A Study of Indian Culture as a Basis for Design

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THE STUDY OF INDIAN CULTURE AS A BASIS FOR DESIGN

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An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Lindenwood University College in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in
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ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on the historical background of Indian-American culture. One key objective is to create a contemporary garment based on the knowledge of Indian traditional clothing.

Research has contributed to gaining knowledge about a continents regional inspirations and understanding how the environment plays a role in many lifestyles. The author sought to gain familiarity with many phases of Indian culture from regional textiles to cuisine.

Today, western influences of India are becoming more contemporary. American designers are mixing the vibrant embroidered textiles of India into their work. Not only is fashion of India popular, their crafts and arts are becoming valuable items as well. Americans are getting inspirational decorating ideas from Indians.

The purpose of the present study is to learn the historical backgrounds of Indian-Americans and how their culture is gradually being incorporated into contemporary fashion today.

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Fashion in India is conservative and traditional. As a designer, transforming a trend without insulting a tradition is the goal.

In the end results, studying Indian-American backgrounds helped the author gain the necessary knowledge from the culture, cuisine, textiles, and arts and crafts to legitimately work on the design phase of the project.

The key was assimilating a solid knowledge of regional styles and variations into an American garment. With these key factors in mind, it was possible to produce an elegant evening gown using their traditional Indian fabric.

Another traditional element, a shawl, has been incorporated lending versatility to an American evening gown that can be worn as either a daring or conservative garment.

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY:

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i

Table of Contents

THE STUDY OF INDIAN CULTURE AS A BASIS FOR
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Chapter I

Introduction

Exploration of Indian Clothing

The influence of fashion in India is known as evolutionary and at the same time glamorous. The experimentation of the designs are artistic yet unique, comfortable and vibrant. Today the uniqueness is versatile which allows one to wear for any occasion.

I became introduced to Indian fashion by an old acquaintance. In recent years, Indian fashion has become attractive to me. As an African American, growing up I believed Africans were the only people with a dark complexion in this country. After living in St. Louis, however, I have been exposed to numerous diverse people.

Through my Indian friends, I gradually became somewhat familiar with the Indian culture. It was fascinating to see this particular group of individuals indulging Indian cuisine and dressed in draped outfits. The men were dresses in American clothing, but the women were wearing their traditional dresses.

From my acquaintance, I learned Indian-Americans generally marry with their own culture and status.

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Families usually have an arrangement for the son and daughter to marry one another. This is part of their cultural and religious beliefs.

Conclusion

It's fascinating to see Indian fashion incorporated with today's style. Indian prints are colorful and adds character to clothing. The fabric is soft which allows one to be comfortable at all times.

After witnessing numerous ways of wearing Indian styles, I strongly recommend everyone add, at least, one Indian garment to their wardrobe. Their comfort, versatility, and style recommends it.

American fashion designers have already began incorporating Indian styles into today's fashion. The styles I have witnessed are Indian tops worn as swimsuit covers and pants worn as lounge wear.

Research

Western influence became familiar to India around the 17th century. It began with the British taking economical control over Indian territory. British officers took command of Indian businesses as administrators and soldiers (Smitha 2002).

Along with this gradual takeover, the British brought their western civilization. Due to technology and organization, it was impossible for Indians to deny the British army. Great Britain's administrative takeover had some positive effects on India. The result led to businesses, administration, missionaries, schools, a national language and railroads which helped to unite India.

The Western influence in India, and for the many Indians who emigrated abroad, raised issues of identity. Maintaining traditional dress has been one important way this Indiannes is sustained for many.

Before the British invasion, the art of sewing was a skill that was not introduced to India. Unlike American fashion, many Indian costumes are free of stitches. Draping, tucking and knotting the fabric is the way to wear their clothing. This way was described as "ready to wear" (Multnomah 2005).

Today, Indian costumes continue to be worn the same way. Indians are extremely traditional when it comes to their beliefs.

