

Evolution of Draping Styles in India: From the Indus Valley Civilization to the Present Day

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Abstract—From the Indus Valley Civilisation to modern international fashion, this review study explores the ongoing evolution of Indian draping traditions. The study, which covers more than 2,000 years of cultural history, shows how changes in terrain, social classification, and foreign influence affected India's demand for "unbroken" or unstitched cloth, which was initially based on ideas of ritual purity.

Additionally, a Regional Atlas of Indian Draping is included in this study, including various styles such the Coorgi Kodava drape, the Bengali Atpoure, and the Maharashtrian Nauvari. A thorough understanding of fabric mechanics is shown in the analysis of each geographical variation as a mechanical adaptation to certain climates and lifestyles. The study comes to the conclusion that, despite sustainable and technical improvements, the modern saree continues to be a timeless symbol of resistance, uniquely absorbing foreign structure while preserving its basic unstitched tradition.

Keywords— Indus Valley Textiles, Nivi Drape, Indian Draping, Textile Evolution, Saree History, and Unstitched Garments.

I.INTRODUCTION

Clothing is the second skin for the human beings and the clothing is primary need. And the draping is the first clothing which is the unstitched garments and this garment is draped in various types wrapping (JD institute of fashion technology, 2024). This clothing was started in india by indus valley civilization. The indus valley civilization was region of India, Afghanistan, Pakistan and it is 2 million years of cultural development was their. And the textile are found that was from 9,000 years (Jonathan, 2004).

And ancient indian culture and rituals are more prefer to unstitched cloths comparing to stitched cloths because they believes that is a purity (Scribd, 2024). and according to civilization development and growing was changed the draping style because

of the foreign power (Pooja.S.D, Sofia.H, 2025). And these all information is collected from the archological avidence, sculptures, painting and etc. In this review paper discuss about changes of draping and fashion from indus valley civilization to present fashion and what is the reason for it.

Here you can read the periodical wise information:

1.1. Indus valley civilization (3300 - 1900 BCE)

The clothing heritage of india begins with the indus valley civilization which the cotton textiles. And the indian draping is the evidence of research and it is the Harappa and Mohenjo daro these are the area of that identified by archaeological and that shows the orgin of cotton textile in india (Malapak, 2025). And also their was find spindle whorls and bronze needles for making the cotton yarns. And also fund the "Wild" silk fiber iduring of indus valley civilization, it was fund in the copper bangle and in beads as a thread pieces, it means the silk production was their in india as the same time of china silk production evidence (Duraiswamy. D, 2021).

The draping style in indus valley civilization by the evidence of archological that fund in stone sculptures and terracotta as wearing the shawl draped over the left shoulder and under the right arm it is upper garment which is the famous 'Priest King' and it is from the Mohenjo Daro (Alkazi, 1993). Here can see the picture of draping. Fig. No.1.



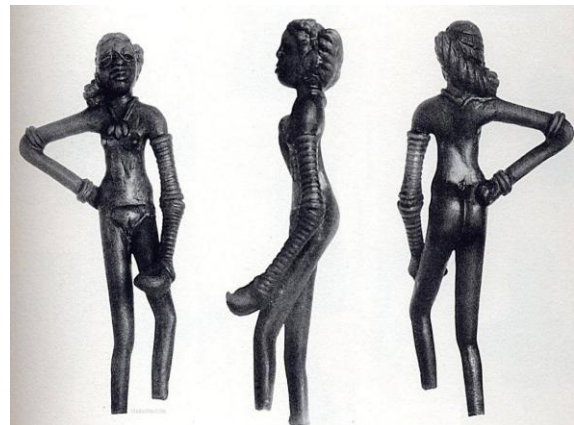
<https://www.harappa.com/slide/priest-king-mohenjo-daro>
Plate. No. 1: "Priest King".

And the female was worn a short skirt for the bottom and upper one is bare body and covered by the heavy jewellery that called as the "Mother Goddess" (Bhatnagar, 2004). that can shown in figure. No. 2. And the "Dancing Girl" was a figure which wore the more bangles and armlets that made by the shell, terracotta, and bronze (Vidyamitra). That shown in Fin. No. 3.

