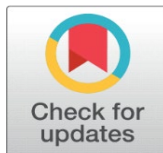


STUDY OF IMPACT OF INDIAN TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FASHION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Indian traditional textiles, garments and clothing have a huge impact on the fashion industry today. Focus on Sustainability has created lot of opportunities for the stakeholders to work. As part of this research, we touch on the following aspects of the fashion industry - Sustainable Environment, Livelihood, Businesses, Practices & education. This paper studies the various traditional and cultural practices in the Indian society which impacts the way fabrics and garments are used. It also documents and analyses apparel brands which believe in sustainability practices to run their unique business. To generate sustainable livelihood, the youth of the country should undergo vocational training suitable to fashion industry in their native language. The paper studies various opportunities in education related to the Fashion ecosystem available in India. The study will document the philosophy, skills, opportunities and collective commitment for promoting sustainable fashion industry.

Keywords: Indian Traditions and Culture, Sustainability, Environment, Fashion

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where fast fashion has dominated the industry for the past few decades. Everyone today is fond of trendy clothes, ignoring the quality and essence of the outfit they'll be wearing. But there are also people who know the true power of sustainability and are focused on wearing sustainable clothes, not just because of the quality but because they believe in wearing value over trend. As the fashion industry continues to grow, so does its impact on our environment. From the harmful chemicals used in production to the excessive amount of waste generated, it's clear that a change is needed. In India, the age-old tradition of wearing sustainable ethnic wear has merged beautifully with eco-friendliness principles, giving importance to the sustainable fashion movement that focuses on traditional fabrics and practices. We pride ourselves in our culture to live life sustainably. It is a way of our life since ages to use any piece of cloth in a very responsible way – right from where it is generated to how it is used beyond its expected life in its primary use. This ethos has been carried on for generations in India since we have a long tradition of creating fabrics manually

using natural resources. The predominant occupation being farming has helped this getting ingrained in our culture to be environmentally responsible society.

1.1. TRADITIONAL FABRICS

India has a diverse and rich heritage of traditional fabrics. Each one has its own importance and legacy to be understood.

Khadi: Khadi, spun on a charkha, is a symbol of India's freedom struggle. It is also a symbol of self-sufficiency and sustainability today. Breathability is a key feature of the fabric, which makes it perfect for warm as well as cold climate in India.

Cotton: Cotton is ideal for casual and formal wear since it is breathable, comfortable making it timeless.

Silk: Banarasi, Kanjivaram, and Chanderi are traditional silk weaves known for their lustrous beauty. India's rich textile history is showcased and also helps to promote good sericulture practices.

Linen: Linen is made from flax fibers. It is a popular choice for sustainable fashion clothing. It is perfect for hot weather since it is light weight. It requires very less water during cultivation.

Handloom: Ikat, Patola, and Maheshwari are handloom fabrics created on traditional looms. They are known for the intricate patterns and craftsmanship.

1.2. SUSTAINABLE FASHION INDUSTRY PRACTICES

Dyeing Techniques: Dyes made from plants and herbs are in demand today. The dyes are safe for the environment and also create earthy unique hues.

Hand-embroidery: Hand-embroidery is the oldest form of surface ornamentation technique which promotes sustainable practices. It creates employment for skilled artisans and so reduces the need for energy-consuming machines.

Zero-Waste Cutting: Zero-waste approach while designing clothes helps in minimizing fabric waste in the cutting process. It helps to save cost and promote sustainability.

Upcycling: Old garments upcycled into new designs is gaining popularity. It reduces textile waste and breathes new life into old fabrics.

Reservation of Heritage: We should contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage by ensuring that these skills are passed down to future generations. It is possible by getting things done by traditional weavers and artisans,

Fair Wages: Leading brands follow the policy of fair wages to their workers, which helps to ensure the well-being and promote better living standards for all the stakeholders.

Environmental Conservation: Sustainable practices like organic farming and natural dyeing contribute to a healthier planet. This is only possible by using less harmful chemicals and water resources.

1.3. SUSTAINABLE TECHNIQUES AND METHODS TO USE FABRICS

Over the years people have found out various techniques and methods to use the fabrics for their variety of uses. It has been a tradition in India to use things beyond its expected life in the primary use. It is a way of our lives to reuse, repurpose our everyday objects beyond its utility. For example, making kids garments, kurtas, bags from old sarees. Altering the old clothes of elder siblings to fit the younger ones. Converting sarees into curtains, utility bags, dust covers and more. Making quilts, dari(floormatts) using old bedsheets, sarees This has been followed from generations together. With the same thought people have created business opportunities by reprocessing used garments, fabrics and more.