Because of British technology, Indians were able to incorporate weaving and spinning machines, as well as new chemical and mechanized printing (Smitha 2002). With this equipment, there was an increase of fabrics and a variety of block print textiles. In India, the tunic, skirt and the pajamas were the first stitched garments (Butalia 2005).

Around the 1960's, The Beatles traveled to India. They studied yoga and meditation. George Harrison, from The Beatles, was influenced by the meditative music from India themes. In the end result, The Beatles had numerous hit songs due to influential Indian beats (Rizzo 2003).

Not only did The Beatles get inspired by the Indian culture but the group left a lasting impression on the people of India. American trends influenced the youth of India in several ways. Indian youths changed their traditional fashion to American trends (Rizzo 2003).

Today, among the younger generation, western style clothing is popular. The older generation tends to stay away from up and coming fashion trends. During school the girls wear

dresses and skirts, but once they become married they wear the traditional ensemble which consists of the sari, used as a skirt or transformed into a style, similar to a trouser. The outfit begins with the Stanaplata, used to cover the breast. The Stanaplata is made of loin cloth depending on the class or status (Butalia 2005).

Establishing Indian Identity

Women of India wear the most important traditional ensemble known as a sari. The sari is a long piece of fabric generally 13-26 inches long and around 4 feet wide. A sari is available in a variety of colors (Butalia 2005).

A majority of Indian women wear saris according to their regional style. Since the fabric used for a sari is long, a skirt or a style similar to a trouser, can be worn with the remaining yards, depending on the folding technique. The dimension of a sari, depends upon the quality and region for production (Butalia 2005).

Demographically India is extremely large and has many ethnic groups. The multiple draping styles of a sari, reveals the separation by age, occupation, religion, status and religion. Women wearing silk saris are considered women of wealth (Butalia 2005).

Referring to religion, men are the least traditional as far as costumes. Both urban and rural areas of India are becoming impressed with the western style.

Statement of Purpose

The multiple styles of India, influenced my design. My intent was to incorporate the traditional style of India into contemporary fashion. The Indian influence consists of draping, tucking and knotting. The contemporary styles today may be too revealing for the people of India. Since there are many Indian-Americans living in the states, I want my design to appear marketable to all.

The Indian fabric I used for my design was bought last year. I saved this particular fabric a specific occasion. I had to find American fabric to combine with the Indian fabric. My design idea is to transform the two types of fabric into one particular style.

There is a relationship between the two fabrics I have selected. The fabric choices selected are both earth tone colors which associate with one another. Like Indian-Americans, the dress I designed starts with a basic top. I used the Indian fabric, purchased from Dallas, as the top.

Next, I wanted to create a waist for the dress. I used the Indian print as the waist for the dress. This creates a smaller waistline for women. I added Indian style to the waist, by knotting the fabric in the back instead of putting in a zipper.

Last, covering the legs, I used a brown stretch fabric which adds a contemporary element to the style. The design fits together due to the colors and the combination of style that was created. My design is versatile. It can be worn as daring, revealing low-neckline gown, but there is a shawl available as a cover up.

Chapter II

Introduction to Resources

During my research, I had a challenging time finding the information for my research paper. I started with several books, general Indian history and art history, from a St. Louis county library. Among these books, however, none had a deep focus on clothing styles.

Next, I chose to search the internet for my information. There I found information, which was valuable, on multiple websites.

The majority of books about India are fact-based accounts about the economy, tourist information and art. These facts are all important but listed very little description about the costumes. The internet led me to sources for the history and detailed descriptions of costumes and how traditional art was affiliated.

History of Indian Fashion

http://www.fashionindia.net/history_fashion/history_fashion.html.
The History of Indian Fashion website was the first website

I discovered. The information was the most history I found about

India. There is detailed description and terms that were easy to

understand.

A historic outline of Indian costumes, through a diversity of

ethnic groups are explained. A person could learn a brief but

precise history starting around the 12th through the 19th centuries.