It is a first stage and origin of textiles and there is no stitching and that is breathable cotton was a direct response to the tropical climate, where airflow was essential for comfort and survival in the heat (Malapak, 2025).



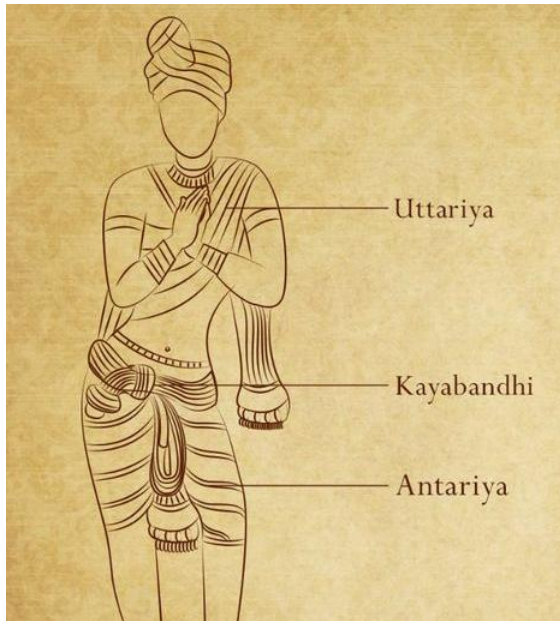
<https://in.pinterest.com/pin/830210512562927780/>
Plate. No. 2: Mother goddess, terracotta.



<https://www.harappa.com/blog/dancing-girl-figurine>
Plate. No. 3: Dancing Girl.

1.2. The Vedic and Post - Vedic Continuity (1500 BCE - 500 BCE)

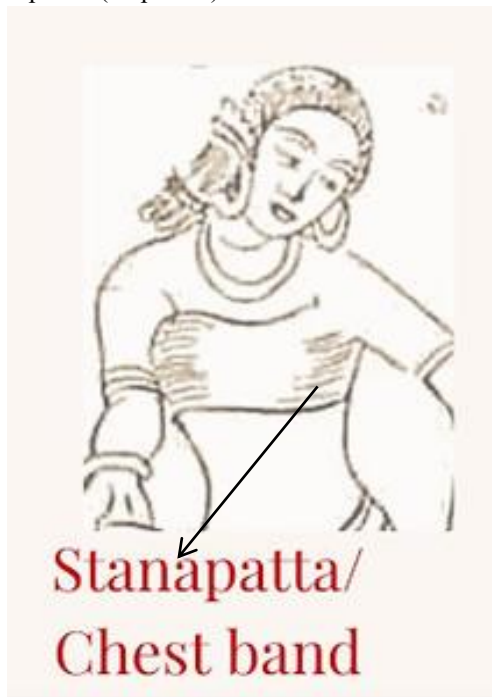
In the Vedic period the clothing was become the more important and more organised and this was mentioned in the Vedas and it matched with that time which discovered by the archaeologists (Fashion Design: Historical Context, Unit 2). and the draping style was three garment system of the vedic is the "Antariya", lower garment passed between and the legs, the "Uttariyaa" which is the long upper body scarf and "Kayabandh" which is secure the anthariya as a waist band (Alkazi, 1993). And these three piece clothing that called as a "Poshak", and it was a Sanskrit word. Here the figure that shows the Vedic period clothing in Fig. No 4.



<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/fa/cd/95/facd9524525f60f787c45c42295c9489.jpg>

Plate. No 4: Three piece clothing “Poshak”

The Antharya was made by the muslin which look transparent so that why the Kayabandh was used to secure it (Reshma. A, 2011). And the fourth piece of draping to the women to cover the bust and that is a breast band, it is tied across the bust horizontally to cover the chest and tied at back side which called as “Stanapatta” (Gupta. M).



https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0529/8257/9389/files/Chest_Band_Blouse_Evolution_480x480.png?v=1718790980

Plate. No. 5: “Stanapatta”

This period saw the rise of Social classification. Clothing began to signify status and vocation. For example, the quality of the fabric and the complexity of the Uttariya drape indicated one’s position within the community (Fashion Design: Historical Context, Unite 2).

