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## Thrifting in India: A Sustainable Revolution

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### Abstract

Clothes, accessories, furniture, and more, the fast fashion industry has always been the leading contributor to environmental pollution.

In today's times, it has become essential for us to act upon it. This can be achieved by increasing the life of the clothes we wear and the things we use.

This concept of giving clothes and other goods a second life/ wave is known as Thrifting.

Thrifting addresses these challenges by promoting the reuse of items, reducing landfill waste, and decreasing the overall carbon footprint associated with manufacturing new goods. By choosing thrifted products, consumers actively participate in a circular economy where materials are continuously reused, repurposed, or upcycled, rather than discarded after minimal use. Thrifting offers more than just environmental advantages—it is also an economical choice. It enables individuals to purchase distinctive, high-quality, and often vintage pieces at prices significantly lower than those in conventional retail outlets. In addition, it promotes ethical consumption by reducing reliance on fast fashion industries that are often linked to unfair labor practices.

As sustainability awareness continues to rise, thrifting is steadily gaining popularity as a preferred alternative to traditional shopping. The growth of online thrift platforms, social media-based resale markets, and specialized second-hand stores has expanded accessibility, allowing consumers to explore a diverse range of pre-owned items with ease. This increasing availability makes adopting an eco-conscious lifestyle more convenient than ever.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations Environment Programme's 2018 report *Cleaning Up Couture*, producing a single pair of jeans—from cotton farming to manufacturing, transportation, and eventual washing—consumes around 3,781 liters of water. This lifecycle also generates approximately 33.4 kilograms of carbon emissions, comparable to driving about 111 kilometers or watching nearly 246 hours of television on a large screen. These figures highlight the significant environmental cost associated with just one garment. When multiplied across the enormous volume of clothing, accessories, and collectibles produced worldwide, the overall ecological impact becomes staggering. The environmental strain is not limited to apparel alone. The furniture sector also contributes heavily to ecological damage, particularly through deforestation, as well as emissions generated during production, finishing, packaging, and transportation processes.

In this context, thrift culture emerges as a viable and sustainable alternative, providing individuals with an opportunity to lower their environmental footprint. In a country like India, which ranks among the largest contributors to carbon emissions, adopting sustainable consumption practices is increasingly critical. Despite its benefits, however, the widespread acceptance of thrifting faces obstacles rooted in cultural attitudes and social perceptions. Second-hand goods are often linked with financial hardship or considered unhygienic, which discourages broader adoption. Addressing and reshaping these misconceptions is essential for promoting sustainability and encouraging a shift toward more responsible consumer behavior.



Source: Al Jazeera

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The fashion industry is one of the world's largest consumers of water, second only to agriculture, and remains a significant source of environmental pollution. It accounts for nearly 10% of global carbon emissions, primarily due to its heavy reliance on fossil fuels, which intensifies climate change. Alongside this, the sector produces vast quantities of waste, much of which is either burned or sent to landfills, further worsening environmental damage.

In India, the fast-paced growth of the fashion industry has increased the use of harmful and toxic chemicals, leading to serious concerns about water pollution. The extensive application of synthetic dyes and chemical processing techniques has contaminated water bodies, posing threats to both ecosystems and public health. Furthermore, nearly 75% of discarded clothing in the country is disposed of in landfills, adding to the escalating waste problem and underscoring the urgent need for sustainable solutions such as thrifting and textile recycling. The consequences of the fashion industry's practices extend beyond environmental hazards; they also have profound social implications. One of the most pressing concerns is the exploitation of labor, as many workers endure extremely low wages and poor working conditions.

To reduce production expenses, many large fashion brands outsource manufacturing to developing nations such as India, China, and Bangladesh, where labor is inexpensive and regulatory oversight is often limited. Workers in these regions frequently endure long working hours, unsafe conditions, and wages that are insufficient to meet basic living needs. This situation underscores the ethical concerns within the industry and highlights the urgent need for fair compensation, stronger labor protections, and more responsible business practices that prioritize both workers' well-being and sustainable development. and the planet.



Source: Al Jazeera

Know The Chain's Apparel and Footwear Report researched and ranked major brands on the working conditions and exploitations in their supply chain.

Kering (owner of the Alexander McQueen and Gucci labels) scored 41 out of 100, while LVMH (owner of the Christian Dior and Louis Vuitton labels) scored 19 out of 100. Tapestry (owner of the Coach and Kate Spade labels), assessed for the first time this year, scored 16 out of 100.

They refused to answer and the condition keeps getting worse day by day.

Not just the fashion industry, wood furniture operations emit pollutants such as hazardous air pollutants (HAPs) and volatile organic compounds (VOC). These pollutants can contribute to health problems that may affect shop employees, their families,

customers, and the community, Not to forget the carbon emissions and relentless cutting of trees to meet the demand. This can be avoided through balancing and sustainable practices.

The possibility of clothing being reused is disappearing due to declining clothing quality. Only around 40 percent of all clothing is useful, while the remainder is shredded after a few uses and returned to landfills. In India, the concept of thrifting remains fresh, while there are a handful of e-commerce small scale businesses and markets for thrifting but none focuses on all the niches that can be worked on. There is a strong cultural emphasis on new and unused items as symbols of status and prosperity. Wearing or using second-hand items is often associated with poverty or is seen as something low. Many people associate second-hand goods with being "impure" or unhygienic, especially when it comes to clothing, footwear, or household items.

All these myths are slowly bursting as the youth of the country is slowly stepping beyond that .

While thrifting is already a success in many western countries. We have examples of some UK based thrift websites working well in the market and being at par with sustainability ,<https://www.thrifted.com/> and <https://www.depop.com>.

## RESULTS

The scope of thrifting in India is growing, driven by changing consumer attitudes, environmental awareness, and the rise of digital platforms.

While thrifting is still in its early stages compared to Western countries, it holds significant potential due to India's large population, increasing focus on sustainability, and the affordability of second-hand goods.

Thrifting offers affordable options for budget-conscious consumers, especially in a price-sensitive market like India.

As disposable incomes grow, so does the desire for variety and experimentation in fashion, which thrifting can provide at lower costs. Thrifting appeals to those looking for unique, one-of-a-kind items that are not mass-produced.

Also, second-hand markets and websites offer access to international brands at lower prices, attracting brand-conscious consumers.

## CONCLUSION

Thrifting in India is gradually gaining traction as a sustainable, affordable, and trendy alternative to fast fashion and new consumer goods. While cultural stigmas, lack of awareness, and infrastructural challenges have historically limited its growth, changing consumer attitudes—especially among younger, environmentally conscious generations—are driving its acceptance. The rise of digital platforms, social media influencers, and organized thrift stores is making second-hand shopping more accessible and appealing.

We still need a platform that is an umbrella for all ranges of products that can be thrifted , with or without refurbishing.

There is a chance of high success as India is a nation of the young, and the youth is changing and getting woke about the issues that our planet is suffering with.

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