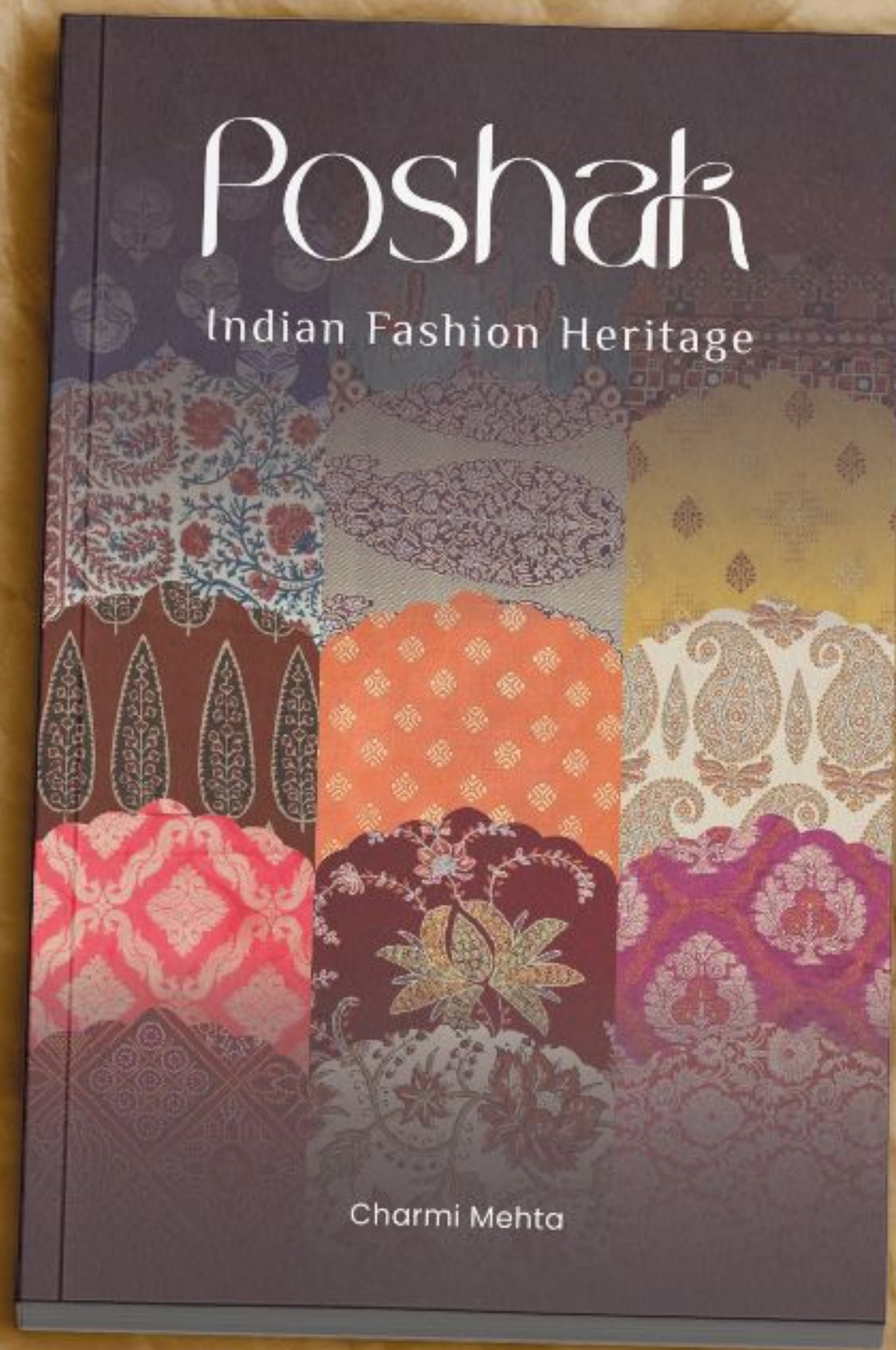


# Poshak

Indian Fashion Heritage



Charmi Mehta



# पोशाक

*This book traces Indian fashion from ancient times to the present, showcasing how clothing reflects our nation's history and culture.*





## Preface

Fashion in India is a vibrant tapestry woven from the threads of history, culture, and identity. This book traces the fascinating evolution of Indian fashion from ancient times to the post-independence era, showcasing how clothing in India has always been more than just a means of covering the body – it has been an art form, a symbol of status, and a reflection of the nation's journey through time.

In these pages, you'll find a chronological exploration of Indian fashion, from the sumptuous silks of ancient courts to the revolutionary khadi of the independence movement and the eclectic styles that emerged in a newly independent India. We'll delve into how societal shifts, technological advancements, and cultural exchanges have influenced fashion trends over the centuries.