1.3. Mauryan and Sunga Elegance

The Mauryan (322- 185 BCE) and the Sunga (185- 73 BCE) , this was the time that the trade network to expand. During this period the floral muslin and gold embroidery on linen was came. And also “Kachcha” was an unstitched length of cloth draped around the hips and between the legs. (Reshma. A, 2011).

The Uttariya also become an accessory for the high status people. And the upper class females wore the Uttariya as a head cover and taking from the shoulder. (Reshma. A, 2011).



<https://www.scribd.com/doc/76207049/Mauryan-and-Sunga-Periods>
Plate. No. 6: “Kachcha”

1.4. The Scythian and Kushan

The arrival of the Kushans (1st - 3rd) who came from the Central Asian tribes introduced stitched garments to the India. And it changed the tradition of wearing unstitched cloths that are the tailored

garments and that are suitable to the cold climate area. (Chandra. M) . They introduced the tunic which called as “Atka” and trouser, and heavy boots which used by the military. (Gupta. T)

These all are foreign elements are become the part of Indian clothing. The heavy padded materials of the Kushans gave way to thin, diaphanous fabrics more suited to the heat. The need for military mobility and the influence of colder Central Asian climates brought structure to Indian clothing, which began to blend tailoring with traditional drapes (Alkazi, 1993).

The time of the Gupta Empire (320–550 CE), a unique fusion had emerged. While the antariya and uttariya remained popular, many women began wearing the choli (stitched blouse) and the ghagra (skirt), which had evolved from the drawstring gathered antariya. The Gupta period is often called the "Golden Age" not just for its art, but for the refinement of its costumes, which emphasized grace and silhouette over the "barbaric" bulk of the earlier Kushan era. (Kharb. D, Gupta. S, 2024)

1.5. The Mughal (1526–1857 CE)

In this period they brought the Persian style of the Indian silhouette through the introduction of sophisticated aesthetic that merged with the Islamic modesty and structured tailoring. The mughal fashion was a reflection of wealth, layering and botanical motifs.(Srivastava. R, 2025).



<https://fashionsocietyfashion.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/peshwaz.png>

Plate. No. 8: Peshwaz

The mughal style to the indian wardrobe was the expensive use of tailored robes and trousers (fashionsociety8, 2018). And the females are wore the “Peshwaz” which was the iconic garment. It was the high waisted and full sleeves and worn over tight “churidar pajamas” Peshwaz was often made of fine muslin or silk brocade and featured intricate zardozi embroidery with gold and silver threads (Sharma.K.D, Swati.S 2017).

The Men wear the Jama, with the long-sleeved coat with the round skirt, which Emperor Akbar famously ordered to be tied on the right side to distinguish it from Persian styles (Man's Robe (Jama) with Poppies).

The Mughal influence also standardized certain textile motifs that remain central to the Indian saree today, such as the floral sprigs (butis), the paisley, and the jaal (grid patterns). The Peshwaz eventually gave way to the contemporary saree in the post-Mughal era as women began to reintegrate the unstitched drape with the modesty of the Mughal silhouette (Srivastava. R, 2025).

1.6. The Colonial Era and the "Modern" Saree (19th Century – Early 20th Century)

The British Raj introduced Victorian standards of "decency," which fundamentally changed how the saree was draped.

The "Nivi" drape became the standard. Previously, many regional styles did not require a blouse or petticoat under colonial influence, the saree was paired with a tailored blouse (with sleeves) and a petticoat for "modesty" (Singh, 1966).

The catalysts were Colonial Influence and Nationalism. While the British enforced Western modesty, the Indian freedom movement simultaneously used Khadi (hand-spun cloth) and traditional drapes as a symbol of resistance and a reclamation of Indian identity (Unit-3).

The Impact of Cinema and Global Fashion

In the 20th century, Bollywood became the primary driver of saree trends (Hazra. S, 2025). Actresses transitioned from heavy traditional silks to lightweight, body-hugging fabrics like chiffon and georgette, popularized by figures like Maharani Gayatri Devi and later by film icons like Mumtaz,

whose "tiered" saree drape became a 1970s sensation (Scribd, 2024).

By the 1990s and 2000s, the saree became a global fashion statement. Designers like Sabyasachi Mukherjee and Ritu Kumar focused on the revival of traditional handlooms, while contemporary stylists introduced "fusion" drapes (Bose. S. K, 2015).



