



News Release

The Fabric of India

Supported by Good Earth India

With thanks to Experion and NIRAV MODI

Part of the V&A India Festival

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The Fabric of India is the first exhibition to fully explore the incomparably rich world of handmade textiles from India. From the earliest known Indian textile fragments to contemporary fashion, the exhibition illustrates the technical mastery and creativity of Indian textiles and is the highlight of the V&A India Festival.

Celebrating the variety, virtuosity and continuous innovation of India's textile traditions, *The Fabric of India* presents approximately 200 objects made by hand. On display are examples of everyday fabrics and previously unseen treasures; from ancient ceremonial banners to contemporary saris, from sacred temple hangings to bandanna handkerchiefs, to the spectacular tent used by Tipu Sultan (1750-1799), the famed ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore.

The exhibition offers an introduction to the raw materials and processes of making cloth by hand. Displays of the basic fibres of silk, cotton and wool illustrate the importance of India's natural resources to its textile-making traditions. The opening section shows fabrics dyed with natural materials such as pomegranate and indigo and the complex techniques of block printing, weaving and embroidery across the ages, together creating a visual compendium of India's astonishingly diverse array of fabrics. Highlights range from muslin embroidered with glittering green beetle wings, to a vast wall hanging appliqued with designs of elephants and geometrical patterns, to a boy's jacket densely embroidered with brightly coloured silk thread and mirrors.

Wealth, power and religious devotion are all expressed through textiles, and the exhibition examines how fabrics were used in courtly and spiritual life. Fabrics created for temples and shrines vary widely in imagery and techniques, depending on the religious context, level of patronage and region of production. Examples on display include a Hindu narrative cloth in silk lampas weave, depicting avatars of the deity Vishnu dating to around 1570; a 16th-century Islamic talismanic shirt inscribed with verses from the Quran in ink and gold paint; a rare early Jain panel embroidered with silk thread and an 18th-century Crucifixion scene made in South-East India for an Armenian Christian church.

The exhibition also explores the range, opulence, scale and splendour of objects handmade for the rich and powerful courts of the 17th to 19th centuries. Fine hangings and large floor spreads used for decoration in the Mughal and Deccani courts depicting beautifully flowering plants are on display alongside a lavish tent used by the infamous ruler Tipu Sultan. The canopy and a wall of the tent is erected in the gallery, allowing visitors to walk inside it to see the magnificent decoration close at hand. There are also stunning examples of dress on view, including a glittering woman's dress and a densely embroidered coat - one of the rarest surviving pieces of Mughal dress.

The historical and ongoing importance of textiles to the economy of India forms a key focus of *The Fabric of India*, with the exhibition highlighting the prevalence of Indian cloth around the world over millennia. Indian textiles have long been exported globally, as will be demonstrated by the display of three of the earliest known surviving fragments of Indian fabric dating back as far as the 3rd century. A range of pieces designed for foreign export showcase the remarkable ability of Indian artisans to adapt designs and techniques for a wide variety of different markets. Objects including an outstanding block-printed ceremonial textile from Gujarat, made in the 14th century for the Indonesian market and treasured as an heirloom piece for many centuries, and examples of simple handkerchiefs known as bandanas from Madras and Bengal, pervasive in the 18th and 19th centuries in the Middle East, West Africa and Britain, demonstrate the wide variety of uses of exported Indian fabric.

The global export of Indian textiles became particularly evident in Europe between the 17th and 19th centuries through the popularity of chintzes. A grouping of a beautiful wall hangings, bed-covers, robes and dresses featuring chintz patterns demonstrate how traditional Indian motifs and techniques were reinterpreted to appeal to European consumers. The enormous popularity of such cloth is illustrated through a display of an elegant set of bed-hangings originally belonging to the Austrian Prince Eugene (1663 – 1736), proof that Indian dyed cotton fabrics were coveted at the highest levels of European society.

The exhibition looks at the changing world as European industrialisation threatened to eradicate Indian handmaking skills in the 19th century. Imitations of India's cloth could be made at lower cost, particularly in British mills, and these fabrics were then imported to India, flooding the market, radically altering India's textile economy and threatening hand-made production. Examples of cotton fabrics woven and printed in England for sale in India are displayed to illustrate this phenomenon.

