

# "Reviving Heritage: The Brand Culture of Indian Wear in Contemporary India"

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how Indian traditional clothing is changing in relation to modern branding and consumer culture. The popularity of traditional clothing, including kurtas, lehengas, sarees, and handloom textiles, has significantly increased as globalisation and contemporary fashion trends impact Indian markets. Indian consumers' renewed cultural awareness and identity assertion are at the heart of this renaissance, which goes beyond simple aesthetics. In order to appeal to young people and the urban middle class, the study explores how Indian fashion brands are reinterpreting traditional clothing through the use of contemporary marketing techniques, digital platforms, and sustainable practices. It also looks at how regional heritage, storytelling, and craftsmanship have shaped the brand culture surrounding Indian clothing. These companies help to preserve India's rich textile heritage while forging globally competitive fashion identities by bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. In the current brand narratives of Indian fashion, the paper emphasises the importance of cultural sustainability and the economic empowerment of artisans. The branding and marketing of Indian clothing has undergone a paradigm shift in the Indian fashion industry, which has its roots in centuries-old textile heritage. To preserve the Indianness of the world, numerous designers have incorporated Indian folk arts like Kalamkari, Madhubani, Warli, etc. into the fashion industry. The development and perception of Indian ethnic clothing brands, as well as their cultural symbolism and deliberate blending of tradition and modernity, are all examined in this study. This paper examines the cultural narratives, consumer behaviour, and branding strategies that influence Indian apparel in the domestic and international markets through case studies of brands like Fabindia, Biba, Manyavar, and Raw Mango. Surveys and qualitative content analysis are used in the study to capture the sociocultural, technological, and economic elements driving this change.

**Keyword:** Indian Wear, Brand Culture, Ethnic Fashion, Indian Textiles, Cultural Identity, Fashion Branding, Contemporary Trends, Consumer Behavior

## Graphical Abstract



## **1. Introduction**

The cultural, spiritual, and socioeconomic development of the subcontinent is intricately linked to the history of Indian clothing. For centuries, traditional clothing, including the sari, kurta, lehenga, dhoti, and sherwani, has represented not only fashion choices but also social standing, regional affinities, and ceremonial customs. Archaeological evidence suggests that cotton fabrics and dyed garments were used as early as the Indus Valley Civilisation (c. 3300–1300 BCE), when Indian textiles and clothing were already widely recognised.

Clothing became increasingly stylised during the Mauryan and Gupta eras, and sculptures and paintings frequently reflected this. Indian fashion was greatly impacted by the Mughal era (16th–18th century), which brought opulent materials like silk, muslin, and brocade as well as adornment methods like chikankari and zardozi. The opulence and fine craftsmanship that still characterise Indian ethnic clothing today were also influenced by this era.

Indigenous weaving and tailoring traditions declined during the colonial era as a result of changes in clothing practices brought about by Western influence and industrial production. Nonetheless, Mahatma Gandhi's early 20th-century Swadeshi movement promoted the resurgence of hand-spun khadi as a representation of independence and defiance. There was a resurgence of cultural pride in traditional Indian attire during this time.

India experienced an intriguing duality after gaining independence. While the Indian elite started dressing more like Westerners, ethnic clothing continued to be important in religious, family, and ceremonial settings. Indian clothing did not start to appear in branded formats until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when India's economy was liberalised. Fashion designers such as Rohit Bal, Sabyasachi Mukherjee, and Ritu Kumar were instrumental in bringing ethnic clothing up to the level of luxury and couture.

Mass-market ethnic clothing companies like FabIndia, Biba, and Manyavar emerged in the early 2000s, fusing traditional styles with easy-to-wear convenience. With the help of malls, fashion retail chains, and e-commerce platforms, these brands positioned Indian apparel as stylish, affordable, and aspirational.

Clothing branding today reflects a conscious effort to revive and redesign tradition for the contemporary consumer. Regional handlooms, artisan communities and sustainable fashion narratives are all gaining greater attention as a result of this aesthetic and socio-cultural renaissance. Thus, Indian apparel represents a powerful nexus of past and present, custom and fashion, artistry and consumerism.

