabric truly deserves by inspiring the young again. And all of this while bringing a change to lives of the maker, the wearer and the environment.
4. **Ecofemme** is a women-led non-profit organisation that produces and sell washable cloth pads. They provide menstrual health education and open dialogues on menstruation to the public to create environmental and social change through revitalising menstrual practices that are healthy, environmentally sustainable, culturally responsive and empowering.

Conclusion

As many businesses want to reduce their carbon footprint and reduce the amount of environmental pollution they contribute, they are seeking out ways to be proactive about their building and waste processes. While manufacturing and building businesses are no strangers to pollution and waste, there are various instances where they can better their practices. Some of which are-

1. **Rethink the process-** Rethink the process to prevent pollution waste from occurring in the first place. Or, if certain processes are required, determine whether or not they can be completed less frequently.
2. **Substitute materials-** Alternative materials for cleaning, coating, lubrication, and other processes can prevent costly hazardous waste generation, air emissions, and worker health risks, says the article. However, before switching materials, ensure that they will still get the job done, do not produce any other toxic waste, and do not require purchasing additional equipment.

3. **Reuse materials-** Wherever possible, reuse materials to reduce toxic waste production. Distill used solvents, reuse clean cardboard boxes and swap out cleaning agents for less hazardous options to reduce contaminants in wastewater.
4. **Improve housekeeping practices-** First and foremost, keep hazardous materials segregated and locked away. When these materials, such as solvents and cleaning agents, are not in use, ensure they are put back into the proper storage facilities. Further, ensure all of these items are labeled appropriately and kept away from drains. Lastly, keep soiled items separate from clean items at all times.

In addition to this, I think that the government should introduce a ban on use of microplastics and other similar materials.

What can you do to prevent or at least reduce the impact your fashion consumption has on the environment? Here are 7 suggestions to help you shop more sustainably.

1. **Buy less-** Check your wardrobe to see how many garments are in there that you hardly wear. If, like most people, there are plenty of items you don't wear then try to appreciate your old clothes again instead of following the latest trends.
2. **Buy used-** When going on a shopping spree, it is also worth visiting second-hand shops, flea markets or vintage online marketplaces. Here you often find great pieces that deserve a second chance. Not only that, you can often find higher-quality clothes that you couldn't otherwise afford.
3. **Quality over quantity-** If you want something completely new, you should invest in good quality and timeless classics so that your clothes last longer. Fair Fashion brands are especially suitable as their collections are typically better made and last longer than fast fashion (or even designer) products, as well as being ethically produced.
4. **Cotton instead of polyester-** When buying your clothes, pay attention to the fabric. One rule of thumb here: cotton is better than polyester! Cotton clothing is usually more environmentally-friendly as cotton is biodegradable. Cotton garments are also softer on your skin.
5. **Fair Fashion instead of branded clothing-** Fair Fashion often seems expensive compared to clothing from cheap chains. But if you compare their prices with global brands, prices are often similar. So, it is better to invest in sustainable clothing than in branded items, which are often produced in the same questionable conditions as

clothing from fast fashion giants.

6. **Wash less-** Sometimes it is enough to air-out clothes or partially remove stains before putting them in the washing machine. Also, only wash when the machine is full and use bio detergent which does not pollute the waste water with chemicals.
7. **Repair-** Don't throw your clothes away immediately if they are broken, you can repair many defects yourself. But if you don't have the time or the skills, you can also take your clothes to your local tailor who should be able to repair most defects for a reasonable price.

The four Labour Codes introduced by the government provide greater autonomy to employment. The new labour codes go a great distance to reflect the current structure of the economy and include more firms and employees under its ambit along with making the legal architecture much simpler, reducing the compliance cost of the firms. This was the need of the hour and will further our aim of improving the ease of doing business and increased competitiveness at global level.

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