

From Archaeotextiles to Modern Drapes: A Chronological Journey Through Indian Costume and Textile Evolution

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Abstract: *This research endeavour provides a comprehensive chronological analysis of the evolution of costume and textiles in India, spanning from the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300 BCE) to the contemporary era. Drawing upon a diverse array of evidence, including archaeotextiles and archaeocostumes (derived from archaeological finds, sculptural depictions, and ancient paintings), alongside literary accounts, foreign chronicles, and modern archival data, the study traces the dynamic interplay of indigenous innovation, environmental adaptation, and significant foreign influences. It meticulously examines the transition from rudimentary draped garments and the pioneering use of cotton in ancient periods to the sophisticated textile artistry of the medieval empires, characterized by intricate weaves, diverse ornamentation, and the gradual integration of stitched forms. The impact of colonial policies on India's handloom industry and the subsequent emergence of hybrid Indo-Western styles are explored, leading into the post-independence era marked by a resurgence of traditional crafts and a globalized fashion landscape. This research highlights how textiles and costume in India have consistently functioned as profound expressions of cultural identity, economic prowess, and artistic excellence, adapting resiliently through millennia of change.*

Keywords: Indian Costume, Indian Textiles, Archaeotextiles, Archaeocostumes, Harappan Civilization, Vedic Period, Mauryan Empire, Gupta Period, Medieval India, Delhi Sultanate, Mughal Empire, Colonial India, Post-Independence Fashion, Sari, Dhoti, Fusion Wear.

1. Introduction

India's cultural heritage is uniquely intertwined with the intricate narratives of its textiles and costumes, which transcend mere utility to become profound expressions of identity, societal structures, religious beliefs, and artistic innovation. Spanning millennia, the evolution of Indian dress reflects a continuous dialogue between indigenous ingenuity and external influences. Factors such as diverse geographical terrains and climatic variations, which necessitated practical and adaptable attire, have profoundly shaped sartorial traditions. Simultaneously, robust trade networks facilitated the exchange of materials and design sensibilities, while the ebb and flow of religious movements and foreign invasions introduced new aesthetic paradigms and construction techniques. Beyond their functional and symbolic roles, textiles have consistently served as a primary medium for artistic expression, with their production forming a cornerstone of India's economy for centuries. Reconstructing this rich history, particularly for ancient periods, presents inherent challenges, necessitating a meticulous reliance on fragmented evidence drawn from archaeological excavations, sculptural representations, mural paintings, descriptive literary texts, and the invaluable observations of foreign chroniclers.

1.1 Ancient Period (c. 3300 BCE – c. 600 CE)

The foundational chapters of Indian costume and textile history are deeply rooted in the ancient past, offering fascinating glimpses into the rudimentary yet sophisticated beginnings of a sartorial tradition that would blossom over millennia. This extensive period, stretching from the dawn of civilization in the Indus Valley to the golden age of the Guptas, witnessed the emergence of indigenous textile

techniques and the development of distinct draping styles that would form the bedrock of future Indian attire.

a) Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300 – 1900 BCE)

The earliest substantial evidence of human habitation and advanced civilization on the Indian subcontinent emerges from the **Indus Valley Civilization**, also known as the Harappan Civilization. Flourishing across vast swathes of what is now Pakistan and northwestern India, its sophisticated urban centers like Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Lothal, and Dholavira reveal a highly organized society with advanced urban planning, extensive trade networks, and remarkable artistic achievements. While aspects of the Harappan script and religious beliefs remain undeciphered, archaeological excavations have yielded crucial insights into their attire and textile production.

The primary sources of information regarding Harappan costume and textiles are the numerous **terracotta figurines, seals, and stone sculptures** discovered from these sites. Though often stylized, these artifacts provide the earliest visual representations of clothing worn on the subcontinent. Key examples include the famous **"Priest-King" bust** from Mohenjo-Daro, whose contemplative gaze offers direct evidence of male attire, and the **"Dancing Girl" figurine**, which, despite its small scale, provides significant clues about contemporary body adornment and a possible freedom of movement in dress. The careful analysis of these archaeological finds is paramount for inferring the sartorial practices of this ancient civilization.

Perhaps the most groundbreaking discovery pertaining to Harappan textiles was the unearthing of **cotton fragments** adhering to a silver vase at Mohenjo-Daro, dating back to approximately 2500 BCE. This finding is monumental as it constitutes the **earliest direct archaeological evidence of cotton cultivation and its use as a textile fiber anywhere in**

the world, firmly establishing the Indian subcontinent as the birthplace of cotton textile technology. The fine weave suggested by these fragments indicates a surprising mastery of basic spinning and weaving techniques, pointing to a developed textile industry. Furthermore, indirect evidence, such as the mention of "madder" on some seals—a plant known for producing red dye—and the presence of dye vats at sites like Mohenjo-Daro, strongly suggest an understanding and application of **dyeing techniques**. Given the warm, arid climate of the Indus Valley, cotton would have been the ideal fiber for comfort and breathability, leading to its widespread adoption.

Based on the available sculptural and figurine evidence, Harappan costume appears remarkably simple, predominantly consisting of **unstitched, draped garments**. This fundamental characteristic of draping, rather than tailoring, would become a defining feature of traditional Indian attire for millennia. For men, the "Priest-King" bust clearly depicts a **shawl-like garment** draped over his left shoulder and under his right arm, leaving the right shoulder bare. This shawl is notably adorned with a distinctive trefoil pattern, suggesting either intricate embroidery, appliqué work, or a complex woven design, indicating a nascent understanding of textile embellishment. Below this, a simple **lower garment**, likely a **dhobi-like wrap**, would have been worn, though it is not fully visible in the bust. Many other male figurines support the prevalence of such draped lower garments, along with simple **turbans or headbands**. Women's attire, as inferred from figurines, frequently features **skirt-like lower garments**, often relatively short, reaching above the knee. The upper body is often depicted as bare, suggesting that breast exposure might have been common for certain activities or societal norms, or alternatively, that upper body coverings were made of highly perishable or sheer materials that did not survive in the archaeological record. **Head-dresses**, often elaborate and fan-shaped or conical, are also prominently featured, indicating complex hair arrangements or ornamental headwear.

