

Seven Incidents of Indian Cultural Appropriation from 2016 to 2025

On June 16 2025, during Milan Fashion Week, Italian luxury brand Prada showcased its Men's 2026 Spring Summer collection, which included open-toe leather sandals. These sandals bore a striking resemblance to Kolhapuri chappals, a traditional Indian footwear originating from the Kolhapur district in Maharashtra.

Reason for the controversy

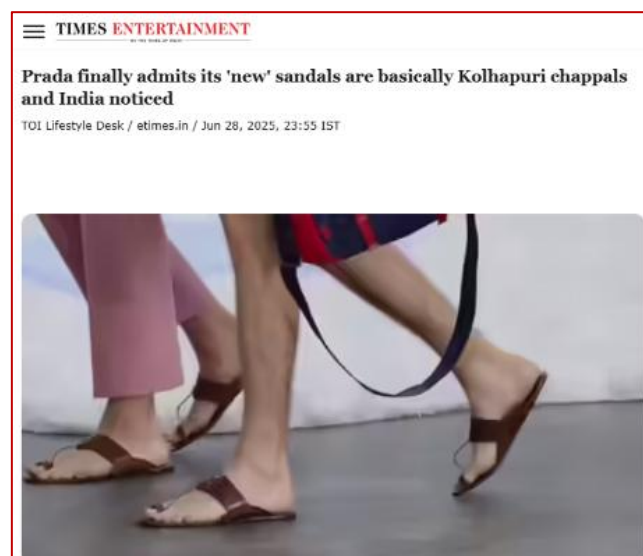
- Initially, Prada did not acknowledge the Indian origin or the artisans, leading to widespread criticism on social media and from Indian officials, with some labeling Prada as “chappal chor” (shoe thief).
- Prada's version was priced at approximately ₹1.2 lakh (around \$1,400), significantly higher than the traditional Kolhapuri chappals, which are sold in India for ₹1,000 to ₹4,000.
- The controversy ignited anger among over 20,000 artisans from Kolhapur, who felt their cultural legacy was being exploited for profit without recognition

What are Kolhapuri chappals?

- Kolhapuri chappals are handcrafted unisex leather sandals, known for their distinctive braided leather straps, intricate cutwork, and durable construction, often using vegetable-tanned leather and indigenous techniques passed down through generations
- These sandals, once adorned by royalty, are a marker of regional identity and craftsmanship, with a Geographical Indication (GI) tag granted on December 11, 2018, to protect their origin.

Prada's Response after Backlash:

- Facing severe backlash, Prada issued a statement on June 28, 2025, acknowledging that the sandals were inspired by traditional Indian footwear from Maharashtra and Karnataka. The company committed to “responsible design practices, fostering cultural engagement, and opening a dialogue for a meaningful exchange with local Indian artisan communities,
- This isn't the first time India's culture has been appropriated. It compiles six additional incidents (seven in total) from 2016 to 2025, highlighting the appropriation of the bindi, nose ring, maang tikka, yoga etc.



1. Kim Kardashian and North West Spark Debate Over Nath Appropriation.

- ✧ In July 2022, **Kim Kardashian and her daughter North West** wore nose rings at Paris Fashion Week, sparking debate.
- ✧ The nath, originating in 9th-10th century India, symbolizes marital status and has deep cultural significance. Over the years, though, the nose ring has found its place as a fashion accessory and isn't necessarily bound by gender either. Critics argued that **wearing it as a fashion statement without acknowledgment was appropriative, reducing it to a trend.**



2. Gucci's Kurta Sparks Cultural Appropriation Debate.

- ✧ On June 3, 2021, Italian luxury brand Gucci launched a collection featuring a garment described on its website as a "floral embroidery organic linen kaftan," priced at \$3,500 (approximately Rs 2.5 lakh) The garment, made in Italy from organic linen, featured floral embroidery, a neck opening with self-tie tassels, and patchwork on the sleeves, **which have been appropriated by the West.**
- ✧ Gucci labeled the garment as a "kaftan," a term typically referring to a robe-like garment with **Middle Eastern origins.** This mislabeling fueled accusations of cultural appropriation, with critics arguing that Gucci was profiting from Indian cultural elements **without proper credit or collaboration with Indian artisans.**



3. Kim Kardashian Faced Backlash for Maang Tikka Appropriation.

- ✧ On April 5, 2019, reality TV star Kim Kardashian sparked controversy after wearing a maang tikka, a traditional Indian hair accessory, as part of her church outfit. Dressed in a white gown paired with gold earrings and the maang tikka, **she faced backlash on social media for cultural appropriation, with critics accusing her of using a culturally significant ornament as a mere fashion accessory.**
- ✧ The maang tikka is a traditional Indian hair accessory deeply rooted in cultural and religious significance. Worn by women, especially during weddings and festivals.



4. Coldplay Faced Accusations of Cultural Appropriation.

- ✧ Coldplay's 2016 music video 'Hymn for the Weekend' was filmed in India and **included vibrant colors, traditional clothing, and religious imagery** to showcase Indian culture. However, Coldplay faced **criticism** for using India as an exotic backdrop, with many accusing the video of reinforcing colonial stereotypes and lacking genuine cultural representation.
- ✧ **Controversy:** It was presented led to accusations of cultural appropriation because it took visual elements from India (like Holi colors, temples, religious symbols, and traditional clothing) and used them mainly for **aesthetic appeal, without proper context or respect for their cultural or spiritual meaning.**

[Video](#)



5. Selena Gomez Faced Backlash for Bindi Appropriation

- ✧ In April 2013, singer Selena Gomez was criticized for **wearing a bindi** during her performance at the **MTV Movie Awards**. While it was intended as a fashion accessory, many pointed out that the bindi holds deep religious significance in Hinduism, symbolizing the 'third eye' a mark of spiritual insight and divine consciousness. Using it out of context, especially in a performance setting, was seen as disrespectful and culturally insensitive.



6. The Appropriation of Indian Traditions through Yoga and Ayurveda.

- ✧ Yoga and Ayurveda have deep roots in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions, but in the West, they are often treated as trends rather than respected practices. Yoga is widely marketed as just a fitness routine, and Ayurveda is sold as a wellness fad. *In many cases, Western companies have even patented Ayurvedic herbs and treatments, making profits without giving credit or benefits to the Indian communities they came from.*
- ✧ The mystical and metaphysical aspects of yoga spirituality have been replaced by Christian yoga, goat yoga, power yoga, rage yoga, Namaste Bitches' t-shirts, and Yoga Barbie dolls. The US Patent and Trademark Office has issued 150 yoga-related [patent](#), 134 trademarks on yoga accessories and 2,315 yoga trademarks. And 1,500 patents involving the yoga industry are awaiting approval.

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