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EVOLUTION OF INDIAN FASHION: FROM ANCIENT TRADITIONS TO MODERN GLOBAL TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

Fashion in India reflects the country's social, cultural, political, and economic transformations across centuries. Indian fashion has evolved from the simple draped garments of the Indus Valley Civilization to the luxurious textiles of the Mughal era, the Western influence introduced during British colonialism, and the fusion styles of the contemporary globalized period. This paper examines the historical development of Indian fashion and explores how cultural traditions, political movements, industrialization, cinema, globalization, and technological advancements influenced clothing practices in India. The study also highlights the role of fashion in representing identity, social class, nationalism, and regional diversity. Furthermore, the paper discusses the revival of traditional textiles and handloom industries after independence and the emergence of Indian designers who successfully blended traditional craftsmanship with modern fashion trends. The findings reveal that Indian fashion is not merely a form of dress but a dynamic cultural expression that balances heritage with innovation.

KEYWORDS: *Indian Fashion, Textile Heritage, Mughal Fashion, Colonial Influence, Handloom Industry, Globalization, Cultural Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Fashion is not merely a trend but a reflection of social, political, and cultural transformation within a society. In India, fashion represents a combination of history, religion, caste, regional diversity, and artistic expression. Archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley Civilization demonstrates the existence of draped garments, ornaments, and textile practices that shaped early Indian clothing traditions.

From the draped garments of ancient India to the luxurious attire of the Mughal courts, and from the impact of British colonialism to the rise of contemporary fusion wear, Indian fashion has continuously adapted to changing social conditions. During the colonial period, Western tailoring techniques and industrial textile production transformed Indian clothing practices, while movements such as the Swadeshi Movement promoted khadi and indigenous textiles as symbols of nationalism. In modern India, fashion designers and media industries have further reshaped clothing trends by combining traditional aesthetics with global influences.

This paper examines the evolution of fashion in India from ancient times to the present era and analyzes the economic, political, and cultural factors that have shaped clothing practices over time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. *A History of Indian Dress* by Charles Louis Fabri

Charles Louis Fabri analyzed the evolution of Indian clothing from ancient times to the Mughal period. His work relied heavily on sculptures, monuments, paintings, and visual sources rather than literary texts. The study highlighted the simplicity of early Indian garments, particularly the use of unstitched clothing such as the dhoti and waist cloths. It also discussed the evolution of the sari and the influence of foreign cultures on Indian dress practices.

Key Findings

- Simplicity of early Indian clothing
- Minimal use of stitched garments
- Development of the sari from waist cloths
- Importance of jewelry and accessories
- Influence of foreign cultures and textiles

2. Evolution of Fashion in the 20th and 21st Century

This study explained how Indian fashion was influenced by:

- Colonial rule
- Industrialization
- Media and cinema
- The freedom movement
- Rise of Indian fashion designers

3. Exploring the Evolution of Fashion Illustrations of Saree

The study explored the transformation of saree designs across historical periods:

- Ancient India: Bright colors and embroidery
- Mughal Era: Luxurious and royal designs
- Colonial Era: Simpler fabrics and styles
- Modern Era: Digital printing and contemporary embroidery

4. Fashion Trends and Their Impact on Society

This study discussed the social and cultural influence of fashion in India. Fashion was identified as a reflection of:

- Cultural diversity
- Social identity and profession
- Economic growth through textile industries
- Psychological and lifestyle changes

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5. Study on the Indian Fashion System

The study examined the structure and functioning of the Indian fashion industry, including the role of designers, manufacturers, retailers, media, and consumers in shaping Indian fashion trends.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the historical development of fashion in India from ancient to modern times.
2. To identify how fashion represents the social, economic, and cultural identity of the country.
3. To analyze the impact of cultural, social, and political changes on clothing styles in India.
4. To examine how fashion trends blend traditional craftsmanship with global influences.

Ancient Indian Fashion

The history of ancient Indian fashion can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization. Archaeological findings, sculptures, cave paintings, and temple carvings depict people wearing unstitched garments such as the dhoti and waist cloths. In many artistic depictions, women were portrayed without upper garments, while stitched clothing was uncommon and mostly associated with soldiers and foreigners.

The sari in its present form did not exist during ancient times. Earlier forms of the sari were shorter waist garments worn without blouses or petticoats. Over time, the garment evolved into the modern draped attire widely recognized today Jewelry also played a significant role in ancient Indian fashion, with necklaces, earrings, crowns, anklets, and diadems commonly worn by both men and women. Ancient Indian craftsmanship in jewelry was highly admired and reflected social status and artistic excellence.



In these sculptures, upper and lower-class women were shown without wearing any upper garment; the only ones who were wearing any were the foreigners and the maids of the royal families. The dancing girls in the Ajanta caves are shown wearing a blouse, who are evidently the foreign entertainers.