Beyond the garments themselves, the Harappans displayed a sophisticated sense of **ornamentation**. Excavations have yielded a vast array of ornaments made from diverse materials, including beads of steatite, carnelian, lapis lazuli, jade, and agate, as well as shells, terracotta, copper, bronze, gold, and silver. These were fashioned into **necklaces, armlets, bangles, girdles, and various hair adornments**. The uniformity in some bead types found across different sites suggests standardized production and extensive trade networks, highlighting the economic importance of crafts and personal adornment within the civilization. In essence, the Indus Valley Civilization laid the critical groundwork for India's future textile prowess. Its pioneering use of **cotton** established a legacy that would see India become the world's leading producer and exporter of cotton textiles for centuries, while the preference for **unstitched, draped garments** set a foundational precedent for traditional Indian attire, influencing the evolution of iconic garments like the dhoti and the sari.

b) Vedic Period (c. 1500 – 600 BCE)

Following the enigmatic decline of the Indus Valley Civilization, the Indian subcontinent witnessed significant

cultural shifts, largely attributed to the arrival of Indo-Aryan speaking peoples whose cultural and religious practices are primarily documented in the **Vedic texts**. This period, characterized by a predominantly pastoral and agricultural society, offers a distinct type of evidence for understanding costume: detailed **literary descriptions** rather than tangible visual artifacts. Unlike the archaeological richness of the Harappan era, direct sculptural or painted representations of attire from this period are largely absent, making textual interpretation the primary methodology for reconstructing Vedic sartorial practices.

The primary sources for understanding Vedic costume are the vast corpus of Vedic literature, notably the **Rigveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda**. These ancient hymns, ritualistic texts, and philosophical treatises contain numerous references to clothing, weaving, and textile production, providing glimpses into the material culture of the time. While these descriptions are invaluable for their detail, they necessitate careful hermeneutic analysis to visualize the precise forms and draping styles. For instance, the **Atharvaveda** speaks of "brightly coloured garments," indicating an appreciation for aesthetics and possibly the use of natural dyes, although specific methods or dominant hues are not elaborated upon.

Vedic texts consistently mention the use of **cotton (karpasa)** and **wool (urna)** as primary textile fibers, indicating a continuation of textile traditions from earlier periods and an adaptation to varying climatic conditions, especially in the cooler northern regions. Descriptions suggest the knowledge of various weaving techniques and the production of different qualities of cloth, from coarser, more utilitarian fabrics for daily wear to finer, perhaps more elaborately woven materials reserved for religious ceremonies or high-status individuals. The concept of '**Vastra**' (garment) is central to many Vedic rituals, often associated with notions of purity, protection, and transformation.

Vedic attire appears to have been simple and functional, reflecting the socio-economic structure of the time, yet imbued with symbolic meaning. The emphasis remained firmly on **unstitched, draped garments**, thereby continuing the fundamental tradition established in the Harappan period. Vedic texts consistently mention a tripartite division of garments for both men and women:

- The **Nīvi** was an inner undergarment, likely a simple loincloth or a brief wrap worn around the waist, serving primarily for modesty and comfort.
- The **Vāsa** constituted the main garment, worn over the Nīvi. This was typically a larger piece of cloth draped around the lower body, akin to an early form of the dhoti for men or a long, wrapped skirt for women. Its simplicity belied its versatility in daily life.
- The **Adhivāsa** served as an outer covering or shawl, draped over the upper body. This garment provided warmth, protection from the elements, and could also signify status or be employed during rituals. For men, it might have been thrown casually over the shoulders or wrapped around the torso, while for women, it could function as a modest covering for the upper body or a light veil.

While explicit visual evidence is lacking, **head coverings** were likely common, serving practical purposes like protection from the sun and possibly holding ritualistic significance, as hinted in later Vedic texts concerning ceremonial attire. The textual evidence also suggests a clear **social differentiation** through clothing; while common people likely wore simpler, coarser fabrics, Vedic hymns allude to more elaborate and finely woven garments, possibly adorned with embellishments, for kings, priests, and during significant religious ceremonies. This indicates that even in a seemingly simple sartorial landscape, the quality and type of fabric were markers of social standing. Consequently, the Vedic period, despite its reliance on textual instead of visual sources, provides an invaluable understanding of early Aryan attire, elucidating its practical functions, spiritual connotations, and the socio-religious context within which clothing was understood and worn.

c) Mauryan Period (c. 322 – 185 BCE)

The establishment of the **Mauryan Empire** under Chandragupta Maurya and later Ashoka represented a watershed moment in Indian history, establishing the first major unified empire across the subcontinent. This centralized administration, coupled with extensive internal and external trade networks, fostered unprecedented economic growth and cultural development, leaving a discernible impact on both textile production and sartorial practices. The Mauryan period marks a crucial transition from predominantly textual evidence to a richer blend of literary and significant visual documentation, allowing for a more concrete understanding of costume.

Key historical sources for this period include **Kautilya's Arthashastra**, a seminal treatise on statecraft, economics, and military strategy. The Arthashastra provides remarkable administrative details concerning textile production, including regulations on weaving, trade routes, and even specifications for the royal wardrobe, thereby offering unparalleled insights into the economic organization of the textile industry. Contemporaneous accounts from foreign visitors, such as **Megasthenes**, the Greek ambassador to Chandragupta Maurya's court, recorded in his lost work "Indica" (preserved through later classical authors), offer an outsider's perspective on Indian attire, corroborating some of the internal textual data. Most importantly, the period is illuminated by significant **sculptural evidence** from sites like Sanchi and Bharhut (though slightly post-Mauryan, these sites reflect strong Mauryan artistic traditions and costume forms), and particularly the iconic **Didarganj Yakshi**. This life-size, exquisitely polished sandstone female figure, with its detailed depiction of drapery and adornment, serves as a quintessential visual record of elite Mauryan female attire and aesthetic ideals.

The Mauryan Empire presided over a flourishing textile industry. The Arthashastra explicitly details the production of various types of **cotton and silk fabrics** from different regions, indicating a sophisticated level of **regional specialization** in weaving. This administrative oversight suggests a highly organized system of textile manufacturing, with state-controlled weaving houses responsible for producing fabrics for the royal court, military uniforms, and perhaps even for trade. Megasthenes's description of Indians

wearing "flowered muslins" further attests to the existence of finely woven and possibly patterned fabrics, highlighting a degree of technical sophistication in textile design. The term "muslin" itself, though later associated with Mosul, here points to the fine, delicate quality characteristic of Indian cottons from ancient times. Furthermore, the presence of specialized workers involved in **dyeing** is hinted at, suggesting advanced techniques to achieve a wide range of colors, which would have been crucial for distinguishing social strata and ceremonial wear.

