# Birth of Costume in Indian Cinematic World

Part 1

By:
Dr. Sarita Kataria
& Dr. Seema Sekhri

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Film making process can be divided into three stages namely: **Pre-production, Production and Post-production** (Bension, 2008). Following graph compares the costuming cycle with the film making cycle to realise how the former precedes the later.
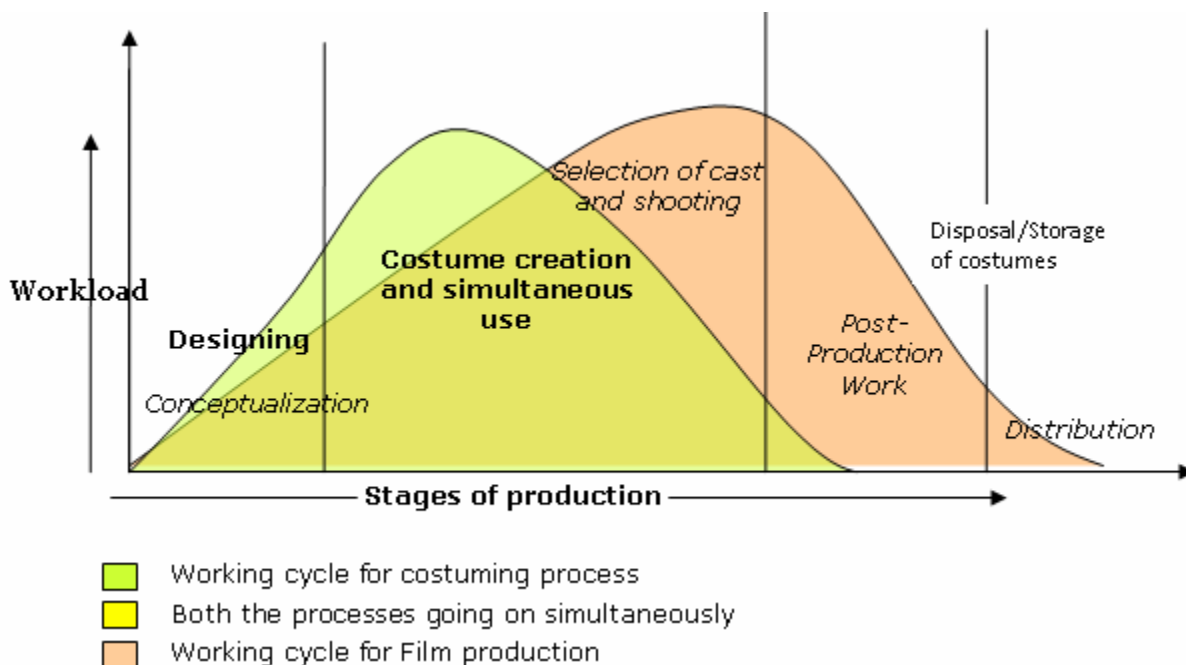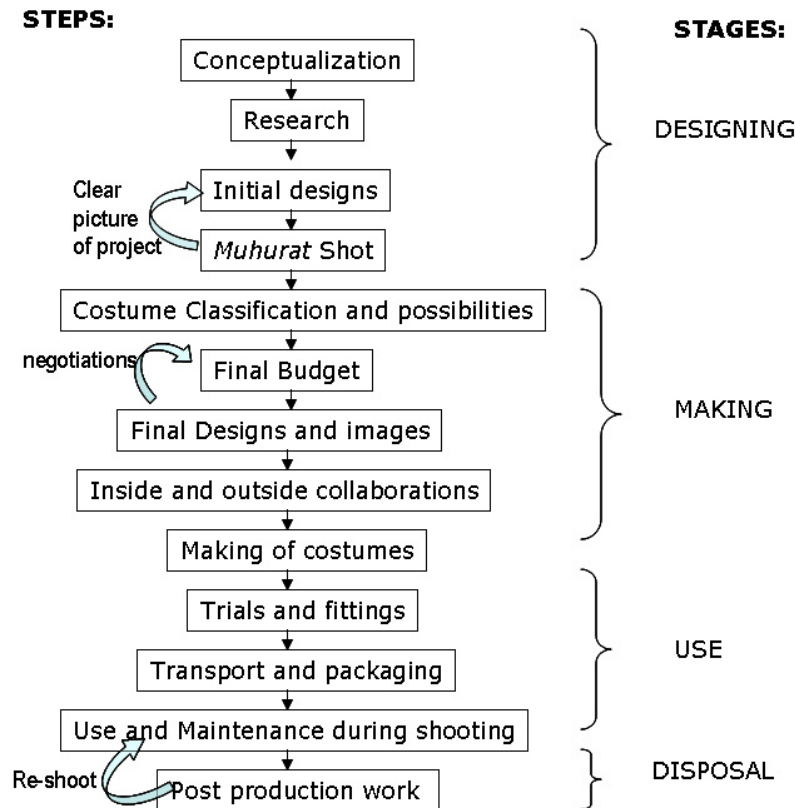

Figure 1: Working cycle of costuming as compared to the overall film production cycle

Pre-production is the planning phase, which includes casting, location selection, set/costume creation and overall scheduling. Production involves the actual making of the film i.e. all activities which are part of the shooting process. Post-production activities include editing, recording, advertising and marketing.