1.3.1. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

1) Upscaling fabrics / garments

Inculcating sustainable lifestyle offers a solution by promoting the concept of upscaling your garments. By repurposing, reusing, and reinventing our clothing, we can create an eco-friendlier and more stylish wardrobe.

Promoting Slow Fashion: Upscaling encourages mindful purchasing and sustainable practices. By promoting slow fashion approach, will help us to break free from the fast fashion cycle.

Fashion Waste reduction: Huge quantity of clothing ends up in landfills each year, which is a major environmental concern. By upscaling we will help reduce fashion waste and lessen the adverse impact on our environment.

Conserving Resources: The production of clothing requires large amounts of water, energy, and raw materials. By upscaling, we will reduce the need for new resources and preserve our planet's resources.

Repurpose: Give new life to old items by repurposing them. Transform an old pair of jeans into trendy shorts, or turn a dress into a stylish top.

Repair and Mend: Extend the lifespan of your garments by repairing and mending any damages. Sewing up small holes, replacing buttons, adding some hand embroidery, surface ornamentation, patches, studs will give a new life to your garment.

Mix and match: You can create a new look for you mixing and matching different pieces from your wardrobe. Experiment with different combinations to discover fresh looks without needing to buy new clothes.

Dyeing and tie-dyeing: Add a new color to your old garments by dyeing or tie-dyeing them. It will help add a fresh and trending look to your clothing

Swapping and Borrowing: Clothes swapping with family and friends will increase the range of clothing which you have. Lot of initiatives of Clothing swaps are organised within communities for this purpose. Swapping garments for special occasions helps reduce your unnecessary purchases.

Garment Renting: Many people are opting for renting out clothes for specific occasions to enjoy variety of styles. This is an increasing trend these days to conserve resources.

Invest in Timeless fashion: While purchasing new garments, be sensitive in opting for timeless pieces which will remain stylish for long. Garments which you can pair with existing clothing to increase the range of your wardrobe. Choose high-quality items that can withstand for more time.

Sensitivity for Sustainable Fabrics: Learn about sustainable fabrics and materials. Consider purchasing clothing that is produced from organic cotton, linen, hemp, or recycled materials. These fabrics have a lower impact on the environment and are better for your skin. Support sustainable fashion brands that prioritize ethical production practices and use eco-friendly materials. With this you will contribute to the growth of a more sustainable fashion industry.

2) Upscaling thru hand loom

The traditional art of hand loom has been effectively used for making fabrics out of reprocessed plastic waste. The plastic waste is cut into fine strips and converted into yarn using a traditional charkha. The yarn is used in the handloom to make fabric. This fabric is used to make bags, accessories and jackets. The traditional handloom is put to contemporary use which helps the craft to be revived and promoted. Fashion Designers should use this as an important element of their designs which will give them an edge over others. It will help the artisans to increase their livelihood, the designers will be able to make exclusive products and help in the sustainability initiatives which is the need of the hour all over the world.

3) Rugs and Quilts

Rugs are made with leftover scraps of cotton trips. The old cotton garment is cut into one to two-inch strips. The strips are assembled and stitched with a crochet hook and thread. The output is a colorful rug that can be used as a doormat or floor mat. This is called Chindi Rug. Another way of making a rug is using old blankets, which are still practiced in the states of Jammu and Kashmir. The nomadic community involved in this work uses acrylic yarn for embroidery on old woolen blankets and converts them into handmade rugs. It is part of the Kashmiri tradition, where they preserve old clothes by upcycling them into something useful. The Initiative is a group that upcycles old sarees into other items, including laptop sleeves, quilts, and yoga bags. Indian quilts, also known as Godhadi, are traditional hand-stitched quilts made using patchwork on old sarees and dhotis. They are full-sized quilts used on beds or also used as shawls. The old sari is folded so that the folds create the quilt, and stuffing is not required. The layers are put together with a running stitch. More decorative parts of the saree are used to create a colourful and vibrant border.