Passage to India

http://www.travelogue.com/pass/pass8.html
This website was valuable due to the information and the

pictures. The pictures of the women wearing sparkled jewels and

saris are detailed. This site give an overview of the state of India

which includes: History, Dateline of Events, Economy, Travel tips

and more.

Arts and Crafts of Rajasthan

www.rajasthantourpackages.com/rajasthan-arts-and-crafts.html
Adding this particular website to my research, gave me the

knowledge about the richest state in India. These individuals

represent their heritage on their fabrics. Known for their artistic

and crafty ways, the Rajput's wanted the tradition to stay alive.

Clothing, Make Up and Jewelry of Ancient India
http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww.sch618/India/Clothing.html
This site shows instructions about draping saris and

photographs of multiple women wearing ornaments. Exploring the

site, people will learn about numerous examples of jewelry from

nose pins, necklaces and ear rings.

Regional Indian Apparel
http://www.indiantravelportal.com/costumes
Not only did I learn the basic terms associated to India

costumes, I became knowledgeable about the states as well. This

website gave a detailed description about the people of India and

how their lifestyle reflects to the clothing. Along with costumes,

the accessories are listed too.

Beatles Influence on India
http://www.joerizzo.com/psych/beatles.html
This particular website was interesting to me. I had no idea

The Beatles music had samples of Indian-American beats. It was

amazing to read about the influences they had on one another. The

Beatles definitely made a lasting impression on the people of

India. Conversely, the Beatles introducing Indian musical motifs

brought the rich world of Indian music into western pop.

Punjab Costumes

http://.web.mit.edu/bhangra/www/costumes.html

Punjab costumes are popular throughout India. The pants-suit ,of Punjabi, is one of the most popular of all Indian garments. The pictures on this website were amazing to view. They are bright and colorful and show the lifestyle of the people of Punjab.

Regional Attire

Rajasthan

In arts and crafts, Rajasthan is known as the country's richest state (Rajasthan 2005). Rajasthanis are known for their artistic ways and crafts. This state has produced their heritage on fabrics. The fabric ranges from traditional prints to tie-dye. Vibrant stones, jewelry, leather work and golds are forms of the goods they produce.

The people of Rajasthan have incorporated examples of fine jewels and embroidered prints to textiles all over.

Dominating the region, Rajput rulers pushed for schools to be involved in arts and crafts. This was a traditional skill they wanted to pass down from one ancestor to the next (Rajasthan 2005).

Costumes for Rajasthanian men consisted of a turban for headgear, angrakha- the upper garment and the dhoti-the lower garment (Rajasthan 2005).

Haryana

When it comes to lifestyle, the people of the Haryana choose their costumes this way. Women wear colorful dresses which consist of a kurti, a white blouse, damaan a long or short skirt and a chunder, a colorful cloth used to cover the head. The men of Haryana wear dhotis, which they tuck between the legs. The men wear costumes are all white in color (Indian 2000).

Andhra Pradesh

Muslims, Hindus and Christians are three religious communities that make up the state Andhra Pradesh. The dhoti was a traditional costume til the 14th century.

Today, the costumes consist of a longer dhoti and a accessory cloth which is worn over the shoulder.

Referring to religion, Hindu, Christian and Muslim men all wear the same outfits which consist of pyjamas rather than dhotis and kurtas. Muslim women wear saris and blouses.

Lambadis are a tribal group located in the state of Andra Pradesh. Their costumes consist of colorful embroidery, beads

and mirrors. The women of Lambada were cholis with a scarf draped over the shoulder and head (Indian 2000).

Gujarat

Ornaments are popular by both men and women in Gujarat. The ornaments are worn around the neck and waist, made of silver with rings worn on one or more fingers.

The costume for women consists of the choli- a color petticoat embedded with glass pieces and a chaniyo- an embroidered blouse. The men of Gujarat wear dhotis and turbans (Indian 2000).