This book is for anyone who has ever marveled at the drape of a sari, wondered about the origin of the Nehru jacket, or been curious about how India's complex history is reflected in its clothing. It's an invitation to explore the intersection of aesthetics, functionality, and cultural significance that makes Indian fashion unique.

As we traverse this timeline together, I hope to deepen your appreciation for the rich heritage of Indian fashion and inspire you to look at clothing, both old and new, with fresh eyes. Welcome to this journey through time and textile – welcome to the fascinating world of Indian fashion heritage.





# Content

<u>0-2</u>	<u>Introduction</u>
<u>3-8</u>	<u>Ancient Period</u>
<u>9-18</u>	<u>Medieval Period</u>

<u>10-24</u>	<u>Colonial Period</u>
<u>25-32</u>	<u>Post-Independence Period</u>
<u>33-34</u>	<u>Conclusion</u>

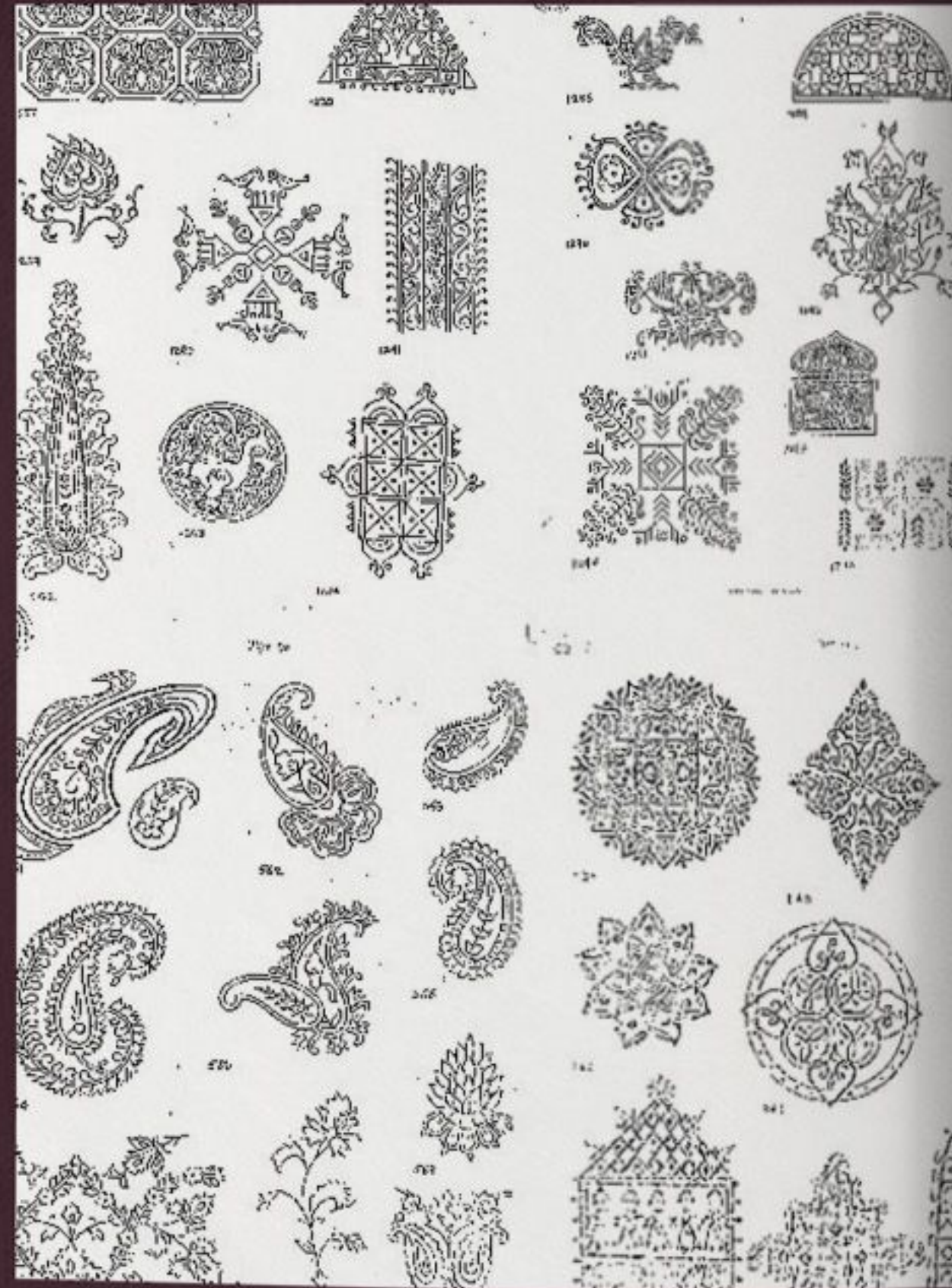


## प्रस्तावना Introduction

## Myth or fact?

Saree, often perceived as a single style, actually encompasses over 100 different draping styles and regional variations, reflecting the rich diversity of Indian culture.





