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# CULTURAL CIRCULARITY: FASHION LONGEVITY IN INDIAN HOUSEHOLDS

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## **ABSTRACT**

The fashion industry is shifting towards circularity. However, this focus mainly emphasizes technological innovations and recycling systems, while the cultural and emotional aspects of clothing longevity are often overlooked. This study presents "Cultural Circularity," which explores the enduring practices of fashion longevity in Indian households. Here, repairing, altering, repurposing, and donating garments have helped keep clothing in use for generations. This research fills a gap in the tech-focused narrative by examining how emotional durability promotes sustainable consumption patterns and how these practices can inspire resilient circular models in global fashion. Through qualitative interviews, ethnographic observations, and a literature review, the study reveals emotional connections to clothing—rooted in memory, identity, and heritage—that discourage wasteful consumption and encourage care-oriented behaviours. The findings show that these cultural practices serve as natural sustainability mechanisms, reducing textile waste without relying on industrial infrastructures. Furthermore, they offer adaptable frameworks for international fashion, where emotional ties can enhance material recovery and create truly sustainable consumption habits. By redefining regular clothing care traditions as key sustainability strategies, this paper positions cultural circularity as an essential, flexible component for reinventing global fashion systems, blending local knowledge with worldwide environmental goals.

Keywords: Cultural circularity, Fashion longevity, Indian households, Sustainable

consumption, Clothing care, Emotional durability

## **INTRODUCTION**

The global fashion industry is undergoing a major change towards circular economy models due to the urgent need to tackle environmental harm, resource depletion, and rising textile waste. Most traditional circularity efforts have primarily targeted technological innovations, like recycling processes and material recovery systems. These initiatives often overlook cultural and emotional aspects that can foster sustainability at the grassroots level. For example, companies like Circ have created technologies that separate raw materials at a molecular level, allowing the recovery of cotton and polyester from blended fabrics. These methods aim to extend product lifecycles through reuse, repair, and recycling, which align with broader circular economy principles focused on designing products for long-term use and recovery.

In many cultures, particularly within Indian households, age-old practices of garment care—such as repairing, altering, repurposing, and donating—have naturally supported circularity for generations. These actions are not just economic necessities; they are deeply linked to emotional connections, where clothes represent memories, identities, and heritage. This connection discourages waste and encourages care. This paper presents the idea of "Cultural Circularity" to highlight these often-overlooked practices. It addresses the unexplored gap

in the tech-centric narrative by investigating how emotional durability in Indian households encourages sustainable consumption and how these practices can influence global fashion systems to adopt more resilient circular models. By combining insights from qualitative interviews, ethnographic observations, and a literature review, this study argues that cultural practices provide organic, low-tech solutions to sustainability challenges, potentially enhancing industrial systems. The significance of this research lies in its ability to link local wisdom to global strategies and reframe everyday traditions as practical frameworks for sustainable fashion.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Circular Economy in the Fashion Industry**

The circular economy in fashion aims to reduce waste by keeping materials in use for as long as possible through methods like recycling, upcycling, and resale. Key initiatives include take-back programs, repair services, and the use of recycled fibers, all of which extend product lifecycles and lessen environmental impact. Technological advancements, such as efficient processing of discarded garments into new resources, have played a crucial role in this change. For example, the European Union has enacted laws to boost textile recycling and extend garment lifecycles. Despite these efforts, challenges remain, including the scalability of circular models and the prevalence of fast fashion.

### **Emotional Durability and Sustainable Consumption**

Emotional durability involves creating lasting psychological connections between products and users, encouraging longer use and care. In fashion, this idea counters fast fashion by building attachments grounded in narratives, memories, and personal significance.

Studies indicate that garments with emotional value are kept longer, which reduces the need for frequent replacements. This emotional component is shaped by social, psychological, and cultural influences, making it a powerful asset for sustainability.

### **Cultural Practices in Indian Fashion Consumption**

In India, traditional teachings prioritize reuse and minimal waste, rooted in cultural values. Techniques like Kantha quilting repurpose old saris into new items, showcasing thriftiness and sustainability. Rafoogari, a time-honored repair method, refreshes textiles and preserves heritage. Post-consumer clothing is often donated to NGOs or upcycled, driven by limited disposable income and cultural norms. Ethnographic research shows that Indian consumers value collaborative consumption, carefully weighing its risks and benefits. These traditions inspire global fashion, with brands embracing organic fabrics and handloom techniques. Cultural sustainability in India emphasizes blending traditional skills into modern systems.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study takes a mixed qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observations, and a literature review. Interviews involved 20 participants from urban and rural Indian households in areas like Delhi, Mumbai, and Kerala, chosen via purposive sampling to reflect varied socio-economic backgrounds. Questions focused on personal experiences with clothing care, emotional attachments, and thoughts on sustainability. Ethnographic observations included home visits to document practices in real time, such as repair sessions or repurposing activities. Data collection lasted six months in 2024-2025, ensuring ethical practices like

informed consent and anonymity. The literature review brought together existing studies on circular fashion and Indian cultural practices. Thematic analysis identified patterns, using grounded theory to develop concepts like "Cultural Circularity."

## ***FINDINGS***

### **Emotional Durability in Indian Households**

Participants shared strong emotional ties to clothing, viewing garments as pieces of family history. For instance, heirloom saris passed through generations evoke memories and identity, discouraging disposal. Repairing tears or altering fits extends the life of these garments, with 85% of interviewees citing emotional reasons for keeping them. These connections promote sustainable habits: repurposing old clothes into quilts or bags reduces waste and aligns with traditional thrift. Donating to charities or family members creates community circularity, lessening landfill contributions.

### **Inspirations for Global Fashion Systems**

Observations revealed flexible frameworks: community workshops on upcycling resemble global repair cafes. Emotional design strategies, like customizable features, could improve durability in Western markets. Integrating Indian practices, such as natural dyes and handlooms, offers eco-friendly alternatives to industrial recycling. The findings suggest that cultural models can decrease dependence on technology, encouraging hybrid systems where emotional and material circularity coexist.

## ***DISCUSSION***

The results highlight that emotional durability serves as a natural mechanism for sustainability in Indian contexts,

challenging the industry's tech-heavy focus. By promoting care, these practices decrease consumption rates without external incentives. Worldwide, implementing such models could tackle challenges like consumer detachment in fast fashion. Brands could weave storytelling into their designs to create attachments, complementing recycling efforts. However, obstacles include cultural adaptation and scaling across diverse markets. This integration connects local and global, enhancing resilience in fashion systems.

## ***CONCLUSION***

Cultural Circularity in Indian households demonstrates that emotional and traditional practices are effective tools for sustainability. By showcasing how these practices reduce waste and inspire global models, this study underscores their potential. Future research should investigate cross-cultural applications to fully realize these impacts.

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