Costuming stages and steps:

Costuming, as a process, is centred more towards the initial phase of film making (Figure 1), although the use of costumes carries on during the complete production. Certain costume creation activities continue till the beginning of third stage, especially in projects where the planning process generally keeps happening parallel to the filming process rather than preceding it. Just like the film making traditions of Indian cinema; its costuming procedures also follow unique practices in the context of historic, structural as well as socio-cultural framework.

STEPS:

STAGES:

Conceptualization

Research

Clear picture of project

Initial designs

Muhurat Shot

DESIGNING

Costume Classification and possibilities

negotiations

Final Budget

Final Designs and images

MAKING

Inside and outside collaborations

Making of costumes

Trials and fittings

Transport and packaging

USE

Use and Maintenance during shooting

Re-shoot

Post production work

DISPOSAL

Figure 2: A flowchart of steps and stages of costuming process for Indian film industry

Costuming is essentially the process of designing, making and utilization of clothing for the characters of any make-believe media production. It involves all the activities which form a part of providing the right apparel to the performers. As a process, costuming involves more of artistic activities during 'designing stage' whereas most of the 'making stage' gives significance to craftsmanship. Efforts in outlining the process of costuming, led to development of a **basic flowchart** (refer Figure 2) of the process. Following is the **description of steps** which lead to the birth or development of costume in Indian cinema:

Conceptualisation

The films are made either by independent film makers or under some well known big firms established in the industry over the years. These production firms referred to as '**Banners**' (Gahlot, 2005) are largely associated with specific individuals who usually start out as actors or directors before they become producers. Both these kind of film makers start out by finding a suitable concept for film and then assemble the required talent to work together on each individual film project. Key members of the team are then recruited through a series of meetings involving '**story**-**narrations**' (or relaying key elements of film's plot) with intended candidates**,** by the screenwriter or director. The costume designer may or may not be a part of these initial sessions depending on the significance of costumes for that project. This initial idea is given to the scriptwriter,

who translates it into a formal script of the film along with a screen play. A constant flow of script changes commonly happen in the Indian industry throughout the making of the film (refer Figure 2.).

Though the scripts for films, theatre as well as television are written in **standard sequential order,** but except for theatre, which is a direct performance medium, the filming of scenes need not be and is not carried out in order of the storyline. Rather, they are shot **'out of continuity'** (Miller, 1999). The sequence of shooting depends more on the site availability, with the scenes happening in a given locale scheduled to be filmed concurrently irrespective of their order in the script. It would be impractical and unworthy to travel back and forth to different locations in order to film the script in a chronological structure. The procedure of filming out of continuity mandates an understanding of matters related to this on the part of the costume designer and the dressmen, because the costume supply to the production happens on this basis.

For smooth and effective vision transfer between director and creative heads like costume designer, script study plays important role. It was found during study that some projects were developing many parts of the script as and when certain part of the movie was being filmed. At the same time there were projects in which the core team was working very methodically on a final bound script which acted as a bible for the complete shooting process.

Table 1: Effects of type of vision transfer to costumer through director and script

Vision transfer through script	
Director with authoritative role	Director accepting low quality scripts
Well written, detailed and complete script	Basic story outline in few pages
Costume designer gets initial cues on costuming expectations by detailed script analysis, resulting in accurate design work	Knowledge of concept passed on in crude way, script development keeps happening during shooting, resulting in diverse effects on final costumes

According to director Muzaffar Ali, the originality of the script could be preserved only in cases when a director plays a more authoritative role. It is an important initial exercise by to do repetitive script readings to grasp the basic vision and pick up finer details related to costuming. But this exercise was stated to be fruitful only if (refer Table 1.),
- there exists a complete script before starting of the project
- director and key members consider it significant enough to implement it strictly

Some directors prefer to distribute a copy of the detailed script whereas others prefer to organize **script reading sessions** with key performers or heads of departments who take down their own notes related to their job. In such cases the notations of the designer attain vital importance for aligning the costume design part with the expectations of the director and other heads. It is significant during primary analysis of script to keep making personal costuming-notes for spotting different requirements

during costume construction stage e.g., one designer described using different colour pens to mention different elements of costuming in the script like green for writing in details about fabric and material, black for the details of instructions to be given to the members of costume making team in her workshop etc. The most crucial are meetings with the creative heads like director, art director and production designer as they are closest to the visual aspects of project. Such conferencing about creative decisions and material choices is found lacking many times and facts get passed on at last moments in a crude way. Production also intends to know about the designer's rough budget estimates for the costumes at this stage of the process. In the initial phases some contract negotiations are also done between the designer and the UPM (Unit Production Manager) regarding screen or advertising credits, travel support etc.