4) Using Threads for Embroidery

Kantha work from the states of West Bengal and Odisha was traditionally made using threads pulled out from sarees and dhotis. 'Kantha' refers to the style of running stitch on patchwork cloth from rags. It is one of the oldest forms of embroidery originating from India; its origins can be traced back to the pre-Vedic age (before 1500 BCE). Kantha does not use hoops or frames like embroidery to keep the cloth tight, which leaves a rippled effect on the fabric. Some intricate designs are signature embroideries which are passed on in families as their specialty. Wearing sustainable and upcycled clothes is more than just styling and fashion. These are not only high quality but also highly valued clothes. Not only would they last much longer, but they would also save the environment from damage by producing fast fashion. Don't you think sustainable ethnic wear is the most prominent choice of clothing that you should wear this festive season? Why not take a pledge on your favourite festival and live a sustainable and healthy life ahead? Let us know in the comments below what you think about living a sustainable life

1.4. APPAREL BRANDS PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Creating livelihoods for local craftsman, artisans is helping ventures to establish sustainable business models. It is helping the entire ecosystem thrive and prosper. Sustainability in use of materials, weaving practices, using eco-friendly materials and giving work to bottom of the pyramid are the contribution of these ventures towards sustainable fashion.

As we move towards greater sustainability, ethical practices, and innovative eco-friendliness, India is leading the way with a variety of Sustainable and homegrown brands dedicated to these principles. They help in honouring India's rich traditional handloom techniques and upcycling methods. These brands follow a zero-waste policy, utilising upcycled yarns, natural dyes, and collaborating with local craftsmen from across India to create its garments. Let us look at the various Indian homegrown apparel brands who promote sustainable fashion

Figure 1 Fabindia



Credits: Fabindia Instagram

Fabindia is the largest private platform in India for products created using traditional techniques, skills, and handcrafted methods. The company connects thousands of rural artisans with modern urban markets, fostering sustainable employment in rural areas and helping to preserve India's traditional handicrafts. It offers a range of products that are natural, organic cotton based, craft-oriented, modern, and affordable.

Figure 2 Ethicus



Credits: Ethicus Instagram

Ethicus is recognised as India's first "Farm to Fashion" organic and sustainable fashion brand, co-founded by husband-and-wife duo Mani Chinnaswamy, a pioneer in cotton contract farming, and Vijayalakshmi Nachiar. They grow their own organic cotton, branded as 'Eco-Logic Cotton', ensuring the use of high-quality long and extra-long staple cotton in their products. The brand has established a handloom design studio in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, collaborating with local weavers and traditional artisans to create world-class textiles for customers in India and abroad.

Figure 3 Doodlage



Doodlage is a sustainable fashion brand co-founded by Kriti Tula and Paras Arora, focused on combating waste in the fashion industry. Inspired by the upcycling traditions of their childhoods, they create limited-edition collections from factory waste and recycle post-consumer materials into new fabrics. Their garments are designed for longevity, and they repurpose any waste into accessories and packaging, all produced ethically and without plastic. Doodlage represents a commitment to sustainable practices in fashion, addressing the environmental costs of cheap production.

Figure 4 No Nasties



Founded by Apurva Kothari in 2011 to live a more purpose-driven life, No Nasties is committed to minimising its environmental impact through sustainable practices. The brand exclusively uses 100 per cent organic cotton and relies on a fully local supply chain, which helps conserve water, reduce energy consumption, and significantly lower CO2 emissions.

Figure 5 The Summer House



The Summer House was founded by Rekha Datla and Shivangini Parihar in 2015. Their aim was to support rural artisans and preserving traditional craft techniques and textiles. The partnership with artisans directly and local NGOs helped the vulnerable craft communities to prosper and do away with exploitative practices.

The Summer House always give priority to responsibly made fabrics - handwoven, organic, ECONYL (regenerated nylon) and Tencel. This way they are committed to sustainability highest ethical and environmental standard which ensures quality.

Figure 6 Okhai



Okhai is committed to creating responsible, handcrafted products using traditional techniques that reflect the artisans' efforts. The brand emphasises ethical, collaborative, and sustainable practices while empowering rural artisans with skills and confidence. Drawing inspiration from architectural monuments to abstract forms as an artistic expression, Okhai's collections highlight unique craft and embroidery.

Suta: Suta, founded by Sujata and Taniya in 2016, is a vibrant design house that beautifully marries tradition with contemporary fashion. Inspired by the meaning of its name — “thread”—Suta celebrates the rich tapestry of Indian art and culture, a passion that has thrived even after years in the corporate world. The brand's exquisite collections feature elegant and bold designs crafted from beloved fabrics, showcasing the intricate skills of artisans across India who utilise ancestral weaving techniques.