Mauryan costume demonstrates a clear progression from the simpler Vedic styles, with more defined draping and a greater emphasis on ornamentation, especially among the elite, reflecting the empire's wealth and grandeur. The tradition of **unstitched, draped garments** remained dominant, forming the core of both male and female attire.

- For **men**, the primary lower garment was the **Antariya**, a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist. This garment was often pleated and then passed between the legs, tucked in at the back to create a proto-dhoti form, allowing for greater freedom of movement and a more tailored appearance despite being unstitched. An **Uttariya**, a long piece of cloth, served as the upper drape, worn in various styles: casually thrown over one shoulder, draped across both, or even fashioned into a sophisticated **Ushnisha** (turban) on the head. Mauryan turbans appear to have been quite elaborate, sometimes featuring complex knots or decorative elements, signifying status or regional identity. Royal and aristocratic men are frequently depicted in finer, possibly sheerer fabrics, sometimes adorned with patterned borders, suggesting a discernment in fabric quality.
- **Women's attire** also centered around the **Antariya**, often a longer piece of cloth wrapped and draped to cover the lower body. The **Didarganj Yakshi**, a prime example, showcases a finely draped lower garment with subtle folds that accentuate the form, suggesting an evolving sense of aesthetic refinement in draping. The upper body is often depicted as bare or covered by a sheer, almost transparent **Uttariya** or scarf, implying that while modesty was observed, it was often achieved through translucent fabrics that still revealed the form. **Elaborate hairstyles** often adorned with intricate **head coverings** or **ornaments** were common, complementing the overall ensemble.

Ornamentation was a significant aspect of Mauryan costume. The Didarganj Yakshi, for instance, is lavishly adorned with multiple strands of pearl necklaces, heavy bangles, and a sophisticated waist girdle (**mekhala**). Other sculptures of the period depict individuals wearing large earrings, armlets, and anklets. These ornaments were crafted from a diverse array of materials, including gold, silver, bronze, terracotta, and precious stones, showcasing considerable metallurgical and lapidary skills. The Mauryan period thus holds significant importance in the evolution of Indian costume and textiles. It solidified the draped garment as the hallmark of Indian attire, with more refined draping styles emerging. Simultaneously, it marked a significant organizational leap in textile production, indicating a robust economy and sophisticated craftsmanship that would form the basis for future developments. The rich visual evidence from

sculptures provides a clearer and more tangible picture of the aesthetic sensibilities and preferred modes of dress during this pivotal era.

d) Post-Mauryan and Early Kingdoms (Shunga, Satavahana, Kushan, Gupta) (c. 185 BCE – 600 CE)

The period following the collapse of the Mauryan Empire witnessed the rise and fall of various powerful regional kingdoms, including the Shungas, Satavahanas, Kushans, and eventually the Guptas. This extensive era, stretching over nearly eight centuries, was a transformative phase for Indian costume and textiles, characterized by increasing sophistication in textile artistry, greater diversity in draping styles, and crucially, the gradual introduction of **stitched garments**, primarily influenced by foreign interactions. The **Gupta period (c. 320 – 550 CE)**, in particular, is widely heralded as a "Golden Age" for its unparalleled artistic, scientific, and cultural achievements, with textiles and costume reaching new pinnacles of elegance and complexity.

The wealth of evidence from this period is immense and remarkably diverse, providing a rich tapestry of visual and textual information. **Extensive sculptural evidence** from major stupas and temple sites offers invaluable insights: the narrative panels of Bharhut (Shunga period), Sanchi (Shunga and Satavahana periods), Amaravati (Satavahana period), and Mathura (Kushan period) depict a vibrant array of daily life scenes, including meticulous details of contemporary attire. However, it is the magnificent frescoes of the **Ajanta Caves** (dating from the late 5th to early 6th centuries CE, primarily during the Gupta and Vakataka periods) that stand as the most exquisite visual records. These vibrant murals offer an astonishing panorama of garments, elaborate hairstyles, and intricate ornaments worn by royalty, courtiers, celestial beings, and commoners alike, providing an unparalleled window into the sartorial aesthetics of the Gupta era. Further insights are gleaned from **coins**, which often depict rulers in their distinctive attire (particularly Kushan coins), and classical **literary works** by eminent Sanskrit playwrights like **Kalidasa** (e.g., *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, *Meghaduta*). Kalidasa's poetic descriptions provide vivid textual accounts of contemporary attire, including details on colors, fabric qualities, and specific adornments, complementing the visual evidence. Accounts from Chinese pilgrims like Faxian, who traveled to India during the Gupta period, also offer external observations on social customs and general prosperity, indirectly touching upon dress.

This era witnessed a remarkable flourishing of **textile artistry**, solidifying India's reputation as a textile powerhouse. The **Gupta Period** is especially celebrated for its exquisite textiles, often referred to as a **Golden Age of Indian textiles**. While high-quality **cotton** remained paramount, **silk** gained significant prominence, with distinct regional varieties and weaving centers emerging. The term "Chināṃśuka" (Chinese silk), mentioned in literary works, indicates a continued trade in foreign silks, but critically, indigenous Indian silk weaving also became highly developed and renowned. Woolen textiles were produced in cooler northern regions. A significant advancement was the widespread introduction of **woven, embroidered, and printed patterns** on fabrics, moving beyond the simpler designs of earlier periods. These motifs were sophisticated,

ranging from intricate geometric designs and naturalistic floral patterns (such as the ubiquitous lotus, delicate creepers, and stylized blossoms) to depictions of animal figures (elephants, peacocks, mythical creatures like kinnaras) and even human or divine forms. The Ajanta frescoes vividly showcase garments adorned with elaborate border designs and all-over patterns, testifying to the technical mastery of the weavers and embroiderers. **Advanced dyeing techniques** allowed for a vibrant and extensive palette of colors, with evidence suggesting a deep understanding of mordant dyeing, which ensured colorfastness and vibrancy. Furthermore, different regions began to specialize in particular types of weaves or fabrics, laying the groundwork for future specialized textile hubs.

The costume of the Post-Mauryan and Early Kingdoms period displays a marked increase in diversity and sophistication, reflecting regional variations and cultural amalgamation. The fundamental principle of **draped garments** continued to define Indian attire, yet the styles became more nuanced and elaborate.

