

# From Wasteful Trends to Timeless Drapes: Can We Reimagine Sustainable Fashion Through Ancient Practices?

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## ABSTRACT

In the backdrop of escalating environmental challenges exacerbated by the fashion industry, this research underscores the imperative to reassess our sartorial choices through the lens of sustainability. Building upon Timo Risannen's zero/minimal waste techniques, including cut & sew and cradle to cradle, this study advocates for a return to ancient draped clothing methods as a viable ecological solution. Echoing Peter Westbrook's sentiment on the preservation of heritage, the study posits draped clothing—a technique entrenched in the annals of civilizations such as the Indus Valley, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman—as a beacon of sustainable fashion. Leveraging rectangular fabric pieces, draped clothing offers versatility, minimal waste, and personalized expression, aligning with contemporary fashion ethos. To evaluate the viability and acceptance of draped clothing as a sustainable wardrobe staple, a month-long experiment engaged volunteers sourced from social media platforms. Participants integrated rectangular fabric pieces into their daily attire, exploring layering, fasteners, and accessories. Initial challenges, including functional apprehensions and adaptation to unconventional styles, were noted. Despite weather-related concerns, participant feedback predominantly endorsed the potential of draped clothing as a sustainable fashion alternative. Documented within a research paper format, the findings highlight the viability of draped clothing as a pivotal divergence in the trajectory of fashion. In a landscape besieged by environmental crises, the fusion of ancient techniques with modern sensibilities may herald a paradigm shift towards conscientious fashion design and consumption, offering a sustainable path forward for the industry and the planet alike.

**Key Words :** Sustainable fashion, Zero waste, Draped clothing, Styling, Personalization

## INTRODUCTION

### **Fashion and need for sustainability :**

Fashion is a personal expression, popular at a certain context and time. It covers clothing, makeup, hairstyle, accessories, footwear, lifestyle and body proportions. Dress, is an essential part of human experience. Perhaps because of its closeness to the body, dress has a richness of meaning that is an expression of the individual as well as groups, organizations, and the large society in which the person lives (Damhorst, Miller and Michelman, 1999). However, overconsumption of clothing at present is leading to generating large carbon footprints and waste. A recent Pulse of The Fashion Industry report stated

that fashion generates 4% of the world's waste each year, 92 million tons, which is more than toxic e-waste. (Committee, 2019)

Thus, there clearly is a need to rethink the way we make, use and dispose our clothes, as all of these have an environmental impact. Fashion Revolution founder and creative director Orsola de Castro told Fashion United that “we need to stop calling it waste and start seeing it for what it is—a resource.” (Parent, 2019). The fashion industry is currently witnessing the stirrings of a shift to zero-waste and a circular economy. In this ideal situation the products are not just used once but re-used and re-purposed multiple times. The fashion industry, which has

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been a major culprit, can lead the way.

“Call it ‘eco-fashion’ if you like, but I think it’s just common sense.” —Livia Firth, Founder of Eco Age and the Green Carpet Challenge on Chopard’s blog

### Objective of the study:

The objective of this study is to explore sustainable design solutions in response to the urgent need for environmentally conscious fashion practices. Drawing inspiration from Timo Rissanen’s research on textile waste management, which outlines five primary approaches, this study focuses on prevention and reuse as paramount strategies within the waste hierarchy. Specifically, the research seeks to investigate the potential of draped clothing—a historical garment technique—as a staple component of contemporary wardrobes. By delving into the history of clothing and its evolution, the study aims to discern the viability and adaptability of draped clothing in addressing modern sustainability imperatives within the fashion industry.

## METHODOLOGY

The research methodology involved a qualitative experiment conducted with two participants selected for their expertise in sustainable lifestyle practices and their respective backgrounds in fashion and environmental activism. Ms. Nikaytaa, a saree researcher and advocate for Indian handloom fabrics, brings extensive knowledge and proficiency in draping sarees, both 6 and 9 yards in length. Her advocacy extends to promoting gender fluid fashion identities through the use of traditional Indian textiles. Ms. Mridula Joshi, a sustainable lifestyle consultant and climate change activist, champions environmentally conscious choices in daily living.

The selection of these participants was deliberate, aiming to capture diverse perspectives and experiences relevant to the exploration of draped clothing as a sustainable wardrobe staple. Their emotional engagement with the experiment facilitated the emergence of creative opportunities and insights into the practical application of draped clothing in everyday life.

Throughout the experiment, participants were tasked with utilizing textile fabrics in rectangular pieces to create various draping styles to meet their clothing needs over the course of a month. Their experiences, challenges, and reflections were documented through participant observation, interviews, and reflective journals.

The qualitative data collected from both participants

were subjected to thematic analysis, wherein recurring themes, patterns, and insights regarding the feasibility, versatility, and acceptance of draped clothing were identified and analyzed. The findings offer valuable insights into the potential of draped clothing as a sustainable fashion option and contribute to ongoing discussions in the field of fashion sustainability and design innovation.

### Review of Literature:

Throughout history, clothing has been distinguished between “tailored” and “draped” garments (Tortora and Eubank, 1989). Tailored attire, closely fitted to the body, involves sewing pieces together, while draped garments, such as togas, require no sewing and are wrapped around the body. Draping, the process of shaping fabric into three-dimensional forms, traces back to 3500 BCE, originating with Mesopotamians and Ancient Egyptians, then evolving in Greek and Roman civilizations. Tailored clothing emerged from Northern European cultures like the Celts and Normans, offering warmth in cold climates through fitted pieces.

