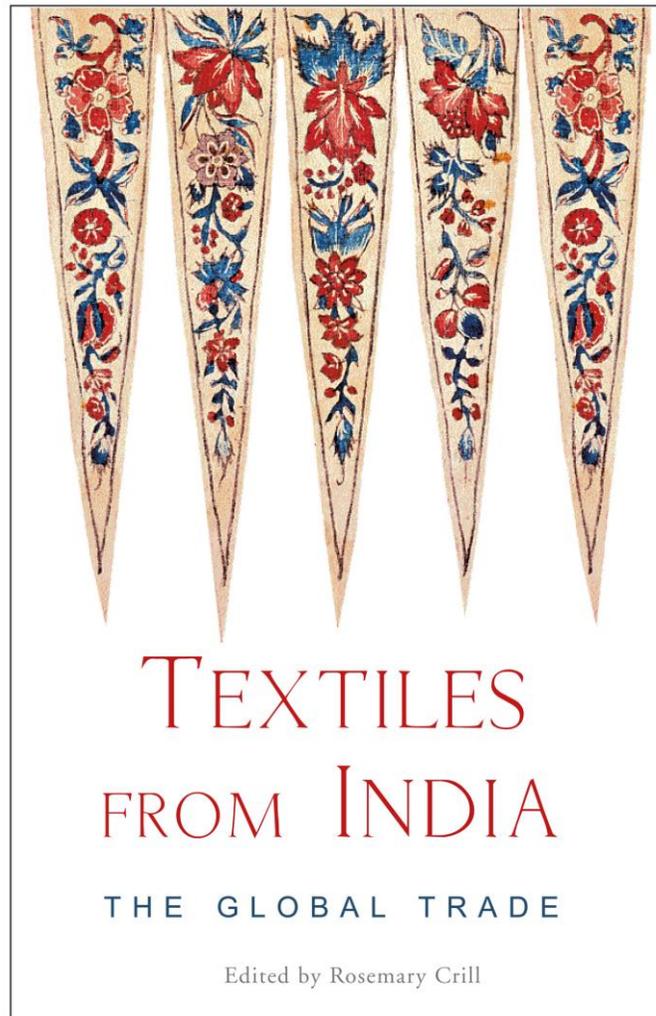


**Textiles from India**  
The global trade



Edited by Rosemary Crill  
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**BOOK REVIEW**

Did you know that 'Madras check' is called 'George' in West Africa and that Indian textiles are embedded in Kalabari life as a symbol of identity, gender and lineage? Or that Kashmir Shawls were not a fashion statement just in Europe but were also exported all over Iran and West Asia, as far as Constantinople?

Textiles from India, the global trade is a compilation of papers presented at a conference on the Indian Textile trade, Kolkata, in 2003; edited by Rosemary Crill, who is the Curator of the Asian Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The articles/papers range from Trade with Asia, Europe, Africa and America to specific types of Indian trade textiles that include the muslins of Bengal and Zardozi textiles; as well as trade in dyes.

Amrita Mukerji, who spearheaded the Sutra Conference in Kolkata, encountered 'George' in the local markets of Nigeria where her husband was posted. Fascinated by the fact that no one could tell her why these textiles(madras checks) were called 'George' or how they came to be there, she undertook a journey that brings us these absolutely fascinating papers on diverse aspects of trade in Indian textiles to Tibet, Sri Lanka and the rest of the world.

Donald Clay Johnson in his paper on 'Seventeenth century perceptions of Textile trade as evidenced in the writings of the Emperor Jehangir and Sir Thomas Roe', informs us among other aspects, that "for all the opulence of spectacles that brocades and other fabrics brought to Mughal ceremonies, they did not form part of trade goods to Europe; while Monisha Ahmed tells us about the manufacture of the Tibetan Gya-ser in Banaras, where it was not unknown for monks to carry back this brocaded fabric for use in their monasteries. We are given fascinating insights into the possibility of trade with Sri Lanka that has hitherto been ignored by textiles historians; by Steven Cohen who sheds light on Dutch intervention to implement the making of Chintz in the Jaffna region, which was short lived.

From Jasleen Dhamija we have an overview of Indian textiles that were "traded from one part of the world to the other, linking people and transferring technologies, ideas, concepts and philosophies" in 'The Geography of Textiles' and Ruby Ghaznavi tells us about the trade in the muslins of Bengal, which is supposed to have prompted the Roman Pliny to complain that the economy of Rome was being ruined by the import of "too much expensive Indian cloth". Rosemary Crill writes on The Indian embroideries at Hardwick Hall, Ruth Barnes on the trade to Eastern Indonesia, while Janet Rizvi tells us about the Asian trade in Kashmir shawls and Joanne Eicher on Kalabari identity and Indian Textiles in the Niger Delta are some of the well known scholars, among others, who have contributed to this publication.

Comprising of papers by twenty-three scholars from four continents, this book is a comprehensive publication on various aspects of trade in Indian Textiles, from the well known fabrics of the East (Coromandel) and West (Gujarat) Coasts of India to South East Asia and Europe, to lesser known dimensions of this trade. A lot of them read like unsolved mysteries where so much material is based on supposition rather than fact and yet the facts are established by these very suppositions. It is quite fascinating to see the kind of details that the scholars link up to establish dates and authenticity of origin of manufacture and motif/design, never really knowing exactly what happened when, where

and why but providing amazing and valuable insights into a world gone by that has provided the backdrop for the world we live and work in today.

Everyone working in the realm of textiles and fashion in or with India today, should make it a point to inform themselves about such historical practices, for the present-day trends in trade were clearly established centuries ago. It is evident that such well researched historical data and scholarship provide us with valuable clues for refining and redefining the process to our advantage, for they establish without the shadow of doubt that “trade and exchange across cultural lines have played a crucial role in human history” and perhaps forever will.

**Gopika Nath**