- For **men**, the **Antariya** remained the primary lower garment, but its draping evolved into more varied and sophisticated forms. The **Kachcha style**, where the Antariya was passed between the legs and meticulously tucked in at the back, became exceedingly popular, allowing for greater mobility and a structured appearance. This style is prominently depicted in sculptures from Bharhut, Sanchi, and Ajanta, directly prefiguring the modern dhoti. The **Uttariya**, the upper drape, continued to be an essential accessory, worn with remarkable versatility: casually thrown over one or both shoulders, elegantly wrapped around the torso, or even tied around the waist as a decorative sash. Its length, width, and material varied according to social status and prevailing fashion. A pivotal development was the **gradual introduction and increasing acceptance of stitched garments**, primarily due to the influence of foreign rulers. The **Kushans**, originating from Central Asia, introduced their distinctive nomadic attire, which included long, fitted coats (often quilted for warmth), tailored trousers (similar to modern shalwars or churidars), and heavy boots. This reflected their equestrian lifestyle and adaptation to colder climates. While initially confined to foreign rulers and their immediate retinue, these stitched forms slowly permeated indigenous attire, particularly in the northern parts of India, creating an early form of sartorial fusion. However, it is crucial to note that the traditional draped garment remained predominant for the vast majority of the population. **Headwear**, particularly the **Ushnisha (turban)**, continued to be a significant element of male dress, becoming increasingly complex and elaborate in its folds, knots, and ornamentation, serving as a prominent indicator of social status, regional affiliation, or religious identity.
- For **women**, this period saw a significant evolution towards the classic Indian **sari**, or at least a more refined and standardized form of it. The combination of the **Antariya** (the draped lower garment) and the **Uttariya** (the upper scarf) often coalesced into a single, longer piece of cloth draped in a more encompassing and elegant manner, setting the precedent for subsequent sari styles. While the upper body was sometimes depicted as bare in

earlier art, particularly for common women or within specific artistic conventions, the use of a sheer **Uttariya** to cover the breasts or shoulders became increasingly common and gracefully depicted, as beautifully illustrated in the Ajanta frescoes. The diverse draping styles depicted across different regions indicate the emergence of distinct local practices. A groundbreaking development was the discernible appearance of early forms of **stitched blouses or bodices**, known as **Kanchuki**, particularly evident during the Gupta period. These were typically short, fitted garments covering the breasts and sometimes the back, often worn beneath translucent outer drapes or saris. While not universally adopted across all social strata or regions, their emergence signaled a significant step away from solely draped upper body attire and indicated a growing complexity in garment construction.

Ornamentation in this period reached new heights of sophistication and luxury. Women were depicted with an astonishing array of exquisite jewelry, reflecting both wealth and refined aesthetics. These included elaborate multi-strand necklaces (**haras**), heavy and intricately designed earrings (**kundalas**), ornate armlets (**keyuras**), multiple bangles (**kankanas**), complex waistbands (**mekhalas**) crafted from pearls or beads, and delicate anklets (**nupuras**) that often chimed with movement. Hair was meticulously styled in complex buns, elaborate braids, or coiled arrangements, frequently adorned with jeweled pins, fragrant floral garlands, and intricate head ornaments. The Ajanta paintings, in particular, showcase the meticulous detail of these adornments and the vibrant colors of the garments, often indicating the sheer quality and transparency of the fabrics worn by the elite. **Royal and divine figures** were consistently depicted embodying the pinnacle of sartorial luxury, shown in exceptionally fine, translucent fabrics, often interwoven with gold thread (**zari**) or embellished with precious stones, signifying their exalted status and spiritual aura. Furthermore, the political fragmentation into numerous kingdoms led to the **emergence of distinct regional variations** in costume, a trend that would become a hallmark of Indian dress in subsequent periods. This Post-Mauryan and Early Kingdoms period was thus pivotal for Indian costume. It witnessed a remarkable maturation of textile craftsmanship, the proliferation of intricate patterns, and the critical, albeit gradual, introduction of stitched garments, particularly due to foreign influences. This period laid the definitive foundation for the diverse and elaborate draping and tailoring styles that would characterize Indian attire for centuries to come, with the sari taking a more recognizable form and regional variations beginning to solidify. The visual evidence from sculptures and paintings provides an unparalleled window into the richness and dynamism of ancient Indian dress.

1.2 Medieval Period (c. 600 CE – c. 1750 CE)

The medieval period in India, spanning over a millennium, represents a dynamic phase in the evolution of costume and textiles. It was characterized by the consolidation of diverse regional kingdoms, followed by the profound impact of Islamic invasions and the establishment of various Sultanates, culminating in the magnificent Mughal Empire. This era witnessed the refinement of existing textile traditions, the emergence of highly specialized regional weaving centers,

and a significant transformation in sartorial aesthetics, marked by the increasing prominence of stitched garments alongside the enduring draped forms. The interplay of indigenous innovation and foreign influences created a rich tapestry of fashion and textile art.

a) Early Medieval Kingdoms (Harsha, Chalukyas, Pallavas, Rashtrakutas, Cholas) (c. 600 – 1200 CE)

The early medieval period in India, marked by the rise and dominance of powerful regional dynasties such as the Vardhanas under Harsha in the north, the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas in the Deccan, and the Pallavas and Cholas in the south, was a period of intense cultural and artistic flourishing. While political fragmentation was common, these kingdoms fostered distinct artistic schools that provide invaluable insights into the period's costume and textile practices.

The primary evidence for this era stems from abundant **temple sculptures and architectural carvings**, which served as didactic narratives and devotional art. Iconic examples include the intricate friezes of Khajuraho and Konark in Central and Eastern India, the rock-cut caves of Elephanta and Mahabalipuram, and the majestic bronzes of the Chola dynasty in the South. These sculptures meticulously depict a wide spectrum of society, from deities and royalty to common folk, showcasing their attire, hairstyles, and adornments. Complementing this, early forms of **miniature paintings**, particularly from the Pala (Eastern India) and Jain (Western India) traditions, offer colored representations, albeit stylized. Literary accounts, such as those by Chinese Buddhist pilgrim **Xuanzang** who traveled during Harsha's reign, provide descriptive narratives of the period's customs and general appearance of the populace, offering a foreign perspective on Indian dress.