## Indian Traditional Motifs

Traditional Indian clothing is renowned for its rich tapestry of motifs, each carrying deep cultural significance.

## Importance of Indian Fashion

### *Cultural Significance and Occasions*

Indian clothing plays a pivotal role in cultural celebrations, religious ceremonies, and festive occasions. From weddings and religious festivals to dance performances and social gatherings, traditional attire adds color and vibrancy to every event.

### *Global Influence and Popularity*

The allure of Indian clothing extends far beyond its borders, with fashion enthusiasts worldwide embracing its timeless elegance and craftsmanship. From Hollywood red carpets to international runways, Indian-inspired designs continue to captivate audiences around the globe.



# 01 प्राचीन काल

Ancient Period

## Myth or fact?

During the Vedic period (1500–500 BCE), clothing was considered sacred. Garments were believed to carry positive energy, and Vedic hymns were recited during the spinning and weaving processes.



## Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus Valley Civilization's textile and clothing practices are primarily understood through clay impressions and figurines, as preserved textiles are scarce.

Men typically wore long cloths wrapped around the waist, similar to dhotis, sometimes with turbans, while women donned short skirts, tight tunics, and occasionally trousers.



Statue of the "Priest King"  
wearing a printed robe,  
Mohenjo-daro.



Mother Goddess wearing  
ornate necklace,  
Mohenjo-daro.



## Vedic and Classical Period



The garments worn in the Vedic period mainly included a single cloth wrapped around the whole body and draped over the shoulder.

People used to wear the lower garment called *paridhana* which was pleated in front and used to tie with a belt called *mekhala* and an upper garment called *uttariya* (a covering like a shawl) which they used to remove during summers.

08

The main costume for women in Vedic culture was *Saree*. An upper garment was introduced as '*Choli*' or blouse in the later Vedic period with sleeves and a neck. And also, a new version of Saree, a little smaller than saree, called the *dupatta*, was designed later to wear along with *Ghaghra*.

'*Dhotis*' were the most initial attire for Vedic men, which were slightly longer but similar to dupatta without an upper garment. Also, there was a second garment similar to dhoti i.e., '*Lungi*'.





## 02 मध्य काल

Medieval Period

### Myth or fact?

There was uniformity in clothing styles across all regions of India during the Medieval period.



