

# Cotton Trade in Medieval Times Part-II

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## Major Inventions That Influenced Cotton Commerce

This dramatic shift to machines in the cotton industry was amazingly rapid. England was, however, the last country in Europe to take up manufacture. But it made a mighty stir when it did wake up. The seductive Indian cottons attracted the fancy of the people in spite of the political pressure (laws and penalties) to abandon them, The weavers were encouraged to imitate the forbidden fripperies (curtains) of Indian cotton. English enterprise rose, by applying brains and skills to handling Indian cottons more proficiently than the native Indians.



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The following table provides the list of inventions which played a great role in the ascent of cotton trade and commerce.

While Richard Arkwright left a great fortune and during his time cotton trade trebled, many of these inventors did not reap the benefits. John Kay had to flee to France and died a penury; James Hargreaves' patent was stolen and he died a poor man in 1778, writing in his will that a guinea be given to the vicar for preaching his funeral sermon while Mr. James gave the widow 400 pounds for her husband's share in the factory. The golden age of cotton lasted from 1788-1803. The English cotton trade flourished. This confirms what Erasmus Darwin had to say, "It

is probable that the clothing of this small seed will become the principal clothing of mankind."

## Cotton in America

The short staple cotton fibre from India created difficulty amongst the English spinners. At that

**Table 1 : Machinery which revolutionised the textile industry**

Sr. No.	Name of the Invention	Year	Inventor	Remarks
1	Fly Wheel or the Fly Shuttle	1730	John Kay	Enhanced the efficiency of spinning, reducing the number of spinning hands (the word, "Spinster" a proficient unmarried woman spinner. She provided her spun weft required for the looms.
2	Drop Box	1761	Robert Kay	Increased the efficiency of the Dutch loom enabling the weaver to ply the separate shuttles.
3	Steam Engine	1762	James Watt, a mechanical apprentice	Provided power to the looms
3	Spinning Jenny (spinning machine with upright spindles)	1764	James Hargreaves, carpenter and weaver	Developing yarns through twisting by the spindles in an efficient way giving more power to the handwheel, providing more weft
4	Spinning frame or Water Frame or	1769	Richard Arkwright, the barber	Increased the pace of spinning
5	Numerous spinning jennies with a plentiful supply of	1770	Lewis Paul and John Wyat	Efficient spinning of the yarn into a warp
6	First piece of genuine British made calico	1773	Richard Arkwright, the barber	Set up a water-powered factory at Crafford, Derbyshire
7.	Improved Arkwright machine ( combining roller drawing and travelling carriage	1758-1827	Samuel Crompton	Improved the quality of yarn, increasing the number of spindles thus expanding the loom capacity
8.	Automatic loom	1787	Samuel Crompton	Machine of great power attached to the Engine of Watt

time the American upland cottons superior to the short staple Indian cottons gained momentum in production. The production of raw cotton dominated in the select few Southeastern states and the finished products were shipped to England from North America. With the advent of the Civil War from 1861-65, there was a blockade of shipment of Southern cotton by the North to England and Europe, resulting in cotton famines in respective countries. Later on, key policy changes resulted in the encouragement of free trade and ended the blockade. Thus interdependence amongst countries for cotton - both raw and finished products - added revenue to the economy of these countries. Three cotton exchanges viz., New York, Middling and New Orleans were formed to understand the flow of the cotton trade and the economy of cotton commerce. Staple grades were created to classify the quality of different cottons grown in diverse regions of America.

### Cotton in Europe

The cotton industry spread to parts of Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Holland, etc. In Germany, it was localised in Alsace and with its favourable conditions for operating machinery, it came to be known as the Manchester of Europe. Saxony also attracted the establishment of mills. Havre and Bremen were the main centres of cotton trade, Havre being the main port. The French industry grew when it made use of English inventions. Switzerland

ventured into producing fancy cotton goods like lace, though it was not a cotton producing nation. The re-introduction of the cotton spinning and weaving skills in Netherlands, though they were the pioneers to migrate to England as skilled hands, revived the Netherlands cotton industry. Cotton spinning was introduced by a Russian Ludwig Knop in 1839, in Russia. He had earlier worked in Manchester with a firm of cotton spinners. He was sent as an agent to Moscow and there started as a cotton spinner, importing machinery from England. Italian cotton industry flourished during the American Civil War (1861-1863) due to increased production of cotton in the Italian soil. Thus, the diverse localised geographical advantages aided in the rise of cotton industry at that time.

### Conclusion:

Cotton assumes an important role as clothing for mankind. The story of cotton trade extending from the ancient times to the medieval and renaissance period has lifted the veil concealing the potential of cotton as a product of commerce, revealing its glorious past. It still continues to be one of the prime contenders as a revenue fetching commodity crop occupying a universal position in the clothing of mankind.

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*(The views expressed in this column are of the author and not that of Cotton Association of India)*