In terms of **textiles**, this period saw a continued excellence in the production of **cotton and silk**, building upon the foundations laid in ancient times. However, a significant development was the heightened **regional specialization in weaving**, with specific areas gaining renown for their unique fabrics and techniques. For instance, the southern parts of India, particularly the territories under the Pallavas and later the Cholas, saw the growing prominence of textile centers like **Kanchipuram**, which began to establish its enduring reputation for exquisite silk weaving, characterized by its heavy quality and elaborate temple-inspired motifs. New **motifs and patterns** emerged, deeply influenced by local flora, fauna, and the rich iconography of Hinduism and Jainism. Sculptural details reveal fabrics adorned with geometric patterns, stylized floral designs (such as lotuses and creepers), animal motifs (elephants, peacocks, mythical beings like makaras), and often, miniature depictions of deities or narrative scenes. These were not merely surface embellishments but were often integrated into the weave itself, demonstrating advanced loom techniques.

The **costume** of the early medieval period exhibited increasing **regional divergence**, moving beyond the more unified styles of earlier imperial periods. Distinct sartorial traditions began to solidify in North, South, East, and West India, reflecting diverse climatic needs, cultural practices, and local aesthetic preferences.

- For **women**, the **sari** continued its evolution, becoming more standardized and recognizable, though draped in numerous regional variations. These drapes were often specific to caste, occupation, and marital status. The use of the **Kanchuki (blouse)** became more prevalent across various regions, marking a gradual shift towards semi-stitched upper body coverings. These blouses were often short, covering only the bust, and could be intricately designed, sometimes featuring backless styles or front ties, as suggested by temple sculptures. The fabric of the blouse often contrasted with the sari, showcasing textural and color variations.
- For **men**, the **dhoti** remained the primary lower garment, its unstitched nature enduring despite the emergence of some stitched forms. Similar to the sari, the dhoti was worn in diverse **regional variations** in terms of length, pleating, and tucking, reflecting local practicalities and aesthetic preferences.
- The influence of earlier foreign incursions, particularly from the Kushans, meant that **stitched garments** saw increasing, albeit gradual, use, especially in parts of **Northern India**. While the dhoti remained commonplace, forms of tunics and fitted trousers began to appear in certain contexts, particularly for soldiers or those influenced by Central Asian equestrian traditions, though they had not yet become dominant.
- **Headwear** for men, primarily the **turban**, continued to be a significant component of attire. Its size, style, and method of tying varied considerably by region and social standing, ranging from simple wraps to elaborate, multi-layered constructions that offered protection and denoted status.
- **Ornaments** in this period became even more elaborate and heavy, often directly reflecting the grandeur and iconography of **temple art**. Both men and women adorned themselves with a profusion of gold, silver, and precious stone jewelry. Multi-strand necklaces, large earrings (sometimes distending earlobes), armlets, bangles, anklets (often with bells), and intricate waistbands were common. These pieces were not merely decorative but often imbued with religious significance, mirroring the divine adornments seen on temple deities.

In summary, the early medieval period was crucial for the **consolidation of distinct regional textile and costume traditions** across India. It was during this time that the **sari took a more definitive and recognizable form**, becoming a versatile and iconic garment, while the dhoti continued its long legacy. The flourishing of regional textile centers and the integration of local cultural motifs into fabric designs underscored a dynamic period of artistic expression and sartorial diversification, setting the stage for subsequent transformations.



Sculpture of a huntress with bare upper part wearing a leafy dress round the waist. Photographed from a Tamil Nadu temple.



Saree draping with folds depicted on the walls of Kailasanatha temple, Kanchi.



Short dress worn by the dancers. Photographed from a temple in Tamil Nadu.



Long dress worn by women.



Costumes observed from the sculptures of the Ramappa temple, Mulugu, Telangana.



Miniature panel of six vilasinis each depicted in different costume. Photographed from a temple of Telangana.

b) Delhi Sultanate and Regional Sultanates (c. 1206 – 1526 CE)

The advent of the **Delhi Sultanate** in the early 13th century, followed by the establishment of numerous independent regional Sultanates across India, marked a profound turning point in the subcontinent's socio-cultural and sartorial landscape. This period introduced a strong **Islamic, Perso-Turkic influence**, which profoundly reshaped courtly attire and textile aesthetics, creating a fascinating blend with indigenous traditions.

The primary evidence for this period comes from **Persian chronicles**, which meticulously documented the court life, military campaigns, and social customs of the Sultanates. Early forms of **miniature paintings**, though still nascent compared to the later Mughal school, began to emerge, offering visual representations of rulers, courtiers, and scenes from daily life, albeit with a distinct Persianate stylistic influence. **Architectural elements**, particularly tomb carvings and decorative motifs found in mosques and madrassas, often reflect the textile patterns and dress styles of the era. Furthermore, accounts from foreign travelers, most notably the Moroccan explorer **Ibn Battuta** who visited India in the 14th century, provide vivid eyewitness descriptions of the people's clothing, especially in the urban centers and at the Sultan's court.

The **textile industry** under the Sultanates witnessed a significant infusion of **Islamic influence**. New **motifs** were introduced, including sophisticated geometric patterns, intricate arabesques, and elegant calligraphy, reflecting the aniconic traditions of Islamic art. These were often integrated with existing Indian floral and animal designs. New **weaving techniques** also gained prominence, notably sophisticated forms of **brocade weaving** (such as *kimkhwab*, though its peak would be later) and certain forms of **tapestry weaving**, which were brought from Central Asia and Persia. The use of **new materials** such as finer qualities of **wool** and **velvet** increased, especially for royal and aristocratic garments, adding to the luxury of courtly attire. **Muslins**, renowned for their exquisite fineness, continued to be a staple, with their quality potentially enhanced through new techniques. Perhaps the most significant development in textile embellishment was the growing prominence of **Zari work**, intricate embroidery using real gold and silver threads. This technique, influenced by Central Asian and Persian traditions, became a hallmark of royal garments, adding unparalleled richness and

shimmer. **Dyeing techniques** were further enhanced, leading to a wider and more vibrant range of colors, often reflecting the deep blues, reds, and greens favored in Persianate aesthetics.

The **costume** of the Sultanate period saw a distinct **shift towards stitched garments**, especially among the ruling elite and in the major urban centers, marking a departure from the largely draped tradition of ancient India. This was a direct result of the dress customs of the Turkic and Afghan invaders.