## Delhi Sultanate Influence on fashion

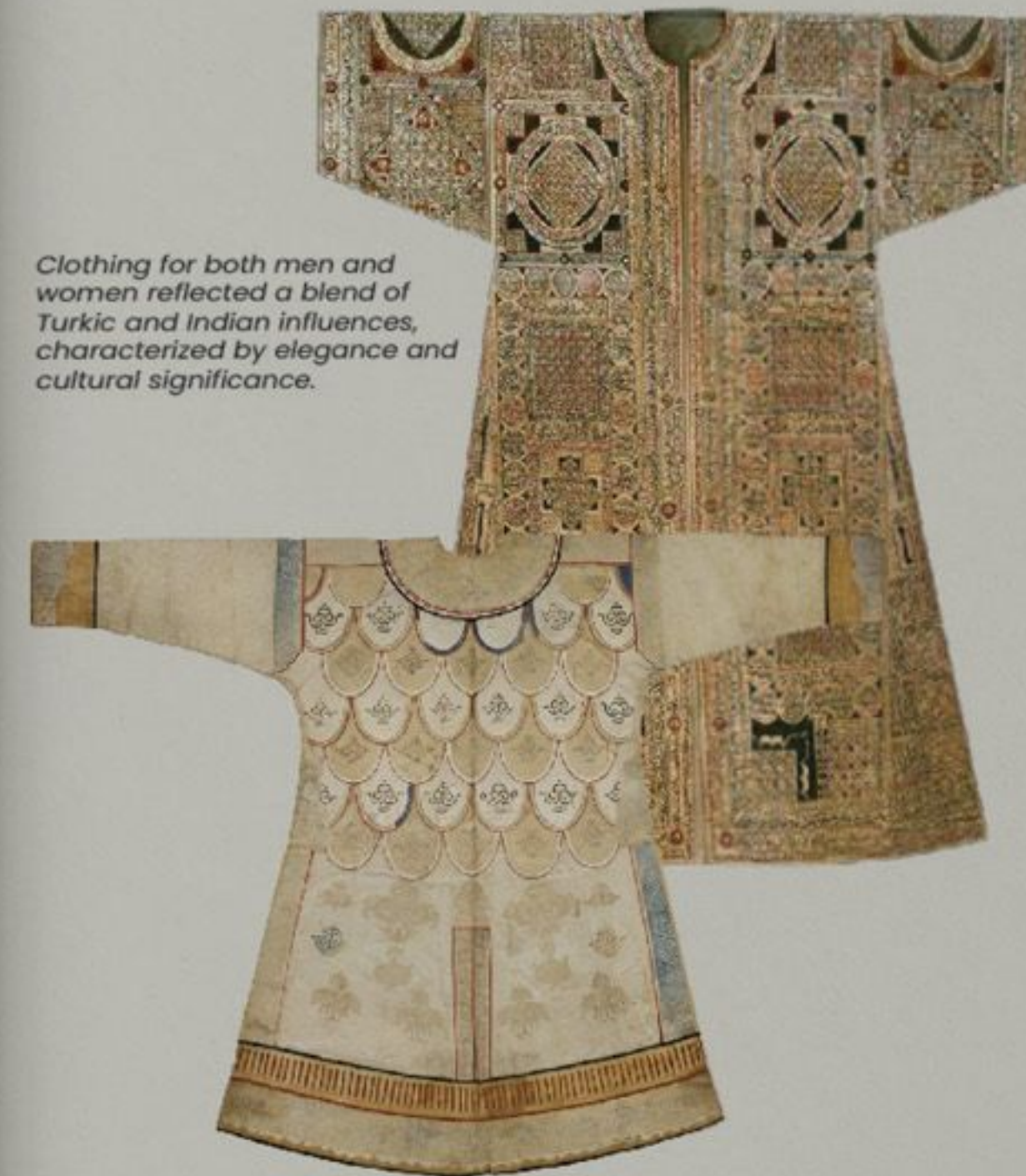
The Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526) marked a significant era in the Indian subcontinent. This period not only transformed the political landscape but also left a lasting impact on fashion and clothing styles.

Both men and women adorned themselves in elegant garments that showcased luxurious fabrics and intricate designs, reflecting their social status and cultural identity.



12

Men commonly wore *kaftans*, long front-buttoned coats made from luxurious fabrics like silk and cotton, often adorned with intricate embroidery and a sash at the waist. They also donned *turbans*, which were essential accessories embellished with jewels and feathers, and *shalwars*, loose-fitting trousers that provided comfort and style.



Clothing for both men and women reflected a blend of Turkic and Indian influences, characterized by elegance and cultural significance.



Women, on the other hand, wore similar *kaftans* and *shalwars*, complemented by *jelicks*, *sleeveless waistcoats* that were often richly embroidered. Underneath, women typically wore soft undergarments made from cotton or silk.



Prints wore at the time of Delhi Sultanate



Silk Merchants



## Mughal Era



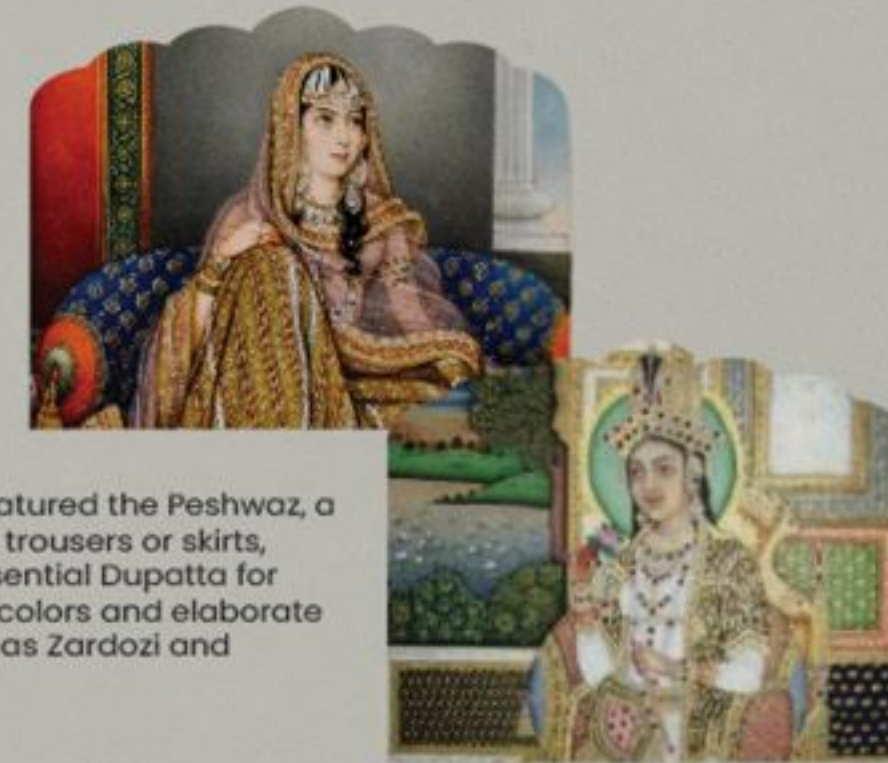
Mughal clothing, a blend of Persian and Indian styles, emerged during the Mughal Empire in the 16th century, characterized by luxurious fabrics and intricate designs.