Jammu and Kashmir

The environment of the states Jammu and Kashmir, has a tremendous amount to do with their costumes. These costumes are considerably different from the remaining states of India.

The costumes of Kashmir and Jammu are colorful and full of embroidery. Embroidered shawls with multiple thread work are included with the costume.

Due to the cooler climates, the women of Jammu and Kashmir wear saris covering the entire body, consisting of heavy wool and cotton. The men wear dhotis made of the same heavy material (Indian 2000).

Kerela

From northern to western influence, costumes in Kerela are based on geographical conditions. The men of Kerela wear munus- a white cloth with golden jerried border which classifies royalty. Women wear the traditional sari and a blouse (Indian 2000).

Karnataka

The people of Karnataka express their lifestyle through clothing. The men wear lungis with a Argarasthram- a silk or cotton muffler covering the shoulder and neck. The women wear saris (Indian 2000).

Maharashtra

The women of Maharashtra wear saris with a short sleeve blouse known as a choli. The sari is measured around 9m long and tucked between the legs. Men generally wear the dhoti, shirt and a type of headdress known as the "pheta"(Indian 2000).

Tamil Nadu

The women wear traditional saris along with a blouse and the men wear lungis which is a rectangular cloth draped around the waist and tucked around the front groin area (Indian 2000).

Uttar Pradesh

Along with several other states, the people of Uttar Pradesh base their costumes on the climate and region. In Uttar Pradesh there is a huge amount of diversity. The men wear kurtas and dhotis. The women tend to wear a combination of the sari, lahanges, sharavas and the gararos, which is a trouser like dress worn over the kurta. This trend seems to be popular in this state amongst Muslim women (Indian 2000).

Punjab

Punjab, a northwestern region of India, is known for their arts and crafts. The costumes of the Punjabi women and girls consist of bright dupattas, which is a cloth worn around the neck, a salwar- pants, and a kameez- a blouse. The men wear a vest, kurta-skirt, lungi- a skirt tied around the waist, a pag- turban, worn in honor of the Punjab, and a turla- an adornment on the turban.

The outfit known as the Punjabi has become very popular throughout India (MIT 2001).

Conclusion

While there are regional differences, there are basic similarities found in the variety. The costumes are suited due to the climates. They costumes styles range from vibrant and versatile

and adds life to the environment. The fabric ranges from cotton and silk.

It's amazing to see, on the website, graphics of the women in their states. Unlike American women, Indian women wear their silk ensembles as work and leisure wear. The American women usually wear silk for special occasions.

