

## **Fable - The Silk Legend**

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Have you seen a silk cloth? Isn't it shimmery & luminescent? The oldest silk discovered dates back to 3630 BC, the Chinese Neolithic Period, in Henan Province of the Chinese civilization. China & silk are inseparable. China owned the secret to silk production for more than one thousand years. Chinese traded silk with the other civilizations of the time. The silk trade was of so much importance that the trade route came to be known as The Silk Route. The fibres of silk are merged in various cultures across the continents. For silk was found among mummies of Egypt, ancient Babylon's used it, and even Roman royalty wore it. Thus, silk is part of a global culture or if we may say so, silk has bound the history & culture of the world for thousands of years.

### Silk: The Queen of Fibres

Silk is a soft yet strong & durable natural protein fibre which is produced by the silkworm. The fabric is soft, smooth & shimmery. It is organic, biodegradable & recyclable. It is warm in winter & cool in summer. It denotes luxury & royalty. Hence, next time you wear silk, consider yourself a prince or princess ;)

How was the first silk fibre discovered? The credit goes to the wife of Yellow Emperor, Liezu, or Lady Hsi-Ling-Shih of China around 3000 BC, also crowned as the Goddess of Silk. Let's time travel and read this incredible story.

### The Story

"My Lady, the tea is served in the royal garden, as desired," informed Amah. Liezu looked up and smiled. A newly wedded wife of fourteen, she was yet to come to terms with the responsibility of her role. The Emperor had often watched her stroll in the garden, just happy listening to the chirping of birds, the aroma of flowers and the soft cushioned grass beneath her feet. He had even suggested jokingly that she can find some remedy to the moths eating the mulberry leaves as she spends so much time in the garden.

Liezu walked towards the garden slowly & gracefully, immersed in her thoughts. She felt lonely in the huge palace. Sitting beneath the mulberry tree, where the table was set, she thought "What is my role as the Emperor's wife? Will I have to keep waiting for the emperor till he is free? What do I do in the meantime?" She thought. Gossips never lured her and neither did the luxuries of life nor extravagant clothes and jewels. A simple girl with beauty & sharpness of the brain, she was struggling to find her own feet. As the legend goes, Liezu picked up the cup, just then a white ball dropped into it. "Oh my lady, keep it down. It's a bad omen. These moths have made it impossible to sit in the garden & drink." While Amah was blabbering, Liezu observed the white ball open & loosen into fine

fibres. She delicately picked one corner of the fibre and starting pulling it slowly. The white ball began to uncurl itself. The whole ball was made of one single fibre that was soft yet strong. It was as soft and smooth as a cobweb. It shone in the angry afternoon sun. Liezu's eyes glimmered with brilliance. "Amah, can you please, bring needle & the cloth from the closet."

The old Amah, anxious

to know why, rushed to fulfil the orders, still confused. Soon Liezu was busy embroidering a small flower using the thread she just discovered. She found her answers. Mulberry tree and these moths were her destiny. "Amah, if the emperor isn't busy, I require his presence."

The rest is history. It is said she devoted her life to silk production. She worked upon the ways to create silk threads from fibre, invented the silk reel, silk spin & silk loom to create the cloth. Liezu's discovery was supported by the Yellow Emperor who encouraged her to study the life cycle of silk moths. He even gifted an entire garden of mulberry trees with silk moths. She must have been so happy!!!!

With her own mulberry forest, she researched ways to produce the best silk and taught China to manufacture silk that became an important part of Chinese culture & economy. The rearing of silkworms & the production of silk is called Sericulture. Chinese researched & created unique techniques to develop the finest of silk in the world. The process of silk production was a big secret to the world until two monks from the Byzantine Empire smuggled silkworm eggs in their walking stick and taught silk production to us all.

#### **Do you know?**

- The Silk Route was approximately 6400km long. The historic trade route of silk dates back to 2nd Century BC and continued till 14th Century AD. It includes China, India, Persia, Arabia, Greece & Italy. The Silk Route extended from the South China Sea in the East to the Mediterranean Sea in the West. Check out the map!!!!
- Why silk shimmers? The silk fibre is made up of a triangular prism-like structure that refracts light at different angles thus, making it shine.
- During the time of the Han Dynasty, silk became synonymous with currency. Taxes were paid in silk by farmers; officers were paid salary in silk. Can you imagine? Silk as significant & valuable as gold and ten times more useful? Only the royal family was allowed to wear silk in China. The Emperor wore white silk within the Imperial Palace & yellow while going out in public.