

Silk Varieties of India

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There are **five major types of silk of commercial importance** obtained from different species of silkworms, which in turn feed on a number of food plants. Except mulberry, other varieties of silks are generally termed as non-mulberry silks. India has the unique distinction of producing all these commercial varieties of silk.

Varieties of Silk

Mulberry Silk

- The bulk of the commercial silk produced in the world comes from this variety and often silk generally refers to mulberry silk. Mulberry silk comes from the silkworm, *Bombyx mori* L. which solely **feeds on the leaves of mulberry plants**.
- These silkworms are completely domesticated and reared indoors.
- In India, the major mulberry silk producing states are **Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal**, Tamil Nadu and Jammu & Kashmir which together accounts for 92% of the country's total mulberry raw silk production.

Tasar

- Tasar (Tussah) is copperish colour, **coarse silk** mainly used for furnishings and interiors. It is less lustrous than mulberry silk, but has its own feel and appeal.
- Tasar silk is generated by the silkworm, *Antheraea mylitta* which mainly thrive on the food plants Asan and Arjun. The **rearings are conducted in nature on the trees in the open**.
- In India, tasar silk is mainly produced in the states of **Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa**, besides Maharashtra, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Tasar culture is the

mainstay for many tribal communities in India.

Oak Tasar

- It is a finer variety of tasar generated by the silkworm, *Antheraea proylei* J. in India which feed on natural food plants of oak, found in abundance in the **sub-Himalayan belt of India covering the states of Manipur, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya and Jammu & Kashmir.**
- **China is the major producer** of oak tasar in the world and this comes from another silkworm which is known as *Antheraea pernyi*.

Eri

- Also known as Endi or Errandi, Eri is a **multivoltine silk spun from open-ended cocoons**, unlike other varieties of silk. Eri silk is the product of the domesticated silkworm, *Philosamia ricini* that feeds mainly on **castor leaves.**
- Eri culture is a household activity practiced mainly for **protein rich pupae, a delicacy for the tribal.** Resultantly, the eri cocoons are open-mouthed and are spun.
- The silk is used indigenously for preparation of chaddars (wraps) for own use by these tribals. In India, this culture is practiced mainly in the **north-eastern states and Assam.** It is also found in Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa.

Muga

- This golden yellow colour silk is prerogative of India and the **pride of Assam state.** It is obtained from semi-domesticated multivoltine silkworm, *Antheraea assamensis*.
- These silkworms feed on the aromatic leaves of Som and Soalu plants and are reared on trees similar to that of

tasar.

- Muga culture is specific to the state of Assam and an integral part of the tradition and culture of that state. The muga silk, **a high value product** is used in products like sarees, mekhalas and chaddars.