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17b
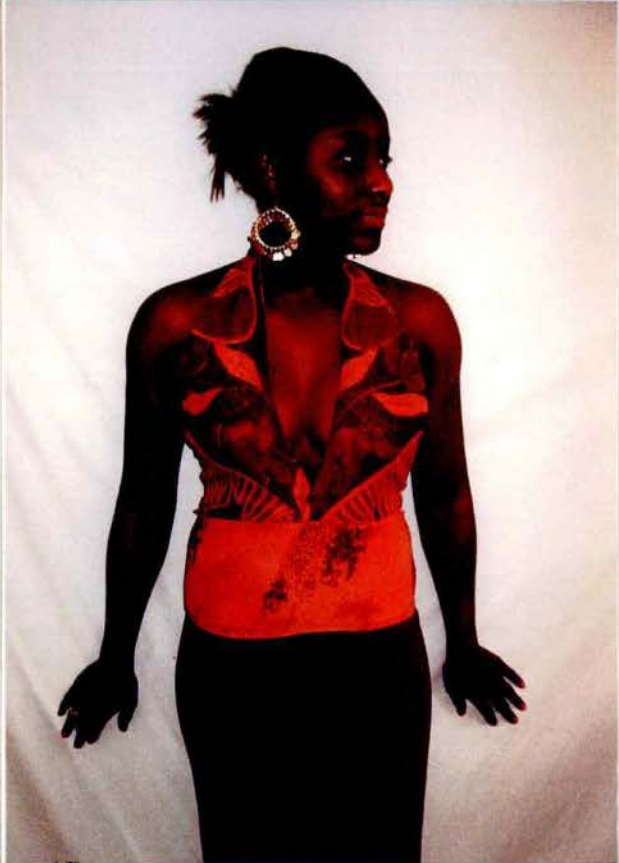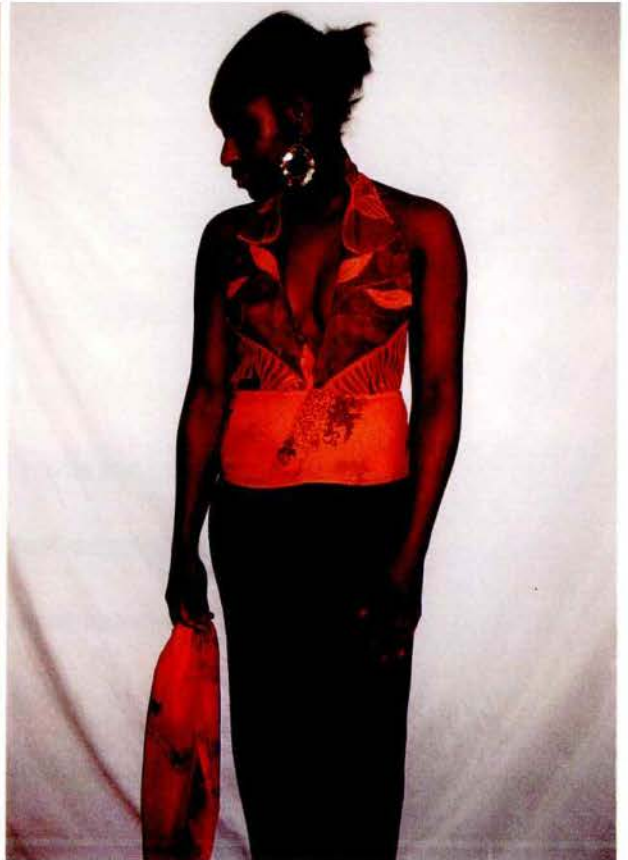
Chapter IV

Discussion

In today's fashion, Indian style and prints are becoming increasingly popular. I decided to use my past experiences towards my design. I suddenly began to have an idea of incorporating Indian style along with American evening gowns.

Several years ago, I put numerous hours towards developing an evening gown by using an embroidered Indian fabric. The gown was not my best work. It looked more like a traditional Indian gown. During my fashion design class, we were required to use basic patterns. The pattern was a bad choice for the gown. In other words, by using the pattern it was not my design. The pattern was too commercial.

Correcting the problem, meant using my own ideas and including them into my design. The first step was to study the way Indians wore their outfits. Along with the deeper familiarity with the outfits, I tried to learn more about the fabric.

In developing my own design, I tried to design the dress somewhat like the Indian way. The key to designing my dress, however, was bringing in my own creativity.

During a trip to Dallas, I found an Indian market that sold fabric. I kept the fabric around for many years because I never had a reason to use it. Now I can finally use it. In St. Louis, there is a limit to what is available. The selections are small and the variety is plain. The Indian market in Dallas had a large selection and the prices were reasonable.

Conclusion

A few years ago, I went to Dallas with the intent to find a career in fashion design. Instead of finding a job, I came home with 5 yards of Indian fabric. The fabric was placed in my storage and has been there until now. My trip to Dallas eventually paid off. Not only did I stay in St. Louis but I decided to go back to college to get my Masters. I finally used the fabric which I thought I would never happen. I have a past in which India was a huge part of my life. I decided to combine my experiences in a design and I putt together an elegant evening gown marketable for everyone.

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