Draped clothing, dominant in warmer climates, prevailed in ancient civilizations like Rome, Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, symbolizing sophistication and elegance. Despite its rich history, draped clothing has often been disregarded, even though it offers insight into ethnic origins and body perceptions (Tortora and Eubank, 1989).

Ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley, China, Andes, and Mesoamerica reflect distinct hearths of civilization, influencing subsequent cultures globally. Egyptian attire, simple yet versatile, emphasized the body’s proportions. Greeks popularized draped tunics and peplos, accentuating the human form’s contours. Etruscans adopted similar attire but emphasized full dressing as a sign of respect.

Romans distinguished between “put on” and “wrapped around” garments, with the tunic being a staple for men, women, and children, worn in various styles like chitons and peplos (Anawalt, 2007). In India, draped clothing comprised three components—uttariya, antariya, and kayabandh—woven as separate pieces and worn in diverse styles (BHOWC, 2006).

In today’s global monoculture, preserving ancient arts like draped clothing is crucial. Draping, an ephemeral art, relies on skilled individuals and remains largely unrecorded, emphasizing simplicity and adaptability over

stitched fittings. As efforts to safeguard cultural heritage continue, the beauty and versatility of draped clothing remain at risk, highlighting the need for its preservation and appreciation.

Furthermore, reviewing literature about sustainability and fashion, “The business of sustainability”, guide provides insights into implementing sustainable practices within the fashion industry. It emphasizes reducing material usage, promoting mindful consumption, and favoring timeless designs - aspects that draped clothing can contribute to (Berrone & Preziosi, 2016). Draped clothing’s potential for versatility, slow production methods, and minimal waste aligns with the philosophy of Slow Fashion. The design for change to focus on timeless styles, versatility and minimal principles align with draped clothing’s potential to provide a sustainable and ethical fashion practice (Fletcher, 2017)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the experiment, the participants delved into the utilization of rectangular fabric pieces as everyday attire, documenting their draping process and daily experiences throughout the month of September as part of the #NoStitchSeptember challenge.

**Subject 1**, Ms. Mridula Joshi, approached the draping exploration with a contemporary perspective. Rejecting traditional draped garments, she sought to infuse a modern touch into her clothing choices. From attending postgraduate classes to religious ceremonies and even embarking on treks, she challenged the boundaries of draped clothing in various settings. Ms. Joshi shared her draping journey through her IGTV channel and Instagram page, aiming to inspire others to embrace alternative clothing options.

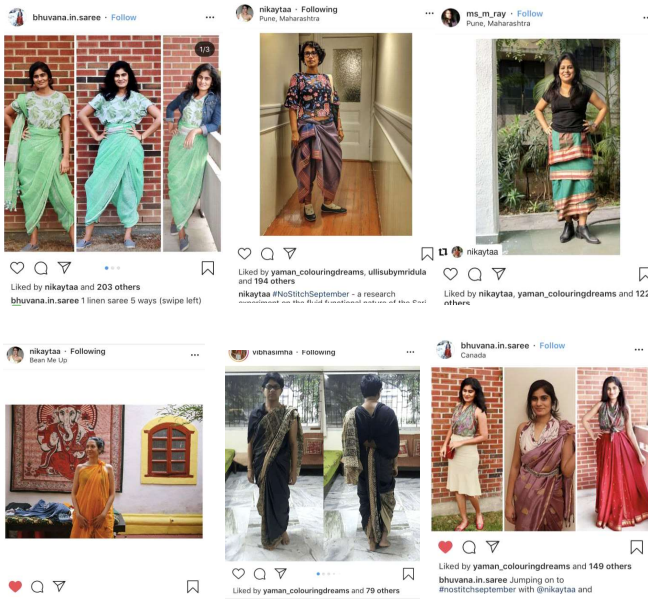
Her innovative approach as a millennial offers a fresh interpretation of a garment with historical roots. Some snapshots from her #NoStitchSeptember include the following looks:



**Subject 2** : As a member of Generation X, Ms. Nikaytaa delved into the intricacies of the saree, uncovering its rich history and embracing its cultural significance through a myriad of draping styles. Her exploration ranged from participating in marathons adorned in draped clothing to imparting teachings about the saree’s heritage.



Both the subjects were able to also motivate their followers to jump on the #NoStitchSeptember wagon, and some creative depictions of the challenge were seen as follows:



## Conclusion:

In conclusion, the findings of this research underscore the imperative for reimagining clothing consumption patterns on a daily basis and expanding opportunities for customers in the contemporary fashion landscape. Inspired by the vision of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation to foster a circular economy within the fashion industry, this study endeavors to reshape the fashion system, ensuring that consumers are presented with only sustainable choices.

The #NoStitchSeptember initiative served as a catalyst for illuminating the transformative potential inherent in the simple yet versatile rectangular piece of cloth. Despite initial challenges, including breaking stereotypes and overcoming apprehensions regarding wardrobe malfunctions, participants emerged with a new found appreciation for sustainability and a fresh perspective on fashion consumption.

As advocated by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the redesign of the fashion system necessitates a paradigm shift wherein sustainability is not merely an option but a fundamental principle guiding consumer choices. By embracing draped clothing and exploring innovative approaches to wardrobe staples, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding sustainable fashion and signifies a crucial step towards fostering a more equitable and environmentally conscious fashion ecosystem.

In essence, by challenging conventional notions of clothing design and consumption, this study illuminates

the potential for individuals to engage with fashion in a manner that aligns with ecological imperatives and social responsibility, paving the way for a more sustainable and inclusive future in the realm of fashion.

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