Figure 7 B Label



The Bombay Hemp Company (BOHECO), established in 2013, was the first guardian of B Label, pioneering the hemp ecosystem in India and working to transform the agricultural landscape. Today, BOHECO has shifted its focus to Himalayan Hemp Nutrition and Cannabis Ayurvedic Remedies. B Label is now reimaged under the creative leadership of Alisha Sachdev, one of the brand's original team members. They use hemp—a category of sustainable fashion and lifestyle for products for the world. Aim is to establish an ecosystem which connects the source to the end consumer promoting responsibility, transparency, and ethics, reducing social and environmental impacts.

Figure 8 Tilla



Tilla is a design studio in Ahmedabad founded in 2011 by Aratrik Dev Varman. The brand celebrates craftsmanship and handmade Indian textiles. The collections are practical with elegant aesthetic, which seamlessly adapts to global trends. Prioritising minimal waste as a core principle, Tilla emphasises mindful design and slow production. Their offerings include clothing, wallpaper, interior textiles, textile art/installations sold at leading design stores world over.

Figure 9 Charkha Tales



Roopika Rastogi is committed to preserve India's heritage of Khadi. She established Charkha Tales in 2016, inspired by Gandhi's revolution through khadi on 2nd October. The brand offers khadi products globally by supporting weavers from Zaidpur and Hardoi in Uttar Pradesh. It helps the weavers with necessary resources for sustainable livelihoods. Charkha Tales collaborates with local crafts like chikan embroidery and tie-dye to be used in their garments and products.

Figure 10 Khamir



The rich artisanal traditions of the Kachchh district is strengthened and promoted by Khamir brand with utmost dedication. “Khamir” meaning “intrinsic pride” in Kachchhi and “to ferment” in Hindi reflects the organisation’s core ethos. The name represents Kachchh Heritage, Art, Music. Kachchh Nav Nirman Abhiyan and the Nehru Foundation for Development came together to establish this brand in 2005. Khamir focuses on supporting traditional handicrafts and preserving local culture.

Figure 11 The Terra Tribe



Charmee Ambavat founded Terra Tribe to create contemporary apparels for the people who are mindful of their environment. The collections are inspired by indigenous African tribes their traditional mud houses and other cultural elements. Their apparels embody the nomadic spirit and explore unfamiliar cultures. Sustainability and ethical practices are at the core philosophy of the brand. They use locally manufactured Tencel, handwoven hemp, linen, and organic cotton. Garments are dyed with eco-friendly pigments, and recycled trims are a priority. The Terra Tribe embraces slow fashion in their work by the commitment to transparency about the circular ecosystem.

Figure 12 Sui



SUI, meaning ‘needle’ in Hindi, is a conscious fashion label based in India and Singapore, founded by Mahima Gujral Wadhwa. The brand symbolises connection, much like a needle links thread to fabric, aiming to intertwine nature with fashion. SUI crafts clothing with a “green heart”, which respects both nature and the artisans who create the garments.

Figure 13 Jodi



Credits Jodi Website

Jodi is a design studio and marketplace founded in 2014 by Gauri Verma and Karuna Laungani. As a high-street, slow fashion brand, Jodi draws inspiration from their shared love for craft, culture, fashion, and travel. The brand focuses on offering joyful, fashion-forward designs for both home and wardrobe. They utilize natural Indian textiles and traditional artisanal techniques such as block printing, bandhani dyeing, hand embroidery in their products.

Figure 14 Oshadi



Credits Oshadi Website

Oshadi, is the “essence of nature” or “healing plant” in Sanskrit. Nishanth Chopra founded Oshadi in 2016 with this philosophy. It is a womenswear brand with a commitment to respecting and regenerating the Earth. The brand focuses on sustainable practices in every aspect of clothing production, from printing and dyeing to weaving and spinning. The 250-acre regenerative cotton farm is at the centre stage of all their activities which embodies ancient Indian agricultural techniques and artisan heritage.

Figure 15 Maati



Credits Maati Website

Neha Kabra of Udaipur founded Maati focusing on organic and sustainable principles. The name ‘Maati’ emphasises the cycle of nature which is reflected in the brand’s commitment to creating garments that honour the earth. Her experiences of living in a joint family was her inspiration for prioritising needs over wants – to develop products responsibly.