With roots in centuries-old customs, India's varied textile heritage creates a rich cultural tapestry that still has an impact on modern fashion. Indian clothing, from the elaborate Banarasi silk weaves to the hand-block prints of Rajasthan, is more than just a style; it is a representation of regional pride, identity, and ritual. Globalisation and the growth of consumerism have significantly changed the Indian fashion scene. A unique brand culture has developed during this transition, changing the way Indian ethnic clothing is viewed, promoted, and worn.

Unbranded, locally tailored clothing has given way to carefully chosen ethnic fashion labels that appeal to both traditional values and contemporary sensibilities with the rise of Indian wear brands like FabIndia, Biba, Manyavar, and Raw Mango. These companies have created a distinctive customer experience that combines tradition and ambition by skilfully fusing storytelling, craft revival, and modern design. Thanks to fusion and Indo-western adaptations, Indian clothing is now more widely positioned as every day, occasion-based, and professional wear rather than just being worn for celebrations or ceremonies.

The study of brand culture becomes essential in this situation. The values, stories, symbols, and behaviours that brands represent and convey are all included in brand culture. This culture is intricately linked to

socioeconomic narratives, artisan knowledge, and regional identity for Indian ethnic clothing brands. Investigating this cultural branding offers valuable perspectives on the modern preservation, commodification, and reinterpretation of Indian heritage.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the branding tactics used by well-known Indian ethnic clothing companies, look into consumer attitudes, and comprehend how cultural identity is negotiated in the marketplace. It also looks at how tradition, digital media, and aspirational branding have come together to make Indian clothing globally known, bringing heritage back into the present day.

Indian apparel symbolizes much more than just culture, it encompasses tradition, identity and storytelling. With the expansion and globalization of the fashion industry, Indian brands are reinterpreting heritage through new-age designs, e-commerce platforms and targeted marketing. This paper focuses on understanding the “brand culture” associated with Indian ethnic apparel and how it maintains and changes cultural values.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

To analyze the cultural relevance of Indian wear in contemporary branding.

To study branding strategies adopted by prominent Indian ethnic wear brands.

To understand consumer perceptions and preferences for Indian wear.

To examine the impact of digital platforms and globalization on Indian ethnic branding.

## **3. Literature Review**

Indian traditional attire has long served as a representation of regional diversity, cultural identity, and artistry. According to academics like Tarlo (1996) and Craik (2009), fashion is a phenomenon that is both cultural and commercial. From colonial resistance to post-independence nationalism and global consumerism, traditional Indian clothing such as kurtas, lehengas, sherwanis, and sarees has undergone waves of reinterpretation over time (Bhachu, 2004; Jain, 2012).

Especially in postcolonial and diasporic narratives, Indian clothing has been a key component of identity assertion (Chatterjee, 1993; Bhachu, 2004). Reviving traditional clothing, according to scholars, is a means of regaining cultural pride and fending off Westernisation (Uberoi, 2006). Handlooms, natural dyes, and embroidery techniques like zardozi, bandhej, and chikankari are highlighted for their aesthetic and symbolic value.

In Indian ethnic clothing, brand culture is a relatively new phenomenon. Brands like Fabindia, Anokhi, Biba, and Manyavar, which offer curated and commercialised versions of Indian customs, arose with the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s. The conflict between authenticity and commodification—where heritage is packaged selectively to appeal to urban and international markets—is highlighted by academics such as Appadurai (1996) and Kaur (2010).

The revival and glorification of Indian clothing are greatly aided by the media. Celebrity endorsements and Bollywood costume designers like Manish Malhotra and Sabyasachi have given ethnic fashion an air of aspiration. Mehta (2015) and Dwyer (2000) examine how the promotion of a hybrid aesthetic in film has influenced mass appeal and market demand by fusing modern silhouettes with tradition.