16



### Men's Costume

Key garments included the Jama, a long coat symbolizing nobility, and the Angrakha, a comfortable upper garment paired with churidar trousers.



### Women's Costume

Women's attire featured the Peshwaz, a flowing tunic over trousers or skirts, along with the essential Dupatta for modesty. Vibrant colors and elaborate embroidery, such as Zardozi and Chikan.





### Headware

The *Kulah*, a distinctive turban style, was worn by men, with each type signifying the wearer's rank or region. Intricate embroidery and jewels often adorned these turbans, adding to their grandeur. Women's headwear included the *Tika*, a jeweled headdress, and the *Sehra*, a floral headpiece worn by the groom during weddings.

### Footwear

Footwear, such as the *Juti*, a pointed-toe shoe, and the *Pajama*, a type of slipper, were crafted from fine leathers and often featured embroidery or applique work. The *Khussas*, a type of embroidered boot, were popular among the nobility.





# 03 औपनिवेशिक काल

Colonial Period

## Myth or fact?

The British imposed their fashion norms on Indians, reflecting their superior status.



## British influence on Indian fashion

The British colonial period in India profoundly transformed fashion, merging Western styles with traditional attire over nearly two centuries.



British influence on India fashion during the colonial period was profound and multifaceted, reshaping traditional attire and introducing new styles. The adoption of Western clothing was particularly evident among the upper and middle classes, who sought to emulate the British to gain social status.

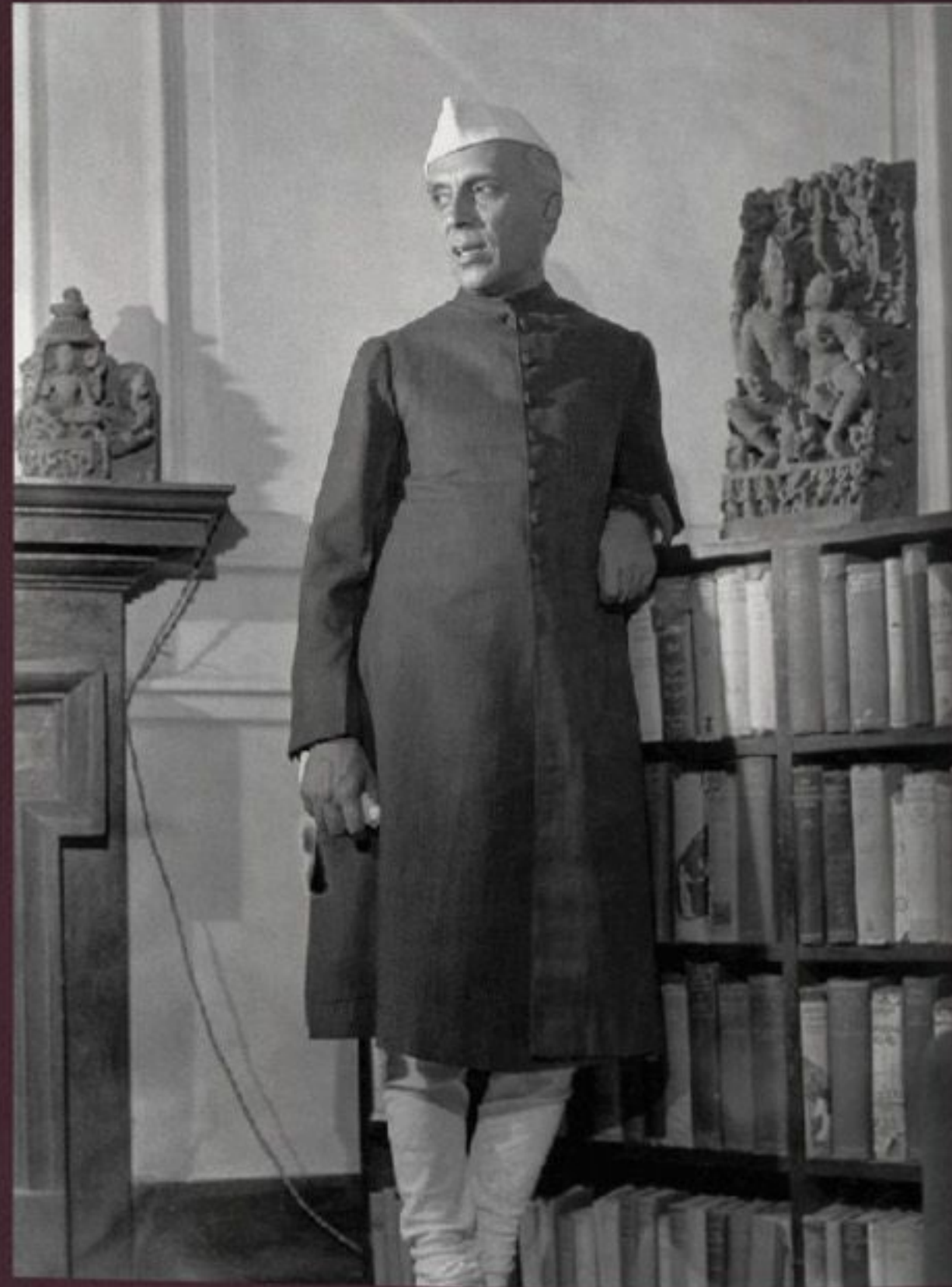
Garments like the Sherwani, a fusion of the Indian Kurta and British frock coat, became popular, while men often combined traditional dhoti with Western shirts and coats.