There is another belief that the saree worn today is of hoary antiquity; however, that is not the case. The saree worn before used to be a lot different than how it is worn today. Saree used to be worn around the waist only without any upper garment. The present-day saree was developed around 1780 AD. It was created by lengthening another garment known as a dupatta or orhani, now tucked into a waistband.

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Jewelery as its nature does not change as often as clothing, however, it also comes and goes. Necklaces, earrings, and diadems were worn for a long period of time. Huge crowns were worn by dance girls and musicians, and yet there is no doubt that Indian jewellery has always been admirable ever since.

Mughal Fashion

The Mughal Clothing was famous for its luxurious style made from muslin, silk, velvet, and brocade. Various dyes using cochineal, sulfate of iron, sulfate of copper, and sulfate of antimony were used.





The Mughal turban was wrapped directly on the head with a tight bundle in front and ascending slope backwards. A band was wrapped across turbon to keep it in place, which was usually made of a different material than the turban itself. Women's headwear consisted of a silk karakul and a boqta hat of various styles, which was ornamented with jewels, feathered pins, and veils.

Men traditionally wore a long coat termed 'Jama' with a Pajama and a Pagri in head to complete the outfit. Women wore salwar, churidar, Ghaghara, farshi, and dhilja along with a lot of jewelry, including earrings, nose rings, necklace, bangles, belts, and anklets.

Lucknow was known for its shoes, which included juti, kafsh, charvhan, salim shahi, and kurd nau. It was also known for its hand embroidery with gold and silver, which was generally used in the turbans of the Mughal Emperors.

During the reign of Akbar, he restyled the garment and developed it into a formal gown by removing the slits, rounding the hemline, and increasing the fullness of the skirt. He also developed 'takauchiya', which was typically made from silk, gold, or woolen material and hence was made versatile for both summer and winter. He also showcased the beauty of 'doshhala', which

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was a double-faced shawl consisting of two fabrics attached at the underside of the fabric.

Only the emperor himself, his intimate relations, and a few selected members were allowed to wear the royal turban ornament.

The women of the court had to follow a procedure of 16 beauty rituals. Eyebrows were to be arched symmetrically, Kajal was also applied on the eyelids, white teeth, Nath, Diamonds, Betel leaf was used to reden the lips, Mehendi was used to decorate hand and feet, etc.



Colonial Fashion

During the pre-colonial era in the 17th century, India was producing 25% of the world's textile which came down to just 2% after India became colonised by the British. Indian craftsmanship was heavily demanded around the world. The major fabrics at that time were cotton and silk. Mughal India was very well-known for it georgus printed and coloured textiles, which later got imported to England and hence became a huge trend over there.

Britishers imposed huge long-term taxes on Indian textiles exported to britain making them 2 times more expensive than British-produced goods. This led to a reduction in demand for Indian textiles. Such practices put thousands of weavers in India out of work. In order to get out of this situation, Gandhi ji started the Khadi movement. He urged the people to wear handwoven clothes that are made by chakaras. However, due to the tough competition from the british factory made cheap goods, it became hard to compete.

When the Britishers came to India, they considered the Indian Traditional dresses as immodest or indecent because of the exposed arms or shoulders in a traditional woman's attire, since for them, full coverage, high-collar dresses, and corsets were considered decent. Hence, patticoat and blouses were started to be worn by the Indian Women, with such practices, they started imposing their own rules on the Indians.

When the Industrial Revolution started in Britain in led to a downfall in the Indian Market since the Western factory-produced goods were cheaper and more durable than the Indian handmade goods.

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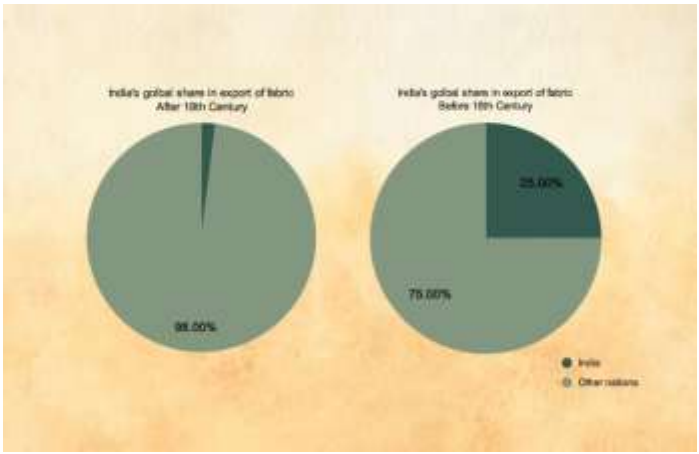
Post-Independence India

After its independence, India started making conscious efforts to revive the old Indian textile heritage. Our traditional textiles represented our culture, identity, and economic reliance. Khadi, which was strongly promoted by Mahatma Gandhi, became a symbol of national struggle. The government encouraged hand spinning and hand weaving. Khadi was often worn by the political leaders to show a connection with the masses.