Figure 16 11.11/ eleven eleven



Founded by Mia Morikawa, a Graphic Design graduate from Central Saint Martin's University of the Arts in London, and Shani Himanshu, who holds a Master's in Fashion Design from Domus Academy in Milan, 11.11 / eleven eleven is a fashion label that emphasises craftsmanship, using indigenous cotton and 100 per cent natural dyes while employing heritage techniques such as hand spinning, handloom weaving, hand painting, miniature tie-dyeing, and quilting. The brand focuses on small-batch, slow-made clothing, collaborating with artisan groups across India to create pieces that transcend geographic and gender boundaries.

Figure 17 IRO IRO



Founded by BhaavyaGoenka, IRO is a circular design collective based in Jaipur that emphasises a practice driven by empathy towards all beings, the planet, and oneself. The collective defines Circular Design as a method that keeps materials in the value chain, focusing on working with waste, indigenous practices, and sustainable approaches.

Figure 18 Ka-Sha



Karishma Shahani Khan founded 'Ka-Sha' a clothing label that uses garments as a means of expressing handcraft and celebrating life. They use traditional and contemporary artisanal techniques, getting inspired from people, stories, journeys, and their diverse perspectives. Each garment is created from indigenous textiles and surface treatments. It results in wearable clothing for the global audience while being rooted in Indian culture. The Heart To Haat, a sister

initiative focused on reusing, repurposing, and reclaiming materials was started by Ka-Sha using innovative craft techniques.

2. CONCLUSION

India has a rich tradition of living life sustainably by following practices in their day to day lifestyle. These simple age-old beliefs and cultural practices has made our lives simpler yet richer. Every state in India has a variety of textiles with unique processes, designs, and patterns. Traditionally, the fabrics were produced using local materials. When they are converted into garments, they were made to be used by all age groups and sometimes even generations. These outfits are also designed considering the local weather. The outfit is recognized for its long-life cycle, with reuse and recycling as a core principle. It's a normal thing for a household to upcycle the garment into something useful even when the garment has outlived its function.

2.1. MINDFUL AND ETHICAL SUPPLY CHAIN FOR FASHION

In the fastmoving world efforts are being taken by many brands to follow sustainable, ethical practices in their supply chain. Various initiatives like using less water for production, handspun-handwoven fabrics, celebrating local crafts & artisans, appropriate compensation to workmen make the whole business of fashion more sustainable

2.2. HANDMADE AND HANDLOOMS TO REDUCE ENERGY

Weaving is a tradition practiced by many communities in all parts of India. People hand-weaved on looms to make fabrics made into products such as clothes, towels, and home linens. This loom does not require energy from fossil fuels, thus having a low carbon footprint.

2.3. UPCYCLING CLOTHING INTO NEW PRODUCTS

Upcycling is a fashion statement that refurbishes an old, discarded item, giving it a whole new life. As the familiar phrase goes, "One man's trash is another man's treasure" is taken too seriously in India.

2.4. HAND ME DOWNS

In most Indian homes, there is a tradition of passing on clothes from the older child to the younger child. It is also a tradition to dress a baby in old clothes handed down from an older sibling or cousin during the first few days/weeks as they are softer and milder for the baby's skin. Some grand outfits, such as sarees and kurtas, are even passed down across generations as heirloom pieces. Giving away clothes to the less fortunate is also very common.

2.5. USING COTTON HANDTOWELS TO REDUCE WASTE

Cotton hand towels, specifically the cotton handkerchief, are a common component of the dress of Indian men and women. These are reused by washing over a more extended period, unlike throwing tissue paper. Paper products like tissues are harsh on the environment since they use a lot of timber, thus impacting wildlife habitat. Using a hand towel instead of tissue paper is an environmentally friendly way to prevent deforestation and can be considered a measure to mitigate climate change effects.

The fashion industry is one of the major polluting industries in the world. It produces a huge amount of carbon emissions and pollutes oceans with microplastics. The production and distribution of the crops, fibers, and garments used in fashion contribute more to air pollution, including water and soil pollution. It is important to be mindful of not buying too much by getting trapped in the fast-moving fashion trends. Many of these sustainable traditional practices for textile and clothing are still prevalent in large parts of India, which helps reduce energy and minimize waste. It is time to get inspired by these practices and contribute less to the ever-rising pollution.

While India is a large producer of fast fashion for the western world, many of its traditional practices are still used at home to embrace a more sustainable approach to clothing and textiles. It is time for fast-fashion chains to embrace

more sustainable clothing practices and for us, as consumers to embrace slow mindful fashion with concepts adopted from traditional India.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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