- **Courtly Attire for Men:** Male courtiers and rulers adopted **tunics** of varying lengths, often referred to as *Qaba* or *Jama*. These were typically long-sleeved, fitted at the top, and flared from the waist, often tied at the side. They were worn over various forms of **trousers (Pajama)**, which could be loose or tight-fitting. Long coats, often adorned with embroidery, completed the ensemble, along with diverse forms of **turbans (Kulah, Safa)**, which were worn in specific styles to denote rank or religious affiliation.
- **Courtly Attire for Women:** Elite women at court also transitioned towards stitched garments. They wore **tunics (Kurta)**, often long and flowing, over various types of **trousers (Salwar)** or long, full **skirts (Lehenga)**. An essential component was the **head covering (Dupatta or Odhni)**, a large scarf draped gracefully over the head and shoulders, providing modesty and elegance.
- **Blend of Styles:** Crucially, while the court and urban elite adopted these Persianate and Central Asian styles, the **general populace largely retained their traditional draped garments**, such as the sari for women and the dhoti for men. This created a dual sartorial landscape, where indigenous and foreign styles coexisted, with the latter primarily confined to the ruling class and those directly associated with them.
- **Influence on Indigenous Costume:** Despite the initial distinction, there was a **gradual adoption of elements of the stitched attire** by some sections of the indigenous Indian population, particularly the emerging urban middle classes and local nobles. For instance, the **churidar** (tight-fitting trousers that gathered at the ankle) and the **kurta** (a tunic) began to be incorporated into the wardrobe of some non-Muslim communities, especially in North India, demonstrating a slow but discernible cultural exchange in fashion.

The Sultanate period is significant for the **introduction of substantial foreign sartorial traditions** into India. This led

to a profound **fusion of styles**, particularly evident in urban centers and courtly settings, where the elegance of Persianate tailoring and motifs began to intertwine with the existing richness of Indian textiles. This period laid the groundwork for the more extensive cultural and artistic synthesis that would characterize the subsequent Mughal era.

c) Mughal Empire (c. 1526 – 1757 CE)

The **Mughal Empire** represents the zenith of Indian textile and costume artistry, a period of unparalleled grandeur, innovation, and synthesis that profoundly influenced subsequent Indian fashion. Under a succession of powerful emperors like Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, the arts, including textiles and costume, received unprecedented imperial patronage, leading to an explosion of creativity and luxury.

The evidence for understanding Mughal costume and textiles is exceptionally rich and diverse. **Extensive miniature paintings** from the imperial ateliers (especially during the periods of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan) serve as the most vivid visual records, depicting rulers, nobles, courtiers, and common people in intricate detail, showcasing their elaborate attire, fabric textures, and ornamentation. Literary sources like **Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari***, a comprehensive administrative document from Akbar's reign, provide meticulous details on the royal wardrobe, fabric types, and the organization of imperial *karkhanas* (workshops). The accounts of European travelers such as **François Bernier** and **Jean-Baptiste Tavernier**, who visited the Mughal court, offer invaluable external perspectives, often marveling at the opulence and craftsmanship of Indian textiles. Crucially, a significant number of **actual surviving textiles** from the Mughal period are preserved in museums worldwide, allowing for direct examination of their materials, techniques, and designs.

The Mughal era marked the **pinnacle of Indian textile art**. Unprecedented imperial patronage fueled innovation and demand for the finest fabrics. **Luxury fabrics** reached new heights of sophistication. **Brocades (Kimkhab)**, especially from Varanasi (Banaras) and Ahmedabad, became renowned for their intricate patterns woven with gold and silver threads, creating dazzling effects. Rich **velvets** and the finest **silks** were extensively used for courtly garments and furnishings. However, it was the **fine muslins**, particularly the legendary Dacca muslin from Bengal, that epitomized Mughal textile artistry. Known colloquially as "woven air" or "evening dew" due to their extraordinary sheerness and softness, these muslins were so fine that a full length of fabric could pass through a finger ring. **Motifs** in Mughal textiles were characterized by their highly refined naturalism and exquisite detail. The ubiquitous **floral motifs (buta, buti)**, often arranged symmetrically in trellises or as single sprays, depicted tulips, poppies, irises, and carnations with botanical accuracy, symbolizing the Mughal love for gardens. Naturalistic designs of birds (parrots, peacocks), animals (deer, elephants), and even mythical creatures were intricately woven or embroidered. Geometric patterns and arabesques, inherited from Persian traditions, were seamlessly integrated. **Techniques** employed were exceptionally complex and diverse. This included advanced loom weaving for brocades, intricate **embroidery techniques** such as **zardozi** (heavy

gold and silver wire embroidery), **ari** (chain stitch embroidery), and **chikan** (delicate white embroidery on muslin, particularly from Lucknow). **Tie-dyeing (bandhani)**, especially from Rajasthan and Gujarat, and sophisticated **block printing** methods were also widely practiced, producing a vibrant array of patterns and colors. This period also saw the development of highly specialized **textile centers** across the empire: Dacca (Bengal) for muslins, Varanasi (Banaras) for brocades and silks, Ahmedabad and Surat (Gujarat) for patterned textiles and bandhani, and Kashmir for its exquisite **Pashmina shawls**, which became prized luxury items across the world.

The **costume** of the Mughal Empire was characterized by its **grandeur and opulence**, directly reflecting the imperial splendor and the refined aesthetic sensibilities of the court. It represented a sophisticated fusion of indigenous Indian and Persianate styles, with elements adapted from Central Asian traditions.

- For **men**, the quintessential garment was the **Jama**, a flowing, often pleated tunic that extended from the neck to the knees or ankles. Its cut varied, sometimes wide and voluminous, sometimes more fitted at the waist. It was typically tied at the side, initially on the right for Hindus and the left for Muslims (though later standardized), and its length could vary significantly. Underneath, various forms of **stitched lower garments** were worn, including the loose **Pajama**, the fitted **Shalwar**, or the tightly gathered **Churidar**. A **Patka**, a long, embroidered waistband or sash, was tied around the waist, often serving to hold a dagger and adding another layer of decorative artistry. **Turbans** were highly diverse and elaborate, signifying rank, regional identity, or personal style, and were often ornamented with a **sarpech**, a jeweled plume ornament. **Shawls**, particularly the luxurious Kashmiri Pashmina, became an indispensable accessory for warmth and elegance, draped over the shoulders or across the chest.
- For **women**, courtly attire was equally opulent and sophisticated. They wore long, flowing, often sheer **Peshwaz** or **Jama** tunics, sometimes over trousers or skirts, allowing for a graceful silhouette. Underneath, a variety of **stitched lower garments** were prevalent, including different styles of **Pajamas**, **Shalwars**, **Churidars**, **Gararas** (wide, pleated trousers), and **Farshi Pajamas** (extremely wide, flowing trousers that trailed on the ground). The **Dupatta or Odhni**, a long, sheer veil or scarf, was an essential and gracefully draped component of the ensemble, used to cover the head and shoulders, providing both modesty and elegance. Short **Angiya or Choli** (bodices), often with a front tie, were worn beneath the outer garments.
- **Jewelry** reached unprecedented levels of artistry and material value. Both men and women adorned themselves with a dazzling array of precious stones, pearls, and gold jewelry. This included elaborate head ornaments (like *jhoomar* and *tika*), intricate earrings, multi-strand necklaces, armlets, bangles, rings, and ornate nose rings, reflecting a profound love for precious metals and gems.
- While **Regional Mughal Styles** emerged as local rulers (such as the Rajputs and the Deccan Sultanates) adapted Mughal courtly attire to their own traditions and climatic conditions, leading to unique variations in silhouette, color