Women's fashion saw the introduction of petticoats and blouses, which were previously uncommon, leading to a shift in social norms regarding modesty and attire.

The British also influenced the textile industry, promoting mill-made fabrics over traditional hand-spun materials, which altered production practices and contributed to the decline of local artisans. This blending of styles created a unique Indo-Western fashion landscape, with terms like "blouse" and "petticoat" becoming integral to Indian vocabulary.







Jawaharlal Nehru attired in  
Khadi 'Nehru Jacket'

## Indian response on fashion and revival movement

The Indian response to colonial fashion was marked by a complex interplay of adaptation, resistance, and revival movements. Many Indians, particularly from the middle and upper classes, initially embraced Western styles as symbols of modernity and social status, incorporating elements like suits and trousers into their wardrobes to align themselves with their colonial rulers. This led to the emergence of hybrid styles, such as the Nehru jacket, which combined Western tailoring with Indian fabrics.

However, as the nationalist movement gained momentum, a significant backlash against colonial fashion emerged, emphasizing the importance of traditional attire as symbols of cultural identity and resistance. Movements like the *Swadeshi* Movement encouraged the use of indigenous textiles, such as *khadi*, promoting self-reliance and a return to traditional clothing as a means of asserting national pride.

This revival of traditional fashion not only sought to reclaim cultural identity but also served as a powerful statement against colonial rule.





## 04 स्वातंत्र्योत्तर काल

Post Independence  
Period

### Myth or fact?

The concept of fashion and personal style  
is a Western influence that did not exist in  
Indian culture before globalization.



## The Evolution of Indian Fashion in the Post-Independence Era

### 1940s-1960s

In the decades following India's independence, the country's fashion industry faced challenges due to the lingering effects of colonialism and economic struggles. However, the urban and educated population continued to embrace Western clothing styles to some extent, keeping European fashion alive.

It was during this period that Bollywood began to exert a significant influence on fashion trends. People looked up to actors like Dilip Kumar and Dev Anand, as well as actresses like Madhubala and Nargis Dutt, for sartorial inspiration. The Indian fashion industry suffered from a lack of organization and limited apparel styles due to the scarcity of affordable brands and retail options.



### 1960s-1980s

The 1960s marked the rise of designers like Ritu Kumar, who revived traditional Indian textile techniques such as hand block printing and Zardozi embroidery, fostering a resurgence of crafts through various organizations and NGOs. Bollywood also significantly influenced fashion, with costume designers like Bhanu Athaiya experimenting with film fashion, notably in movies like *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1962) and *Amrapali* (1966).

