Tribal Jewellery (Sikka Mala) Inspired Fashion Collection: A Convertible Office-to-Evening Capsule

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Abstract

Professionals increasingly move from workplace to social settings with no time to change, yet generic "day-to-night" styling rarely draws on cultural heritage. This paper proposes that heritage ornament can itself drive the transition. Using the Sikka Mala, the coin necklace of Indian tribal and folk adornment, it develops a convertible capsule built around a wine velvet waistcoat edged with silver-toned coin discs and chevron embroidery, worn with wide-leg velvet trousers. Two original instruments structure the work: a Three-Layer Translation Model (form, rhythm, sensation) and a Dual-Context Wearability Matrix that tests office restraint, evening expressiveness and transition effort. The outfit serves the workday, casual wear and party wear through styling and a few construction choices. The paper also discusses sustainability and ethical guidance for designing with tribal heritage.

Keywords: convertible fashion; Sikka Mala; tribal jewellery; office-to-evening wear; heritage translation; modular design; sustainable fashion

1 Introduction

The working day no longer ends at the office door. Dinners, launches, family functions and informal meets often follow straight after work. A wardrobe that moves credibly between these settings saves time, reduces the number of garments owned and raises the use each garment receives.

This paper takes the opposite position. Heritage ornament can be the mechanism of transition. The coin of the Sikka Mala suits this role well. It is a repeatable unit, it scales from a few discs to a dense field, and it can read as a quiet metallic border in daylight and a bold statement under evening light.

1.1 Research questions

1. Which formal and sensory qualities of the Sikka Mala can be abstracted into garment design without literal copying?
2. How can one outfit be structured to be acceptable at work, comfortable in casual settings and expressive for a party?
3. Which ethical practices make such translation responsible?

2 Literature review

2.1 Tribal jewellery as a system of meaning

Studies of Indian adornment treat jewellery as a coded language in which metal, form and placement signal identity, life stage and belief (Untracht, 1997; Dhamija, 1970). Elwin (1951) shows how orna-

ment in central India is embedded in daily and ritual life and not separated as "art". Coin jewellery combines three roles at once: currency, symbol and heirloom. It is therefore both an object of display and a store of family security.

2.2 Modular and transformable clothing

Design research on transformable garments describes several strategies: detachable components, reversible surfaces, adjustable proportions and multi-way wearing (Gwilt and Rissanen, 2011). The common aim is to extend a garment's useful life by letting it serve more than one need. Chapman (2005) adds that durability is also emotional: a garment survives when the wearer stays attached to it, which suggests that meaningful ornament supports longevity as much as sturdy construction does.

2.3 Dress, setting and the body

Entwistle (2000) argues that dress is a situated practice: people dress for a setting and for the judgement of others in it. Workplace dress therefore demands restraint, coverage and legibility of role, while evening dress permits display. A convertible garment must satisfy both codes with the smallest possible change.

2.4 Sustainability and heritage ethics

Fletcher (2014) links sustainable fashion to slower use, local skills and relationships between maker and wearer. Young (2008) and the UNESCO (2003) Convention frame the other side of the same coin: borrowing from living cultures can become extractive unless context, credit and benefit are respected.

3 Method and conceptual framework

The study uses practice-based design research. Stages follow the design-thinking sequence of empathise, define, ideate, prototype and refine (Brown, 2008): literature and artefact review, analysis of the Sikka Mala, concept and palette development, sketching and outfit resolution, and reflective evaluation against the framework below.

3.1 The Three-Layer Translation Model

To avoid literal copying, the paper separates a jewellery piece into three layers, each translated differently (Table 1). Figure 1 shows how each layer is carried from the source object into the finished outfit.

Table 1. The Three-Layer Translation Model.

Layer	What it holds	Translation rule	Risk if ignored
Form	Shape and unit (the circular coin)	Abstract into a trim or motif; never reproduce a whole necklace on cloth	Costume effect
Rhythm	Spacing, repetition, graduation, layering	Carry into placement and proportion: rows, borders, scale change	Loss of the piece's visual logic
Sensation	Weight, sheen, sound, cool metal	Carry into fabric, finish and movement	Flat, purely graphic result