palettes, and motifs, the fundamental elements remained. **Commoners**, however, continued to wear simpler versions of traditional draped or semi-stitched garments made from coarser fabrics, illustrating the distinct class-based sartorial divide.

The Mughal Empire undeniably represents the **zenith of Indian textile and costume artistry**. Its influence was profound, shaping subsequent Indian fashion, both courtly and popular, for centuries. This period solidified a remarkable **fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and Persianate aesthetic sensibilities**, creating a distinctive and enduring sartorial legacy that continues to inspire designers worldwide.

1.3 Colonial and Modern Period (c. 1750 CE – Present)

The period spanning from the mid-18th century to the present day marks a dramatic and often turbulent chapter in the history of Indian costume and textiles. Characterized by the decline of indigenous empires and the imposition of colonial rule, followed by the resurgence of national identity and global integration, this era witnessed profound disruptions, forced adaptations, and ultimately, a dynamic re-invention of India's sartorial heritage. The introduction of industrialization and Western fashion profoundly reshaped production methods, aesthetic preferences, and the very symbolism of clothing.

a) Decline of Mughal Empire and Rise of British Rule (c. 1750 – 1947 CE)

The 18th century saw the gradual fragmentation of the mighty Mughal Empire, creating a power vacuum that was swiftly filled by European trading companies, most notably the British East India Company. As the Company transitioned from a trading entity to a formidable political power, its economic policies had a devastating and transformative impact on India's once-flourishing textile industry and, consequently, its costume traditions.

Evidence for this period is abundant and diverse, ranging from **British East India Company records** and **colonial paintings** that often depicted Indian life and figures, to the advent of **early photographs** that captured changing sartorial practices with unprecedented realism. **Fashion magazines** from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both Indian and British, offered insights into emerging trends. Furthermore, **nationalist literature** and political discourse provided critical perspectives on the role of textiles in the anti-colonial movement.

The most catastrophic impact of British rule on Indian textiles was the systematic **decline of the handloom industry**. India, for centuries the world's leading producer and exporter of high-quality cotton and luxury textiles, faced unprecedented competition from cheap, mill-made cloth produced in Manchester and Lancashire. British industrial policy, characterized by high tariffs on Indian finished goods entering Britain and low tariffs on British machine-made cloth entering India, effectively flooded the Indian market and crippled indigenous production. Traditional handloom centers, which had thrived for millennia, such as the producers of the famed **Dacca muslin**, faced severe contraction, leading to widespread unemployment and the

loss of invaluable artisanal skills. This marked a deliberate economic subjugation, transforming India from a manufacturing powerhouse into a supplier of raw materials and a market for British industrial output.

Concurrently, there was a significant **shift in patronage**. The traditional patrons of exquisite textiles—Indian royalty, nobility, and temple institutions—saw their power and wealth diminish. In their place, British administrators and an emerging class of Western-educated Indian elite became new patrons, leading to a demand for fabrics that sometimes incorporated European aesthetics or were adapted for Western tastes. While many traditional crafts suffered, some, like the heavy silks of **Kanjeevaram** (Kanchipuram) in the South and the intricate brocades of **Benarasi** (Varanasi) in the North, along with the vibrant tie-dyeing of **Bandhani** from Gujarat and Rajasthan, demonstrated remarkable resilience. Their survival was largely due to continued local patronage from temples, regional princely states, and a steadfast preference among the general populace for traditional weaves, a testament to their inherent quality and cultural significance. This period also saw a subtle **influence of European aesthetics** on Indian textiles, with the introduction of new weaves, dyes, and printing techniques. Some Indian manufacturers began to mimic European designs or adapt them to local tastes, reflecting a new hybridity in textile production.

The profound disruption to India's textile heritage, however, inadvertently fueled a powerful nationalist response. The **Swadeshi Movement**, gaining momentum in the early 20th century, championed the revival of **handloom and khadi** (hand-spun, hand-woven cotton) as a potent symbol of national pride, economic self-reliance, and resistance against British colonial exploitation. Mahatma Gandhi notably made khadi a central tenet of the independence movement, urging Indians to spin and weave their own cloth, thereby transforming a simple fabric into a powerful political statement against foreign domination.

In terms of **costume**, the colonial period introduced a complex dynamic of adoption, adaptation, and resistance.

- The most striking development was the **adoption of Western clothing** by the educated Indian elite, particularly men engaged in professions like law, medicine, and civil service. **Suits, shirts, trousers, and hats** became symbols of modernity, education, and upward mobility, often worn by those who had studied in Britain or were employed by the colonial administration. For women, Western gowns and dresses were occasionally adopted by a very small segment of the elite.
- This led to a fascinating phenomenon of **Indo-Western Fusion**. For instance, it was not uncommon to see Indian men wearing a traditional dhoti with a European-style coat, or women pairing a sari with a high-necked, puffed-sleeve **Victorian-style blouse**, reflecting the prevailing British fashion of the late 19th century. This fusion was less about mimicry and more about an organic blending of elements.
- The **sari**, in particular, underwent a process of **standardization and re-definition** during this period. The **Nivi style**, originating from Andhra Pradesh (then part of the Madras Presidency), with its elegant pleats tucked

at the waist and the pallu (decorative end) draped over the left shoulder, gained widespread popularity and became a quintessential symbol of Indian womanhood, transcending regional boundaries. Blouse styles became more varied and modest, often influenced by European silhouettes, featuring high necks, longer sleeves, and more structured forms.

