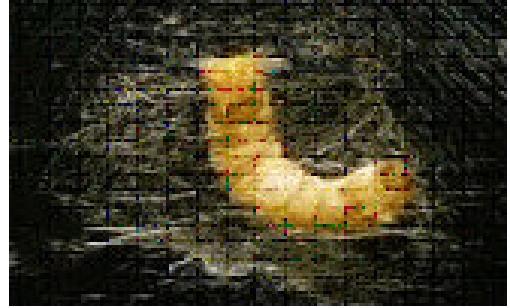


## **HISTORY :**

*Historical evidence shows that silk was discovered in China and that the industry spread from there to other parts of the world.*

### **SILK DISCOVERY SECRETE...**

The Chinese has used silk since the 27th century B.C.. During the Roman Empire, silk was sold for its weight in gold. The Chinese domesticated silk worms and fed them with mulberry leaves. They unwound the silkworms' cocoons to produce long strands of silk fiber.



Silk is one of the oldest fibers known to man. Its discovery as a weave able fiber is credited to the Lady Xi Ling Shi, the 14-year-old bride of the Emperor Huang Ti, the so-called 'Yellow Emperor'. One day in 2640BC, according to Confucius, **she was sitting under a mulberry tree, drinking a cup of tea into which a silk cocoon fell from above. She noticed the delicate fibers start to unravel in the hot liquid and has been credited as the first person to 'reel' or unravel a silk cocoon and use the filament to create a yarn for weaving.** Whether or not the legend holds true, it is certain that the earliest surviving references to silk production place it in China and that for nearly 3 millennia, the Chinese had a global monopoly on silk production.

The Chinese kept the secret of the beautiful and value added material that, they were producing from the rest of the world for more than 30 centuries. Travelers were searched thoroughly at border crossings and anyone caught trying to smuggle eggs, cocoons or silkworms out of the country were summarily executed. Demand for this exotic fabric eventually created the lucrative trade route now known as the '***Silk Road***', of which mention is made as early as 300BC in the days of the Han Dynasty, taking silk westward and bringing gold, silver and wools to the East.

Silk was exported along the **Silk Road** (*the ancient trade route linking China and the Roman Empire*). This trade brought China a great wealth, but the Chinese did not give away the secret on how silk was produced.

The Chinese could not keep their monopoly forever. The industry is said to have spread to Tibet when a Chinese princess, carrying silkworm eggs and mulberry tree seeds in her headdress, married the king of Khotan in Tibet. From Tibet the industry spread slowly to India and Persia.



According to Western historians, mulberry-tree cultivation spread to India through Tibet during 140 BC and cultivation of mulberry trees, rearing of silkworms began in the areas flanking the Brahmaputra and Ganges rivers.

According to some Indian scholars silkworms (*Bombyx mori*) were first domesticated in the foothills of the Himalayas. Evidences in ancient Sanskrit literature reveals that certain kind of wild silks were cultivated in India from time immemorial.

When British came to India, the flourishing silk trade exploited and developed silk centres in many parts of the country. The Company exported large quantities of silk produced in West Bengal to England. The Company's monopoly was abolished in 1836 and the entire trade turned over to private enterprise, due to improper organized system the silk industry in West Bengal declined. By the time other silk producing states in the country viz., Jammu & Kashmir, Mysore have developed the industry.

## **Sericulture in India**

Silk is a way of life in India. Over thousands of years, it has become an inseparable part of Indian culture and tradition. No ritual is complete without silk being used as a wear in some form or the other. Silk is the undisputed queen of textiles over the centuries. Silk provides much needed work in several developing and labor rich countries. Sericulture is a cottage industry par excellence. It is one of the most labor intensive sectors of the Indian economy combining both agriculture and industry, which provides for means of livelihood to a large section of the population i.e. mulberry cultivator, co-operative rearer, silkworm seed producer, farmer-cum-rearer, reeler, twister, weaver, hand spinners of silk waste, traders etc. It is the only one cash crop in agriculture sector that gives returns within 30 days. This industry provides employment nearly to three five million people in our country. Sericulture is cultivated in Karnataka, Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Gujarat, Kerala, Maharastra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Orissa etc.

Though India is the second largest silk producer in the World after China, it accounts for just 5% of the global silk market, since the bulk of Indian silk thread and silk cloth are consumed domestically. Germany is the largest consumer of Indian silk. The sericulture industry is land-based as silk worm rearing involves over 700,000 farm families and is concentrated in the three Southern states of Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. (The states of Assam and West Bengal are also involved in the industry to a certain extent).

Silk, the queen of the fabrics still commands passion of consumer right from 2200 BC to till today, nationally and internationally. The export potential of Indian Sericulture Industry is evident from the fact that the annual export is Rs.2879.56 crores during the year 2004-05.

The Central Silk Board, Ministry of Textiles, Govt. of India has been acting as a facilitator for planning, development and monitoring of sericulture industry between the States and Central Govt. The subject of Research is the exclusivity of the Central Silk Board and its sub-ordinate Research and Training Institutes.

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