



Political Fashion Expression and Racial Justice within India: Labour, Representation and Resistance

Author : Sanika Deshmukh.

Co-authors : 1. Saloni Owhal. 2. Pooja Chaudhary. 3. Shweta Kul.

M.voc Fashion Technology Student.

Guided by : Dr. Deepali Joshi.

Baburaoji Gholap College Sangavi, Pune.

Savitribai Phule Pune University.

Abstract

Fashion is frequently Understood as a cultural or aesthetic phenomenon, yet it is also a highly political and socially reactive form of expression. The political nature of fashion intersects with different areas including caste, race, gender, labour exploitation and cultural identity in the context of India. The objective of this research paper is to examine how fashion functions in a political context in India and can serve as an avenue for raising issues regarding racial justice, worker inequities, digital representation and artisan's rights. The study will also consider concepts such as overlapping identities, anti-racist way of teaching, intellectual property protection, environmental justice as well as movements such as Khadi, slow fashion and social media activism on the example of India. This paper will conclude that fashion has the capacity to either perpetuate systemic inequality; or that it could be an avenue through which individuals can experience empowerment and justice.

Keywords: Fashion, Political Expression, Racial Justice, India, Khadi, Artisans, Intersectionality

1. Introduction

Fashion is not only about clothing or trends; it represents system of control, social rankings, and political belief systems. Fashion has undergone a historical association with fighting back, identity and improvi society within India. From Mahatma Gandhi's promotion of Khadi to symbolize against foreign rule resistance; to the contemporary discourse surrounding colourism, caste discrimination and labour exploitation; there is considerable evidence to support that fashion has illustrated various political facets of social and financial oppression.

2. The Khadi Movement symbolizes the interplay of politics and fashion in India. In the Indian independence movement, Khadi came to represent:

A rejection of English-made fabrics;

An emphasis on finding independence from colonialism through economic Independence and The respect of manual labor.

Khadi has been taken back in today's society by fashion designers and "ethical-fashion" brands at the on the edge of the Slow Fashion Movement, highlighting issues of for-profit unfair treatment of garment workers around the globe.

While modern brands view Khadi as a fashion item, and thus commodifying it, they also do not address the wage or labor conditions of the artisans who produce the item.

India produces many of today's garments and employs millions of workers; mostly women; yet reports of how these businesses exploit labor continue to increase rapidly.

3. In manufacturing cities like Tiruppur, Bengaluru, and Delhi NCR:

Workers consistently receive low pay;

Workers work long hours, and in unsafe working environments;

Workers have no job security or protection from profit-divine system; and

As a result, there is a disconnect between the how it is seen “glamour” of fashion, its production systems, and their associated labor unfair use. The ethical-fashion movement suggests that in order for "fashion justice" to become a reality, fashion must provide its workers with fair wages and a transparent process of production.

4. Intersectionality & Racial Justice in Indian Style

Intersectionality as Framework.

Overlapping struggles functions as a works to analyse how various identities (caste, gender, class, area, and skin tone) overlap to create difficult experiences of unfair treatment.

Indian Examples

Tribal woman artisans face discrimination based on caste as well as gender discrimination and economic being pushed aside.

Models from North East India are often pigeonholed or seen as not rela in the popular fashion world.

Colourism defines to be present in how advertising, models are selected, and what constitutes beauty.

When analysing being seen through the lens of intersectionality it can be confirmed that simply having representation is not sufficient in addressing the larger Built-in unfairness present.

5. Digital Media, Algorithms & Representation

As a result of the making available to everyone of fashion via social media, many Indian artisans and designers have utilized Instagram and digital marketplaces to create direct-to- consumer marketing strategies.

Digital Bias:

Social media can also reflect the hidden computer-coded favouritism within them due to their democratic nature.

More well-known fair-skinned influencers have rapidly increased visibility on social media platforms.

Urban English-speaking creators are favoured.

Tribal or regional creators are often labelled "ethnic" or "folk".