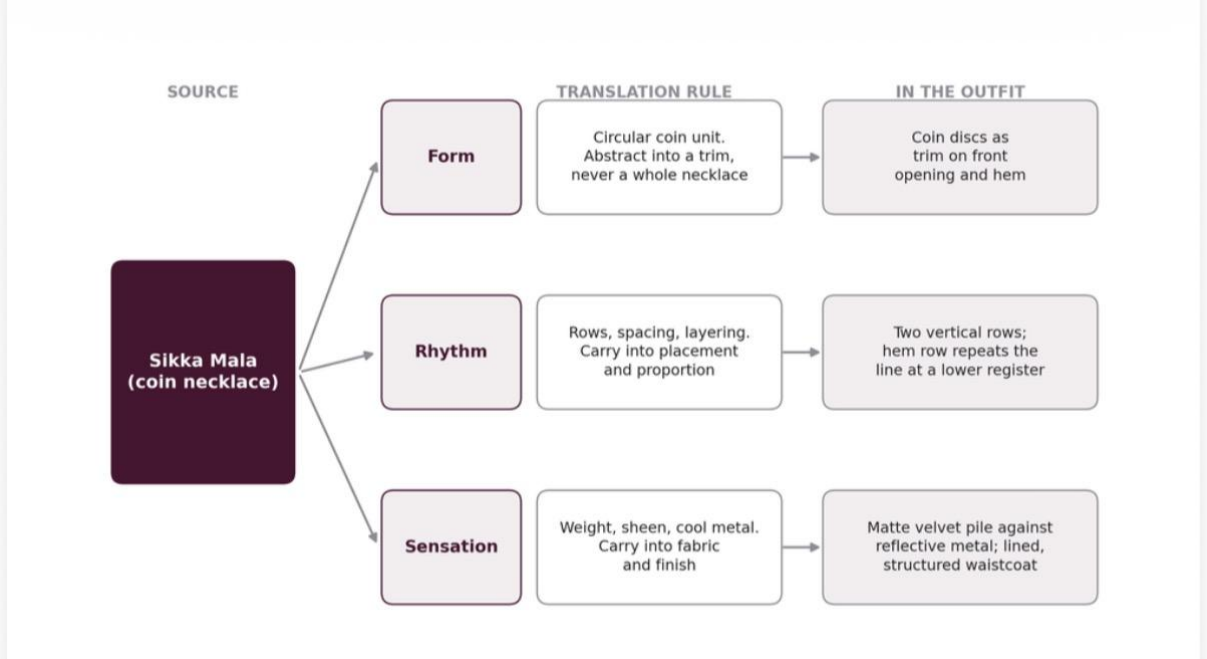


Figure 1. The Three-Layer Translation Model applied to the Sikka Mala: from source object, through translation rule, to the finished outfit.

3.2 The Dual-Context Wearability Matrix

A convertible design must pass two tests and one cost test. The matrix in Table 2 is a proposed evaluation tool.

Table 2. The Dual-Context Wearability Matrix.

Criterion	Question	Office (restraint)	Evening (expression)
Coverage	Is the neckline and torso appropriate for the setting?	Full coverage under the layer	Controlled skin-play permitted
Ornament level	How loud is the metal?	Reads as border or trim	Reads as statement
Structure	Does the silhouette signal composure?	Tailored, upright	Same structure, relaxed styling
Transition effort	How many changes, how long?	Target: one to two changes, no tools, a few minutes	–
Heritage fidelity	Is the source recognisable and respected?	Yes, subtly	Yes, boldly

4 The Sikka Mala as design source

The Sikka Mala is strung from coins, usually silver or silver-toned, and worn in single or layered strands across the neck and chest. Three qualities matter for design. Its unit is a circle, repeated with slight variation in size and spacing. Its strands are layered, so the eye reads rows and bands. Its metal is heavy, cool and audible, which gives the wearer a physical awareness of the piece. Symbolically, coins signify prosperity and security, and the necklace is worn at celebrations, so the form carries festive meaning.

5 The collection outfit

The final outfit is a two-piece ensemble in deep wine velvet with a contrast layer beneath (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The final outfit, front (left) and back (right): wine velvet cropped waistcoat with coin-and-chevron border, worn with high-waisted wide-leg velvet trousers.

- **Waistcoat:** cropped, sleeveless and open-front with a scoop neckline. Silver-toned coin discs run in two vertical rows along the front opening and in a horizontal row along the hem.
- **Border detail:** a white zig-zag (chevron) embroidery or piping line flanks the coins, defining them and adding a second, finer rhythm.
- **Inner layer:** a black bralette, which supplies the evening reading and can be replaced by a covering top for the office.
- **Trousers:** high-waisted, wide-leg velvet trousers with a tie waist, side pockets and angular diamond-style topstitching on the side panel.
- **Footwear:** black pointed flats, keeping the look modern and easy to wear.

