

**Chintz: How a Fabric Changed the World
April 21, 2018; Prangins, Switzerland**

Remarks by Ambassador of India

**Hon'ble Director of the Museum Ms. Helen Thomson,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me begin by congratulating the National Museum and its leadership for reenacting history here today. This exhibition brings together a memorable era of Indian and European history, on the role that Chintz and textiles played in the making of history. Thank you for inviting me on this occasion.

India has been a land of textiles and cotton from time immemorial. Cotton perhaps is the most ancient of textiles which continues to be widely used today, both as garment and outside of garment. It would not be an exaggeration to state that Cotton is perhaps one of symbols of continuity of ancient civilizations. Like several other major contributions that Indian civilization gave to the world such as 'Yoga', 'Ayurveda' etc. role of Indian weavers in evolution of cotton and textile industry is unique.

Cotton was referred to in the Hindu sacred text of Rig-Veda, several centuries Before Common Era, by referring to it as "threads in the loom". Ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, who lived in the 5th century BCE wrote that in India there were trees which produce a kind of wool better than sheep's wool in beauty and quality, which the Indians use for making their clothes.

The world famous rock-cut Ajanta Cave carvings of 2nd century BCE show how the cotton textile industry evolved to make a roller machine to get the seeds out of the cotton. Since those ancient times, till the 18th century India was able to produce technically very advanced textiles than any other part of the world.

The story of Chintz that we celebrate here today is part of a long and distinguished history of cotton that evolved in India. 'Chintz' is one of those often forgotten contribution from India to the world of Textiles. Its journey from some of the finest workshops in India to Europe and the story behind it are all part of a larger Indian story.

Indian weavers continue to produce some of the best cotton fabrics even today. It continues to produce print cottons of highest quality adapting to the latest fashions of the day. The Indian textile industry continues to be predominantly based on cotton, with about 65% of raw materials consumed being cotton.

In fact textile Industry is part of the economic transformation that one sees in India today. I would like to make a special mention of the handloom sector, as hand operated traditional weaving of cotton is successfully practiced in many parts of India today. The handloom industry today employs around 4.3 million people in rural India and is perhaps the largest cottage Industry anywhere in the world. Indian handlooms are known for their specific designs as well as unmatched finesse. Various traditions of cotton printing and weaving such as Jamdani, Bandini, Kalamkari, Block Printing are still alive and thriving in India. Even though many of these traditions are millennia old, Indian Textile Industry has managed to adapt them to the modern day fashion trends.

Khadi, the handwoven cloth, played a significant role in India's independence movement. The spinning wheel that Mahatma Gandhi used to spin Khadi became a symbol of India's freedom struggle. In fact, Khadi continues to be an important factor in India's textile industry today. It is a unique fabric that keeps the body cool in summer and warm in winter, and is a major attraction when we have growing concern on 'climate change'. Those who travel to India cannot miss the large number of Khadi Bhawans showcasing khadi clothes of all types and from different states of India.

India today is one of the largest manufacturer and exporter of textiles and apparels, with a massive raw material and manufacturing base. Textile sector is the second largest employment provider in the country, employing over 50 million people directly and around 70 million people indirectly. It is a significant contributor to Indian economy, both in terms of its domestic share and exports. It contributes about 10 per cent to manufacturing production and 15 per cent to the country's total exports earnings.

I congratulate the Swiss National Museum in organizing this event today. I urge all present here today to visit India to see for themselves the land where cotton fabric originated and evolved and also to explore the opportunities it offers.

Thank you