To protect the artisans and hand weavers, the Government started an association, 'All India Handloom Board' in 1952. Policies were introduced to promote cottage and small-scale industries.

Different states started reviving their style, such as :
Bnarasi silk: Uttar Pradesh
Knajeevaran Silk: Tamil Nadu
Bandhani: Gujarat and Rajasthan
Chanderi: Madhya Pradesh

Designers such as Ritu Kumar collaborated with artisans to bring back the traditional arts, which helped India gain world-class popularity in textiles. This also started providing employment among the local weavers and preserved the centuries-old skills and traditions. Hence, India gained popularity and strength in the global market.



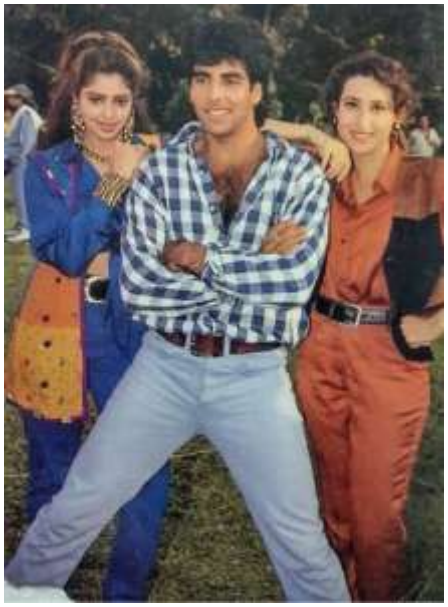
With a rise in silent films and early talkies, actors wore dramatic costumes. The 1950 to 1970 era was known as the Golden Era of Bollywood. When fashion started being more expressive, Heavy jewellery was popularised. Traditional outfits were styled for visual impact. The urban audience began copying their looks for special occasions. During the 1950s, when actresses like Madhubala and Nargis were popularised Elegent sarees and fitted blouses started being in style. Men's fashion was being inspired by actors like Raj Kapoor, who made simple shirts, trousers, and jackets popular among the middle class.

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During the 1960s, with actresses like Sadhana, trends like 'Sadhna cut', Churidar kurta sets, and sleek fitted sihouettes stared being on style.

During the rise of actresses like Hema Malini and Zeenat Aman during the 1970s, Chiffon Sarres, Jumpsuits, Flared pants, Large Sunglasses, and statement accessories started being on trend. Actors like Amitabh Bachan made Bell Bottoms, Printed shits and sideburns famous.



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During the 1980s Fshion Shifted from tailors to Designer made Clothes, who started reviving traditional styles into modern forms. Boutique culture became popular in Modern metropolitician cities such as Delhi and Mumbai.

With the establishment of NIFT in 1986, Fashion was started to be recognised as a career option, which made the fashion sector more organized and recognised. Designers like Manish Malhotra started collaborating with Bollywood and used it as a medium to showcase their designs to the masses. After the economic liberalisation in 1991 International brands started entering the Indian Market through which the global fashion trend started incresing which made the Fashion weeks and designer exhibitions more common.

Modern Era

In the modern era, fashion is shaped by celebrities, Bollywood, social media, and the changing lifestyle of people. The modern Indian fashion combines ethnic and Western elements. Outfits like kurti with jeans, crop tops with lehengas, say a lot about the emerging Indian fashion.

Indian designers such as Sabhyasachi Mukharjee and Manish Malhotra have popularised the Indian bridal and couture fashion. With a rise in e-commerce platforms such as Myntra, fashionable outfits are becoming accessible to a large portion of the population.

Designers and handlooms are now promoting local artisans and handlooms and supporting slow fashion.



CONCLUSION

The evolution of fashion in India reflects the country's rich historical, cultural, and social transformations across centuries. From the simple draped garments of the Indus Valley Civilization to the luxurious textiles and embroidery traditions developed during the Mughal Empire, Indian fashion has continuously adapted to changing influences while preserving its cultural identity. The colonial period under the British Raj introduced Western styles and industrial textile production, which significantly altered traditional clothing practices. However, movements promoting indigenous textiles and craftsmanship also emerged, strengthening the connection between fashion and nationalism.

After independence, Indian fashion experienced rapid modernization through the growth of the textile industry, fashion education, cinema, and the rise of renowned designers. In the contemporary era, globalization and digital media have further transformed fashion trends, leading to the popularity of fusion wear that combines traditional Indian elements with Western aesthetics. Despite these modern influences, traditional textiles, handloom crafts, and regional clothing styles continue to remain an important part of India's cultural heritage.

Thus, the history of Indian fashion demonstrates that clothing is not merely a form of personal appearance but also a reflection of identity, tradition, economic change, and cultural continuity. The evolution of fashion in India highlights the country's ability to balance modernity with tradition, making Indian fashion unique and globally influential.

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