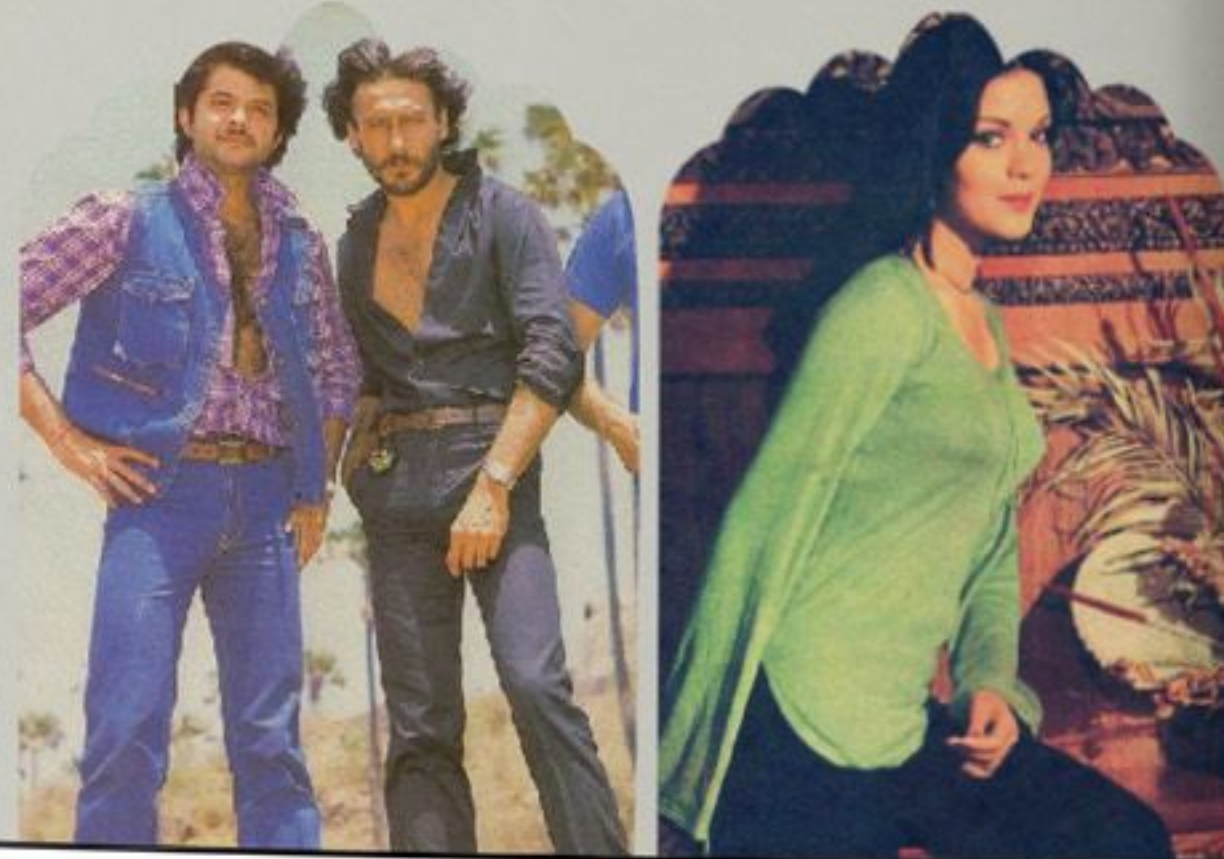


### 1980s-1990s

The 1980s and 1990s saw a remarkable increase in fashion's appeal to the general public, thanks to Bollywood's continued influence. People drew inspiration from celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan, Jackie Shroff, and Zeenat Aman, whose fashion choices reflected their personalities. Many 1970s styles, such as denim, bell bottoms, and sportswear, were on par with European fashion during this period.

The 1980s also marked the emergence of homegrown Indian fashion

brands like Lakme, Louis Phillipe, and Park Avenue, which became popular among consumers. This era saw the rise of renowned designers like Abu Jani, Sandeep Khosla, and Tarun Tahiliani, who established themselves in the industry.