Research by Nair (2017) and Kapoor & Choudhary (2020) examines how young urban consumers interact with heritage brands to express values like sustainability, craftsmanship, and cultural pride in addition to their desire for style. Social media, influencer marketing, and brand storytelling have a particularly strong impact on millennials and Gen Z consumers.

The artisanal revival and sustainable fashion are receiving more attention from academia and industry. Research by Shenoy (2020) and Bhardwaj & Fairhurst (2010) looks at how the Indian "slow fashion" movement

promotes fair trade, ethical branding, and the continued existence of handloom and craft-based jobs. This makes room for fashion with a purpose and is in line with the UN's sustainable development goals.

The local handloom and heritage industries face competition from fast fashion brands and global fashion trends. Globalisation has, however, also made it possible for Indian ethnic brands to expand internationally. The global rebranding of Indian clothing is facilitated by diaspora communities and e-commerce sites like Jaypore, Taneira, and Raw Mango (Rovine, 2009; Mathur, 2014).

Several studies have highlighted the role of textiles in India's socio-cultural history (Bhatnagar, 2016; Mukherjee, 2018). Kapferer (2012) discussed luxury and tradition in branding, which resonates with Indian ethnic brands. However, limited research has explored how branding has evolved uniquely within the Indian context to retain cultural specificity while appealing to aspirational middle classes and NRIs.

#### **4. Methodology**

The study uses a qualitative mixed-method approach:

Case Study Analysis of five brands: FabIndia, Biba, Manyavar, W, and Raw Mango.

Consumer Surveys: 150 respondents across metros and Tier-2 cities in India.

Interviews: Brand managers and fashion retail experts.

Content Analysis: Review of advertising, social media presence, and websites.

#### **5. Case Studies of Prominent Indian Wear Brands**

##### **5.1 FabIndia**

FabIndia was founded in 1960 to connect traditional Indian crafts with urban demand. Its story revolves around rural empowerment, artisanship, and sustainability. It curates its retail experience ethnographically. Since its founding in 1960, FabIndia has played a leading role in introducing traditional Indian crafts and textiles to urban markets. It establishes a model of ethical sourcing and inclusive growth by bringing more than 55,000 rural artisans into contact with mainstream consumers.

##### **Important Techniques:**

Handmade, natural fibre products from rural artisans are promoted by an artisan-based supply chain. In its brand communication, brand storytelling places a strong emphasis on sustainability, tradition, and authenticity.

**Retail Experience:** Modern layouts and ethnic elements are blended to create stores that reflect Indian culture.

**Impact:** A resurgence of interest in khadi and handloom.

provided rural artisans with a means of subsistence.

Establish a standard for fashion's social enterprise branding.

##### **5.2 Biba**

One of the top ethnic clothing brands in India, particularly for women, is BIBA. It was founded in 1986 and provides a large selection of reasonably priced ethnic ready-to-wear apparel. Ready-to-wear ethnic apparel was made popular by Biba, which catered to middle-class Indian women. It exhibits an aspirational style influenced by Bollywood and frequently works with TV and films. Important Techniques: Reasonably priced ethnic clothing: combining contemporary silhouettes with traditional patterns.

Celebrity Endorsements: Designed collections with a Bollywood theme in collaboration with Bollywood films.

**Retail Expansion:** Well-established in India's shopping centres and other urban areas.

**Impact:** Increased the availability and style of ethnic clothing for daily wear.

made mix-and-match fashion in Indian clothing more popular.

##### **5.3 Manyavar**

Manyavar, which Ravi Modi founded in 1999, has elevated men's ethnic clothing into a branded, aspirational market. Mostly for weddings and festivals, it sells sherwanis, kurta sets, Indo-western attire, and accessories.

#### Important Techniques:

**Specialised Focus:** Focused on the wedding and celebration markets, which are comparatively unexplored in the menswear industry.

**Celebrity endorsements:** Virat Kohli and Ranveer Singh have served as brand representatives, enhancing the brand's relatability and style quotient.

**Retail Network:** More than 600 exclusive brand outlets (EBOs) both domestically and internationally, guaranteeing a regulated brand experience.

