

Sustainable Production in Apparel and Textile Industry: The Challenge

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Opinion

Textile industry is blamed to be one of the major contributor of environmental pollution. The processes involved in apparel and textile production starting from growing fibre crops like cotton to wet processing, manufacturing, performance and disposal contributes in releasing large amount of effluent in air, soil as well as in water bodies. Due to such hazardous wastes, all species in the ecosystem are affected severely. Environmental technology (also termed as green technology, clean technology or sustainability) is the application of the environmental science and green chemistry to conserve the natural environment and resources primarily to curb the negative impacts of human involvement on environment and also to protect our ecosystem for the future generations. The growing eco consciousness has led the worldwide institutions and industries to adopt organic farming, low impact fibres, water and energy saving processes, bio finishing, recycled packaging, eco labelling etc. However, a million dollar question is whether we are keeping up to the pace with these practices to be actually able to deliver according to the expected lines. The answer is certainly 'No' and the reasons behind this situation are attributed to certain facts, which have been emphasized in this opinion paper.

The Real Challenge!

If sustainability was as simple as it seems, the planet today had been on a different platform but there are many reasons as to why textile industries do not switch over to cleaner production and adopt sustainable approaches. Similarly, why the consumers do not fit in their roles in achieving sustainability needs to be explored. Role of Apparel and Textile Industry in achieving Sustainability. Some of the biggest challenges and the role of apparel and textile industry in achieving sustainability are discussed as under:

- a. The main challenge before the textile production industry is how to produce a product at a competitive price by using environment friendly process and by reducing emissions and pollution treatment price. Compliance to sustainable procedures are taxing for the pocket and so the industry promoters find ways and means to avoid them till the time things can be prolonged in the existing manner. For instance, supercritical dyeing using CO₂ to save water can be achieved in a special sophisticated equipment so to undertake such a dyeing, investment is firstly required to purchase the advanced machinery. Therefore, the cost of making a sustainable development plan stops before it actually gets started.
- b. Lack of technical expertise on advanced eco-friendly systems also keeps the apparel and textile industry away from adopting sustainable procedures. The old and rigid mind-set of people who lack exposure to sustainability feels it as an expense rather than an opportunity to increase business in the end. Thus, instead of making sustainability a high priority, they devalue it and place it low in their strategic planning.
- c. Profit vested outlook and failure to understand the real value of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is another major obstacle to achieve sustainability in apparel and textile industry. The pressure to reduce lead time in production accompanied with shorter life cycles have made the industry promoters run in a cat race to compete and win compromising on the mandates of CSR. The supply chains have become so agile that multiple violations are seen and therefore, the industry cannot fit into its claim of CSR.
- d. Lack of motivation that drive the industries towards sustainability and barriers to its implementation requires special attention from the side of government and other authorized agencies. Awareness programmes, training sessions, infrastructural support, expert guidance etc. are to be arranged for the industry to gain confidence and step into the systems to achieve sustainability and open up the managerial perception towards eco-friendly technologies and processes to make internal changes in the structure.

Debated Role of Consumers

The consumption choices of consumers are powerful decisions that they make in everyday life and shape markets and production patterns that have tremendous impact on natural resources and ecosystems as well as on the global community. The idealistic role of consumers can be a leading step in achieving sustainability, but there are certain reasons as discussed below as to why consumers do not fit in their roles.

1. Unchecked consumption of apparel and textile products by the consumers have forced the production to reach at a peak where sustainability seems difficult to be adhered to. We live in a consumer society that encourages extravagant spending, impulse purchasing and wealth display through latest gadgets, high living standards and fashionable clothing. Need of the product is surpassed by the want or desire to show off without realizing the consequences of constant production of products that our environment has to face.
2. Lack of green consumerism is a crucial factor. Consumers generally say that they want green products but when it comes to actual buying, the position is altogether different. They are not ready to buy an organic product as it is generally placed with a higher tag as compared to its non-organic counterpart even when customers know that organic products are eco-friendly. This forces the industry to continue production of non-organic products in order to cater to the demand. Therefore, there exists an intention action gap amongst the consumer's knowingly or unknowingly creating bar in achieving sustainable production. Very few consumers who identify as being 'passionate about sustainability' are willing to pay more for products or services that are labelled as eco-friendly.
3. Today's consumer is having time limitation for buying products. Low patience and high comfort level further add to the problem. The amount of time and research about a new product for verifying its sustainability parameters is tapering



down. In fact, the consumer does not want to choose between sustainability and convenience. There is a disconnect that exists for the majority of consumers between the convenience they want and their expectations around sustainability. Moreover, it appears that customers do not take initiative to go out of their way to buy eco-friendly brands. In fact, they will buy anything and everything that is available next door without exploring the facts related to its being eco-friendly or not. Sustainable or responsible consumption behaviour can change the world. However, the irony is that a major portion of consumers just does not care for sustainability aspect of the product and stick to their age-old purchasing habits.

Thus, it is a high time to change mind-set of industrialists and consumers for not only

talking about achieving sustainability, but also contributing for the same in their deeds and actions. The future for the Indian textile industry is promising and the only need of the hour is right education and governance in promoting the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development [1-2].

References

1. Anonymous (2005) Environmental hazards of the textile industry. Environmental Update #24, Business Week.
2. Shinde LM (2009) Pollution and its control in textile industry. Fibre2Fashion.