Figure 3 shows the construction detail at close range: the coin-and-chevron border (A), the angular topstitching on the trouser side panel (B) and the matte contrast band at the trouser hem (C).



Figure 3. Construction details. (A) Coin discs and chevron embroidery at the front opening and hem. (B) Diamond-style topstitching on the trouser side panel. (C) Matte contrast band at the trouser hem.

The design applies the Three-Layer Model as follows. Form is abstracted: the disc appears as a trim, not a necklace. Rhythm is kept: the two front rows echo the strands on the chest, and the hem row repeats the line at a lower register. Sensation is kept through the contrast of matte pile and reflective metal, and the weight of a lined, structured waistcoat.

6 Convertibility: one outfit, three occasions

The ensemble converts through two routes. The first is styling-led and needs no change to the garments. The second is construction-led and is proposed as a development option for production.

6.1 Styling-led conversion

The change at the end of the workday is one swap of the inner layer and one change of footwear and accessories (Table 3). No change of the main garments is needed, which keeps transition effort within the target in the matrix.

Table 3. Styling-led conversion across three occasions.

Occasion	Inner layer	Waistcoat	Trousers	Footwear and finish	Coin trim reads as
Office	Ivory or black high-neck shirt or fitted camisole	Worn open over the shirt	Waist tied neatly, shirt tucked	Loafers or pointed flats, minimal jewellery	Metallic border
Casual	White tee or plain knit	Worn open, relaxed	Tie loosened, hands in pockets	Clean sneakers or flats	Quiet detail
Party	Black bralette or satin camisole	Worn open as shown	Tie cinched, fuller drape	Heels or pointed flats, statement earrings, sleek hair	Statement

6.2 Construction-led conversion (proposed)

1. **Detachable coin band.** The coin-and-chevron border is made as a separate band that attaches through concealed snap tape. Without it, the waistcoat is a plain, tailored wine layer for conservative workplaces.
2. **Reversible lining.** A matt lining on one side and a metallic or jacquard lining on the other lets the interior flash at the party.
3. **Convertible waist.** The tie waist can be worn knotted at the front, at the side or looped, changing the proportion without a new garment.
4. **Separates.** Waistcoat and trousers are designed to work alone, giving six or more outfit combinations from the capsule.

These options are design proposals, not tested construction, and would need pattern and wear testing before production.

7 Sustainability and wear frequency

A garment that serves three occasions is worn more often. Fletcher (2014) and Gwilt and Rissanen (2011) both point to longer and more intensive use as a larger lever than material substitution alone. A convertible set also lowers the number of garments needed for a working week and weekend. Two cautions apply: velvet usually needs careful or dry-clean care, which adds an environmental and cost burden, and a heritage-led design only supports slower consumption if the wearer keeps the piece in use. Detachable parts should be repairable and replaceable.

8 Ethics of designing with tribal heritage

- **Research before reference.** Understand a form's meaning and use before adapting it.
- **Name the source.** Credit the tradition, not a generic "tribal" label.
- **Keep sacred items out.** Do not use objects of ritual significance as casual decoration.
- **Share benefit.** Where possible, source from or collaborate with artisans and pay fairly.
- **Check protections.** Be aware of legal frameworks such as India's Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 (Government of India, 1999), where they apply.

9 Limitations and future research

The study is design-led and rests on literature and artefact analysis. It has no wearer trials, no artisan interviews and no wear-testing of the proposed detachable components. The Sikka Mala varies by region and community, and the collection works from a composite reading. Future work should (i) test the Dual-Context Wearability Matrix with working women across at least two sectors, (ii) prototype and wear-test the detachable band and reversible lining, (iii) compare perceptions of the outfit in conservative and creative workplaces, and (iv) engage artisan communities in co-design.

10 Conclusion

A heritage artefact can organise a convertible wardrobe, not merely decorate it. By separating the Sikka Mala into form, rhythm and sensation, the design keeps what makes the necklace distinctive without copying it literally. The wine velvet waistcoat and trousers, edged with coin discs and

chevron embroidery, move from workday to casual to party through an inner-layer swap and accessories, and the Dual-Context Wearability Matrix gives designers a way to test such pieces. Handled with research, credit and care, tribal heritage can become a living resource for everyday professional dressing.

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