Cultural theft is evident in Indian fashion, which has heavily appropriated traditional crafts as inspiration for luxury products with no credit given to artisans, low payment paid for their work.

Examples of the above include:

Madhubani artwork appropriated as luxury in designer collections Copying of Kutch-style embroidery by global companies

Take unfairly Warli and Gond designs, without permission, by hundreds of designers.

The Need for Legal Protection

Despite some Asian crafts receiving Geographical Indication (GI) tags, very few have any real applying the law and the GI process generally has no direct impact on protecting against exploitation. To effectively protect artists from cultural appropriation and taking advantage practices, stronger ownership of Idea laws are required.

Therefore technology has the potential to support rather than challenge racial and/or cultural ranking system without being utilized in a mindfully.

6. Cultural Appropriation And ownership of Ideas Rights

An Analysis of Artisan Exploitation

7. Environmental Justice & Waste Colonialism

The issue of sustainability as it relates to fashion justice is extremely important, and how we approach sustainability creates unequal social responsibility for companies. Environmental dumping occurs by exporting large amounts of used clothing from developed countries to developing countries such as India. As a result, this practice will

Shut Down Local Textile Businesses

Cheap, mass produced, imported clothing and donated used clothing have driven down the prices of locally made goods, making it impossible for local makers to compete on price.

Example: East Africa; Countries such as Kenya and Rwanda have seen an flood of large amounts of second-hand ("Mitumba") clothing from the West, which has lead to the collapse of their local cotton and garment industries, which once employed thousands of people.

Create a Massive Amount of waste site in the Environment

A significant amount of clothing, especially low quality fast-fashion, is not recyclable and ends up in landfills where synthetic fibre clothing remains for centuries without decomposing.

Example: Atacama Desert, Chile; Approximately 39,000 tonnes of unsold or discarded clothing are dumped in the Chilean desert each year, creating a vast toxic mountain of waste that cannot be processed.

Example: Kantamanto Market, Ghana; Only 60% of the second-hand clothes imported to Ghana are sold, so 40% either go to waste site or are burnt on the beach creating pollution in both cases.

chains and charity-based economic systems instead of establishing self-sustaining industries. Example (Raw Materials Exports): Raw cotton produced in poor nations ultimately ends up being exported to wealthier countries as finished clothing; thus, developing countries miss out on the 'value-added' profit, and still rely on unstable world market prices, and the business practices of other nations.

Developing Economic Dependency on Local Businesses

When communities do not support their own manufacturing, they rely on foreign supply Therefore, in studying environmental justice, it is necessary to equally address the connections of racial and/or economic justice.

8. Aid in the process of independence in fashion education and create room for a more historically accurate representation.

Independent fashion education: The process of attempting to remove the Euro-centric biases fixed in Euro-centric views of history, design, and aesthetics that are represented as the only universal standard or sense of "fashion," when in fact universally acceptable fashion has been a worldwide concept since long before colonialism, rather than referring to non-Western attire as "ethnic" or "basic."

Removing Eurocentrism: To dismantle Eurocentrism in India, one must reject the western belief in the supremacy of European history, culture and knowledge – the way that they have been viewed through a colonial lens. Independence the curriculum involves recognising and integrating the scientific and social achievements of pre-colonial societies in India; validating Indian perspectives in academic and media contexts; and ultimately removing these value systems in our society.

Knowledge-based Justice: This would entail validating the local knowledge of weaving, natural dyeing, and crafts as high-level technical expertise instead of "uncivilized" handiwork. **Narrative Correction:** It replaces a singular Western notion of "fashion gaze" with mixed stories, which bring to light the contributions of Black, Local, and People of Color (BIPOC) whose work had previously been erased or misused.

Economic & Social Equity: It establishes a connection between decolonization and ethics in modern society by discussing colonial economic practices and the exploitation of labor forces currently taking place with the fast fashion movement in former colonies.