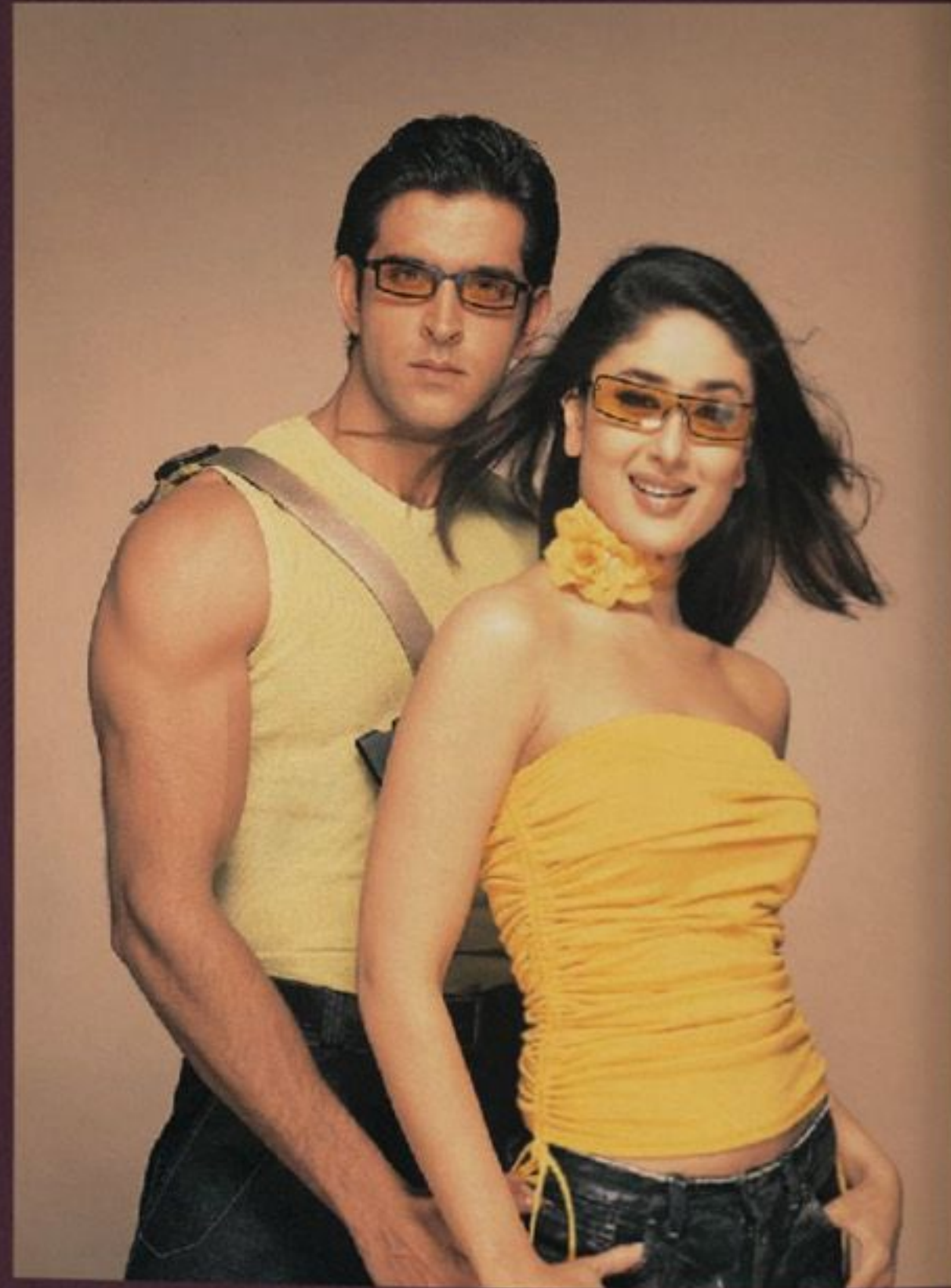
### 1990s to 2000s

The 1990s and 2000s saw a significant increase in fashion exposure across Indian households due to the growing popularity of television. Fashion magazines also played a crucial role in shaping trends during this period. Designers like Manish Malhotra and Rohit Bal gained recognition, and their work is still highly valued today.

The success of Sushmita Sen and Aishwarya Rai in international beauty pageants had a significant impact on global beauty standards and fashion trends. Increased overseas travel also contributed to the influence of Western dress styles.







Bollywood actors being  
the 'trendsetters'

## 2000s to 2010s

The 2000s witnessed a rise in women's discretionary income and financial independence, leading to increased spending on clothing and cosmetics. More global fashion brands, such as Louis Vuitton and H&M, began expanding their presence in India. The advent of digital technologies and the growth of e-commerce platforms in the 2010s made fashion more accessible and convenient for consumers.



However, brands had to adapt to the constantly evolving preferences of Indian consumers, who increasingly prioritized quality over anything else.





## Conclusion

The journey of Indian fashion from ancient times to modern times showcases a rich blend of cultural heritage, innovation, and resilience. Evolving through diverse influences, Indian fashion has embraced traditional craftsmanship while adapting to global trends. The revival of indigenous textiles and techniques has preserved the essence of India's sartorial legacy, allowing it to shine on the international stage. As contemporary designers draw inspiration from this rich history, Indian fashion continues to celebrate a unique fusion of tradition and modernity, ensuring that its vibrant spirit remains influential in the global fashion narrative.





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# Poshak

Charmi Mehta

From ancient drapes to post-independence designs, this book weaves together the captivating story of Indian fashion. Explore how clothing has reflected India's cultural evolution, artistic innovation, and social transformation across centuries.

Discover:

- Royal court styles
- Traditional garment symbolism
- Fashion's role in independence
- Evolution of iconic pieces
- Modern fusion trends

A must-read for fashion enthusiasts, history buffs, and cultural explorers alike.

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