The Fabric of India reveals the consequences of this exchange, illustrating the way in which European developments in industry provoked a resistance movement which saw textiles take on an important role in the development of Indian nationhood and identity. The Swadeshi ('Own Country') movement called for Indians to stop buying foreign goods and support indigenous production. By the early 20th century, Indian textiles became a major symbol of resistance to British rule, and in the 1930s Mahatma Gandhi further compounded this by asking Indian people to

spin and weave their own yarn and fabric by hand, to produce a cloth known as Khadi. Wearing, spinning and weaving Khadi became a political tool of the Independence movement. *The Fabric of India* displays a selection of contemporary clothing using Khadi, showing that its symbolism remains relevant to this day.

Since the 1950s, revival initiatives have attempted to protect the cultural place of handmade textiles by reintegrating them into the economy. Elaborate wedding attire and film costumes have popularized traditional embellishment techniques and on display will be a magnificent wedding outfit by Sabyasachi Mukherjee, one of India's most important designers. Today innovative approaches to historic hand-making techniques are evident from high-end fashion runways to gallery walls. The continued global impact of India's hand-making skills is highlighted with pieces by international brands Hermes and Isabel Marant. Contemporary Indian textile art is on display to illustrate how traditional natural dyes, embroidery and hand painting techniques are being used to create decorative pieces.

The final section of the exhibition explores India's dynamic fashion industry and its continuity of India's textile traditions. Many Indian designers are using handmaking techniques in imaginative ways and innovative designs by Manish Arora, Abraham and Thakore, Rahul Mishra, Rajesh Pratap Singh and Aneeth Arora will be on display. The sari, the traditional dress of India, has been embraced in recent years by contemporary designers as an opportunity to combine innovative design with a uniquely Indian identity. A selection of the most exciting saris being produced today is shown as a vibrant finale to the exhibition.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- Tickets cost £14 (concessions available). V&A Members go free.
- The exhibition is curated by Rosemary Crill, Senior Curator in the Asian Department, and Divia Patel, Curator in the Asian Department
- The exhibition is part of V&A India Festival, a series of exhibitions, activities and events throughout Autumn 2015 to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Nehru Gallery of Indian Art at the V&A.
- The V&A is open daily from 10.00 – 17.45 and until 22.00 every Friday
- The exhibition is designed by Gitta Geschwendtner

Corporate Support for the V&A is more vital than ever. Please help us by acknowledging the exhibition supporters, Good Earth India, Experion and NIRAV MODI

About Good Earth India

Founded in 1996, Good Earth is a design house that celebrates the heritage of India and Asia. Each year, it creates a unique design collection that tells the story of a culture from its own point

of view. Working with traditional crafts, Good Earth presents them as Sustainable Luxury. Crafted by hand, inspired by nature and enchanted by history, Good Earth products are designed for everyday living for both home and apparel.

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Experion is India's leading real estate developer. With substantial development rights across many locations, the company are developing townships, group-housing projects, commercial landmarks, retail destinations, hotels and resorts. Experion is a 100% FDI funded developer backed by Experion Holdings Pte Ltd, Singapore - the real estate investing arm of the \$2.5 billion AT Holdings group of companies.

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About NIRAV MODI

NIRAV MODI is an international luxury jewelry brand built on the passion to create extraordinary jewels that celebrate 'the eternal shine in every woman'. The only Indian jeweller to be featured on the cover of Christie's and Sotheby's catalogues, NIRAV MODI builds on 100 years of family legacy in the diamond industry.

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Exhibition Publication and V&A Shop

The accompanying book is *The Fabric of India* edited by Rosemary Crill (£35, hardback). A range of products inspired by the exhibition is available from the V&A Shop in store and online at www.vandashop.com. For PRESS information, contact Emily Crutcher on 020 7942 2985 or e.crutcher@vam.ac.uk

For further PRESS information about the exhibition, please contact Lucy Hawes in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2500 or email l.hawes@vam.ac.uk (not for publication).

A selection of high resolution images is available to download from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

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