



Irene, Gold brocade evening dress with beige silk chiffon scarf, 1958. Lurex and silk brocade and silk chiffon. Gift of Mrs. B. J. Leonard





# East Meets West

From paisley prints and Hindu iconography to silk saris and Nehru jackets, Indian traditional dress influences the luxury fashion industry

Text by MIGNON A. GOULD ♦ Photos courtesy PHOENIX ART MUSEUM

India's diverse culture has influenced Western civilization for centuries. Throughout time, the West has embraced various elements of the Indian culture, from cuisine and cinema to religious traditions—many of which have made an impact on the global fashion industry.

The culture of India and its people have been the muse for many fashion collections and can be seen in the colors, textures and construction of high-end designer garments and

accessories. The sartorial significance of traditional Indian dress has motivated a legion of designers and fashion houses to create clothing inspired by hundreds of years of ceremonial customs.

When we think about Indian-style fashion, our imagination often turns to garments with draped and baggy silhouettes, embellishments featuring intricate embroidery and beading with brilliant color palettes such as magenta, paprika and saffron. Western









designers infusing aspects of Indian style into their fashion collections have been pivotal in developing a worldwide appreciation and understanding of the culture, from the deliberate use of a particular color to the sacred symbolism of certain animals.

“Rich colors such as Elsa Schiaparelli’s Shocking Pink in the 1930s reflect the rich magentas of India’s bridal customs,” explains Helen Jean, interim Jacquie Dorrance Curator of Fashion Design at Phoenix Art Museum. “Imagery such as the peacock, cobra, elephant and tiger have inspired ornamentation on accessories from the bejeweled purses of Judith Lieber to the trompe l’oeil on the silken scarves of Hermès.”

### **CULTIVATING INDIAN-INSPIRED FASHION**

In the decade since India opened its doors to foreign retailers in the early 2000s, copious collections have featured Indian-inspired looks, from Hermès’ Spring 2008 Jodhpur pants and Chanel’s Pre-Fall 2012 designs with intricate hand-worked embroidery to Louis Vuitton’s Spring 2015 vibrant hues of narangi orange and rani pink and Gucci’s Fall/Winter 2019 Sikh turbans.

With ever-evolving trends, how has Indian-inspired fashion been able to maintain its influence in the Western luxury market? Undoubtedly, one contributing factor is India’s growing obsession with luxury brands and the emergence of designer flagship stores in the country, including Hermès in 2011 and Ted Baker in 2018.

Just a few months after the December 2018 wedding of celebrities Nick Jonas and Priyanka Chopra—who donned a custom Ralph Lauren wedding gown featuring mother of pearl paillettes, crystal seed beading and Swarovski crystal embellishment atop a strapless column gown made with more than two million mother of pearl sequins—Ralph Lauren opened a flagship store in New Delhi in 2019. The brand could not have arrived

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LEFT PAGE: Bill Blass, Coat and trousers, 1980s. French silk and lurex brocade. Gift of Mrs. Hugh Downs. THIS PAGE: Unknown, White dress with wide eyelet edged collar, 1820s. Cotton (white), eyelet. Arizona Costume Institute Purchase



in the country at a more opportune time.

“Every few years it seems a major designer or brand is referencing India in their collections. From paisley prints to sari-inspired draping, these trends keep re-surfacing time and time again,” Jean says. “It speaks not only to the borrowing nature of fashion, but also to the aesthetic beauty intrinsic in India’s clothing.”

### EXHIBITING CULTURAL STYLE

It is this type of East-West fashion merger that sparked the idea for the *India: Fashion’s Muse* exhibition, which runs February 29 through June 21 at Phoenix Art Museum. It explores the ways in which traditional Indian dress has inspired Western design and adapted to modern design practices. The exhibition features a compilation of pieces from Indian and Western designers, including nearly 40 garments and more than 20 accessories from the collection of Phoenix Art Museum and on loan from private collectors and museums.

Featured designs include a 19<sup>th</sup> century emerald green paisley silk shawl, a 1960’s teal blue three-quarter length Nehru jacket previously owned by John Lennon, a 1980’s Bill Blass French silk and lurex brocade, Mandarin-collared coat and trouser suit, and an Alexander McQueen “The Girl Who Lived in a Tree” dress from the designer’s Fall 2008 collection. Also on display are items from Indian designers Anamika Khanna and Naeem Khan, as well as Western designers such as Pierre Balmain, Givenchy, Mary McFadden, Halston, Yves Saint Laurent, Versace and Olivier Lapidus.

“From paisley ties to turbaned Hollywood starlets, Western fashion has borrowed, adapted and appropriated from India for centuries, and that is a very timely conversation to have right now,” Jean says. “But, in our increasingly globalized world, how do we become more respectful borrowers of cultural beauty?”

In an era when there is ongoing debate on appreciation versus appropriation, this exhibition delves into the intertwining of cultures through the medium of fashion and the legacy of craftsmanship of garments that make the enduring style so appealing and influential.

“When we share our traditions in clothing, we are connected on a very intimate level,” Jean continues. “Clothing is one of the most effective and complex ways that we identify ourselves to the world.” ♦

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TOP: Mary McFadden, Embroidered jacket, early 1980s. Silk velvet with metal and bead embroidery. Gift of Mrs. Jacquie Dorrance. BELOW: Olivier Lapidus, Dress, fall 1994. Silk velvet and gold lame with wrapped thread appliqué. Gift of Olivier Lapidus in honor of the exhibition *Extending the Runway: Tatiana Sorroko Style*