<https://www.azafashions.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Sridevi-wearing-saree-in-Mr-India.jpg>

Plate. No. 9: Sridevi & The Chiffon Revolution

- Pant-Style Saree: Draped over jeggings or palazzos for mobility. (Agarwal. A, 2025)
- Mermaid Drape: Clings to the waist with small pleats to create a fishtail silhouette (Mano. M, 2025)
- Butterfly Drape: A slimmed-down Nivi style with very narrow pallu pleats (Mano. M, 2025).
- Belted Saree: Using a modern belt to nip the waist and secure the pallu (Flourious, 2025)

A Regional Atlas of Indian Draping Styles

150 distinct regional draping styles, each adapted to the specific climate and lifestyle of the locale. These styles reflect a deep understanding of fabric mechanics and human movement (Kharb. D, Gupta. S, 2024)

- a. Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh: Seedha Pallu. To hang in front, the pallu is carried from the rear over the right shoulder. This showcases the intricate needlework of Bandhani or Banarasi silks.

- b. Himachal Pradesh: Draping Pattu. frequently uses a "digra" (silver brooch) to tie a shorter, heavier woollen drape for insulation in hilly areas.
- c. Punjab: Draping Phulkari. Historically, the strong surface decoration was emphasised by being draped as a "shawl" over simpler forms.
- d. West Bengal: Atpoure. distinguished by a double-shoulder pallu and no front pleats.(Goel, S. 2022).(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- e. Assam: Chador Mekhela. A three-piece practical drape. The Chador is the top wrap, while the Mekhela is a bottom that resembles a sarong (Goel, S. 2022)..(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- f. Odisha: Santhali/Khandua Drape. It displays the ikat patterns of Sambalpuri textiles and has a shorter length to make labour in agricultural or tribal environments easier.
- g. Manipur: Phanek and Innaphi. A thin, transparent wrap (Innaphi) with a sarong-style bottom (Phanek).
- h. Nauvari, Maharashtra (Kasta). A 9-yard bifurcated drape that resembles trousers.(Goel, S. 2022).(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- i. Goa: Style Kunbi. A short, knee length drape that is knotted at the shoulder to enable mobility in muddy coastal or paddy fields.(Goel, S. 2022).(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- j. Gujarat: Gol Saree, or Parsi Drape. The pallu is pulled from the back, wrapped around the right shoulder, and tucked into the left waist in a "U" shape.(Goel, S. 2022).(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- k. Madhya Pradesh: Chanderi and Maheshwari. usually adhere to the Nivi style, but are distinguished by the fabric's reversible borders.
- l. Tamil Nadu: Madisar. The Brahmin community wears a very intricate 9-yard drape. It has a saree-style top and a dhoti-style bottom.(Goel, S. 2022).(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- m. Kerala: Neriyaathum Mundum. Traditionally made of cream cotton with gold Kasavu borders, this two-piece set consists of the upper Neriyaathu and the lower Mundu.(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- n. Karnataka: Kodagu (Coorgi). The pallu is brought from the back over the right shoulder, and the pleats are tucked in at the back.(Goel, S. 2022).(Tulsi Silks. 2023)
- o. Andhra Pradesh: Kappulu. It has a distinct Grecian aspect since it is draped from left to right, which is the opposite of the typical Nivi. (Tulsi Silks. 2023)(Goel, S. 2022).

II.SUGGETIONS

- Using the modern techniques with the combination of indian traditional draping, it makes the sustainable and modern
- One cloth or garment in designing in multiple way wearing to give the modern touch to the tradition like botton masala.

III.CONCLUTION

The development of Indian draping styles shows the strength of a culture that prefers "unbroken" cloth over stitched clothing. From simple cotton wraps in the Indus Valley to the intricate nine-yard sarees of regional kingdoms and the modern Nivi style, the saree and dhoti have stayed central to Indian identity. These garments have uniquely absorbed foreign influences like Kushan tunics, Mughal robes, or Victorian blouses while keeping their essential unstitched nature. As India looks to a future focused on sustainability and technology, the saree remains a timeless symbol, showcasing the elegance, resilience, and rich diversity of the subcontinent's heritage.

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