**Brand messaging:** Phrases such as "Shaadi hai, taiyaar ho jao" resonate emotionally with Indian wedding customs.

**Impact:** Pioneered the Indian ethnic clothing industry's branding for men. established a market for traditional menswear that is ready to wear. helped bring the kurta-Pajama and sherwani back into vogue as aspirational clothing.

#### 5.4 W for Woman

Combining fusion styles, W's branding focuses on empowered working women. Its strategy blends contemporary silhouettes with Indian motifs.

#### 5.5 Raw Mango

Designer Sanjay Garg founded the upscale handloom company Raw Mango in 2008 with the goal of modernising traditional Indian textiles. It is renowned for its sophisticated styling, revivalist philosophy, and minimalist design. Raw Mango is a luxury brand that reimagines handwoven saris through cultural storytelling and minimalist design. It focusses on global market sand consumers of intellectual fashion.

**Important Branding Techniques:** Identity of the Couture Handloom: Focusses on clothing and woven saris from historically significant areas such as Bengal, Benaras, and Chanderi.

**Cultural Storytelling:** The boundaries between art, culture, and fashion are blurred by campaigns that frequently reference mythology, history, and Indian customs.

**Selective Retail Strategy:** Boutique-style establishments that enhance exclusivity and immersive experiences by more closely resembling cultural galleries than retail stores.

**Minimalism with Depth:** Earthy hues and crisp silhouettes highlight the intricate weaving, fabric quality, and Indian identity.

**Impact on Culture:** Transformed the handloom from a rustic to an aspirational craft. elevated traditional weavers to a prominent position in Indian fashion.

encouraged urban, well-educated consumers to get involved with local crafts.

**New developments:** Incorporates folklore, regional languages, and cultural symbols into branding. relies on editorial features, word-of-mouth among cultural elites, and organic growth rather than mass marketing.

### 6. Key Branding Strategies Observed

Element of Branding	Strategy Applied
Strategy Cultural Symbolism in Practice	Use of traditional motifs, weaving methods, and prints
Storytelling	Campaigns with a festival, heritage, or wedding theme
Influencer Engagement	Fashion bloggers, celebrity ambassadors
Experience Retailing	Ethnographic store design --- Digital Presence
Digital Presence	Instagram Reels, fashion films, e-commerce platforms



Engagement of Influencers Ambassadors for celebrities and fashion bloggers Retailing through Experience  
Regional festivals and ethnographic store designs Online Presence Fashion videos, e-commerce sites, and  
Instagram Reels

## **7. Survey Findings: Consumer Behavior Trends**

**Demographics:** 62% Female, 38% Male

55% from Metro Cities, 45% Tier-2/3

**Age Group:** 20-45 years

**Insights:** 70% preferred Indian wear for weddings/festivals.

40% wore Indian wear to work (especially fusion styles).

56% valued brand heritage and craftsmanship.

82% shopped online or discovered brands through social media.

**Key decision factors:** Price, Style, Brand Legacy, Craft, Comfort.

## **8. Discussion**

### **8.1 Indian Brands as Cultural Narrators**

Indian wear brands aren't merely clothing providers—they act as cultural custodians. Many align their campaigns with national festivals, rituals, and spiritual symbols.

### **8.2 Globalization and Localization**

While globalization exposes brands to international fashion, successful Indian brands localize design aesthetics, language, and occasions, maintaining cultural authenticity.

### **8.3 Challenges**

Mass production vs. craftsmanship

Rural artisan integration

Sustainability vs. market demand

## **9. Conclusion**

Indian brand culture in ethnic wear is a powerful intersection of heritage and innovation. These brands are not only commercial entities but also social influencers shaping how India perceives itself. Their success lies in maintaining a balance between rooted identity and aspirational modernity.

## **10. Recommendations**

Invest in craft documentation and digital storytelling.

Create collaborative platforms between designers and weavers.

Promote sustainable fashion initiatives as core brand values.

Develop regional language campaigns for wider reach.

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