- For **men's attire**, while Western wear gained ground in professional settings, traditional garments like the **Sherwani** (a long, buttoned coat worn over a kurta and churidar) and the **Achkan** (a similar, often slightly shorter coat) became formal wear, particularly during ceremonial occasions and later, a symbol of nationalist identity. The **Churidar-Kurta** combination also became a common and respected form of traditional dress. The **dhoti-kurta** remained the prevalent attire for common men across much of India, especially in rural areas.
- The British also introduced **European-style military and official uniforms** for the Indian army and administrative services, further integrating Western sartorial codes into the Indian landscape. Despite these influences, **regional styles** of costume retained a strong presence, particularly in rural areas and among communities deeply rooted in tradition, though even they might have subtly incorporated new materials or techniques.

The colonial period represents a profound disruption and transformation of the Indian textile industry, leading to a significant **economic decline of traditional crafts** but also fostering resilience and adaptation. It ushered in a significant **influence of Western fashion**, resulting in the creation of new hybrid styles that spoke to India's evolving identity. Crucially, clothing emerged as a powerful **symbol of national identity and resistance**, becoming integral to the anti-colonial struggle.

b) Post- Independence Era (1947 CE – Present)

India's independence in 1947 marked the dawn of a new era, allowing for the re-assertion of indigenous cultural forms and a dynamic engagement with global trends. The post-independence period has been characterized by both a revival of traditional crafts and a rapid diversification of costume, influenced by economic development, technological advancements, globalization, and the powerful medium of popular culture.

Evidence for this contemporary period is abundant and easily accessible, drawn from **contemporary fashion media** (magazines, blogs, social media), the collections of prominent **designers**, the pervasive influence of **Bollywood films**, the public appearances of **figures** in politics and entertainment, and broad **retail trends** across the country.

In the realm of **textiles**, the Indian government, recognizing the historical and economic significance of handlooms, initiated various programs and policies to support and **revive traditional crafts**. Organizations like the All India Handloom Board were established to promote artisans and ensure the survival of heritage weaves. Simultaneously, the textile industry underwent significant **technological advancements**. The proliferation of power looms alongside traditional handlooms, the introduction and widespread use of **synthetic fibers** (like polyester and rayon), and the adoption of

sophisticated **digital printing** techniques transformed production methods and diversified the range of available fabrics. These advancements allowed for mass production and greater affordability. Globally, Indian textiles have continued to gain international recognition and acclaim. Iconic weaves and crafts such as the luxurious **Pashmina** from Kashmir, the intricate **Ikat** tie-dyes, and the hand-painted **Kalamkari** textiles have found a global market. A growing global awareness of environmental concerns has also led to a renewed interest in **sustainable fashion**, with traditional, eco-friendly textiles like **Khadi** and other handloom products finding increasing appeal both domestically and internationally.

The evolution of **costume** in post-independence India has been dynamic and multifaceted, reflecting a society grappling with tradition, modernity, and globalization.

- The period has witnessed an **explosion of styles**, driven by rapidly changing fashion trends, increased exposure to global aesthetics, and the ubiquitous influence of media. The **sari** remains an iconic and enduring garment, symbolizing Indian womanhood. However, its draping has become more experimental, with designers and fashionistas exploring new, innovative ways to wear it. The rise of the **"designer sari"** has transformed this traditional garment into a high-fashion statement, incorporating contemporary motifs, materials, and embellishments.
- The **Salwar Kameez** (a tunic, trousers, and scarf combination) has emerged as an incredibly popular and practical garment for women across India, transcending regional and social boundaries. It has evolved into numerous styles, from the elegant, flowing **Anarkali** suits reminiscent of Mughal attire to the voluminous **Patiala** salwars and the classic **Churidar** styles, offering comfort and versatility for daily wear and formal occasions. Similarly, the **Lehenga-Choli** (a long skirt, short blouse, and dupatta) has become the quintessential attire for celebrations, particularly weddings, with designers constantly innovating on its silhouette, embroidery, and fabric combinations.
- For **men**, Western wear, including **shirts, trousers, and suits**, has become the dominant form of daily and professional attire, reflecting global corporate trends. However, traditional wear such as the **Kurta-Pajama** and the ceremonial **Sherwani** retains significant importance for festivals, weddings, and cultural events, serving as a powerful link to heritage.
- **Indo-Western Fusion** continues to be a major and evolving trend for both men and women. Designers are constantly creating innovative blends, such as **sari gowns** (pre-stitched saris with a contemporary silhouette), **kurta dresses**, and the pairing of traditional **Nehru jackets** with Western shirts and trousers. This fusion reflects a confident and adaptive Indian identity that embraces both its heritage and global contemporary styles.
- The **influence of Bollywood films** cannot be overstated. Indian cinema has played a pivotal role in popularizing fashion trends, introducing new styles, and making traditional garments appear glamorous and aspirational across the subcontinent and the diaspora. Finally, Indian designers are now significant participants in **global fashion trends**, showcasing their collections at

international fashion weeks and drawing inspiration from, and contributing to, global sartorial conversations.

In essence, the post-independence era is characterized by a **dynamic evolution** marked by a concerted effort to preserve and revitalize traditional textile and costume heritage, coupled with a seamless integration of global trends and constant innovation. This period truly reflects India's diverse, adaptable, and rapidly changing society, where clothing serves as a multifaceted expression of tradition, modernity, and global outlook.

2. Conclusion

The evolution of costume and textiles in India is a magnificent testament to a continuous, living heritage, tracing an unbroken thread from the earliest cotton fragments of the Indus Valley Civilization to the vibrant, dynamic fusion wear of the 21st century. This chronological journey reveals a profound and enduring connection between the subcontinent's people and their attire, where clothing has consistently transcended its utilitarian function to embody cultural identity, artistic expression, and socio-economic realities.

Throughout millennia, this evolution has been shaped by a continuous interplay of indigenous creativity, remarkable resilience in craftsmanship, and transformative foreign influences. From the unstitched simplicity of early draped garments to the intricate tailoring introduced by Central Asian invaders and the subsequent imperial grandeur of Mughal courtly dress, each era has added layers of complexity and beauty. Despite periods of significant disruption, particularly during colonial rule, India's textile traditions demonstrated extraordinary adaptability, often becoming symbols of resistance and self-identity. The post-independence era, characterized by a renewed appreciation for heritage alongside a confident engagement with global trends, continues this legacy of innovation. Ultimately, the story of Indian textiles and costume is one of unparalleled artistry, demonstrating its ongoing relevance as a powerful symbol of cultural richness and a continuing source of artistic excellence on the global stage.

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