9. Fashion Accessories as Political Symbols

People use various decorative items in their day-to-day lives; these items can have both political and cultural significance. Examples of items that have political or cultural significance include:

Khadi wraps worn at protests, tribal jewelry worn as pride, and hand-woven saris worn to support picking families in India.



Political Campaign Badges



10. Transparency and the Fair Fashion Movement

Several organizations, including Fashion Revolution India, have started a movement to promote transparency across the entire fashion supply chain through an ongoing campaign titled "Who Made My Clothes?" By doing so, consumers can be assured that the brands they are purchasing are fair because they reveal what they are paying artisans, where they are sourcing their goods from, and what type of working environment artisans are being provided.

11. Conclusion

Fashion serves as a reflection of the socio-political dynamics of the time period. Through the lens of connected social categories, digital bias, artisan rights, and environmental justice, this article examines how fashion has been viewed as both a means of unfair treatment as well as empowerment. It also examines how the fashion industry, as a whole, must create long-term systemic changes in order to achieve true justice within the industry. Only by carrying out fair labour practices, enabling representation across the boards (in terms of gender, race, and sexual orientation), providing legal protections for artisans, and creating decolonizing forms of education can fashion be used as a vehicle for positive social transformation in India.

12. reference's

1) On the Khadi Movement and Political Expression

Tarlo, E. (1996). *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*. University of Chicago Press. (This is a seminal text on how Gandhi used Khadi as a political tool against British colonialism).

Bean, S. S. (1989). "Gandhi and Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence." In A. B. Weiner & J. Schneider (Eds.), *Cloth and Human Experience*. Smithsonian Institution Press.

2) On Labour Exploitation and the Garment Industry

Mezzadri, A. (2017). *The Sweatshop Regime: Labouring Bodies, Exploitation, and Garments Made in India*. Cambridge University Press. (Specifically covers the labor dynamics in hubs like Delhi NCR and Tiruppur).

Clean Clothes Campaign (2020). *Unfree Labour in the Garment Industry*. (A report detailing the systemic issues of low wages and unsafe conditions in South Asian manufacturing).

3) On Intersectionality and Colorism in India

Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." University of Chicago Legal Forum. (The foundational text for the "Intersectionality" framework you mentioned).

Srivastava, S. (2013). "Visions of the 'Fair' Nation: Memory, Spectacle, and the Aesthetics of Colorism in India." *Journal of Visual Culture*.

Parameswaran, R., & Cardoza, K. (2009). "Melanin on the Margin: Advertising and the Cultural Politics of Fair Skin in India." *Journalism & Communication Monographs*.

4) On Digital Bias and Social Media Algorithms

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. NYU Press. (Useful for your section on digital bias and how "fairness" is prioritized by code).

Bishop, S. (2019). "Managing Visibility on YouTube through Algorithmic Gossip." *New Media & Society*. (Explains how influencers navigate algorithmic favoritism).

5) On Cultural Appropriation and Intellectual Property (GI Tags)

Scafidi, S. (2005). *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Intellectual Property in Cultural Heritage*. Rutgers University Press.

Das, K. (2010). "Protection of Expressions of Folklore in India: Issues and Challenges." *Journal of Intellectual Property Rights*. (Directly addresses the Madhubani and Warli examples you cited).

6) On Environmental Justice and Waste Colonialism

Brooks, A. (2015). *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes*. Zed Books. (Essential for the section on “Mitumba” and the collapse of local textile industries).

OR Foundation (2021). *Stop Waste Colonialism*. (A key advocacy group reporting on the Kantamanto Market in Ghana and the global impact of textile waste).

7) On Decolonizing Fashion Education

Vats, A. (2020). *The Color of Creativity: Intellectual Property and the Making of a Black Intellectual Tradition*. (While US-focused, it provides the framework for “Narrative Correction” and “Knowledge-based Justice”).

Pham, M. H. T. (2017). “The Fashion Police: Governing the Good Consumer.” *Journal of Consumer Culture*.