Research work

Although substantive amount of theme based research work on subject of the movie is done and shared by the director and art director, yet there is a requirement of research from costuming point of view. A preliminary research must be carried out to get a rough idea about the theme followed by specific detailed assessment of exact costume styles and inspiration for the design elements of costumes, especially in case of period films or biography based films. This could prove challenging when enough documentation of appearance does not exist e.g., director Satyajit Ray, once commented (c.f. Robinson, 2005) after making the period film based on Ravindranath Tagore's 1916 novel, that it posed special design problem, "There was no description of lead actor...occasionally there was a mention of what lead actress was wearing, but none of the male characters' dresses were ever described".

Plate 1: (a) Costume made on the basis of detailed character research, (b) Related initial sketch by director Satyajit Ray, Movie: 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi', Source: NFAI

During making of another of his movie *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, he transcribed a few lines in his *Kheror Khata* (term for notebook in Bengali) under costume related notes (Plate 1.), from the then writer Emily Eden's famous travel journal about her meeting with the king of Oudh in 1837 (the king was one of the characters in Ray's movie),

"The throne is gold, with its canopy and umbrella covered with cloth of gold, embroidered in pearls and small rubies. Our fat friend, the prince was dressed to match his throne".

Many designers depend on observation, photographing or meeting with people or society to be depicted in the film to know about their dressing styles. Presenting the characters belonging to certain class, caste, society or group in less than authentic way might create confusion, unacceptability or even irritability in the audience. In case the world to be created in the movie is totally an imagination of never existent period or people (e.g., the film *Love Story 2050** or roles of a ghost in *Bhoot** or a witch in *Makdi**), the challenge for designer is to create a look that seems believable and suitable for the specific make-believe scenario depicted.

The *'Mahurat'* shot

In Indian film industry traditionally all of the actual work on film, sometimes even final script development, occurs after the 'Muhurat' shot. This is a ceremony that is designed to announce the commencement of work on a particular project of film (Gahlot, 2005). This initial step has always been done in Indian industry as a religious ritual. Completion of this ceremony allows the producer to raise funds from various sources such as the selling of distribution rights in various territories. In fact it is also used as a platform to inform the required individuals about the kind of film it will turn out into. For costume designers, the relevance of this ceremony is to judge the feasibility, saleability and workability of a film concept. It is also an occasion to know about and meet the key members of a team.

Initial designs and images

Presentations and discussions happen during this stage in ways that depend on the working style of the designer and the prerequisites of the key members. Generally some kind of rough visual material in form of photographs, sketches or other costume design details need to be ready for presenting the intended look of costumes in the film. Assistant designer Sachin Sharma (worked as member of design-team for costume designer Manish Malhotra) stated that individuals who have come from theatrical backgrounds, fashion industry or training institutes are generally more comfortable with media like theme boards. However, Indian film industry has a wide range of entrants from different backgrounds, and many times designers face a panel in which members may not respond easily to these visual techniques preferring photographs over detailed sketches and a costume on dummy than on a hanger. For coming up with appropriate initial designs or 'look' of the period and society in which the story is set, needs to be analyzed for decisions on,

(i)   Fabrics available for making clothes in the defined period
(ii)   Clothing details that would be preferred by characters of the story

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* Title of a Hindi film

(iii)   Instances or occasions in the movie which could make an impact on the dresses
(iv)   Dressing up rules for specific individuals shown in the scenes

Thus the discussion on initial designs and images finally serves following purposes:

(i) Getting clarity regarding one basic vision on look of costumes which permeates throughout the movie, to plan the look of characters in the movie e.g., comic as in *Padosan*[*], raw as in *Lagaan*[*], stylized as in *Dhoom*[*] or realistic as in *Gandhi*[*]. Later fine tuning and decision-making for other things keeps happening throughout.

(ii) The director, producer, art director, or in some cases the actors give their feedback on what is initially presented to them. Going through this step smoothly, meant gaining approval from these personnel and maintaining an authority over the look of costumes.

Thus with the above four steps, it has been discussed as to how the designs and 'look' of the costumes is prepared in Hindi films. The part – II of this series will contain details on the final costume designing on the basis of film's costume classification and final budget.

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(v)   Wilkinson-Weber, Clare M., 'From commodities to costume: productive consumption in the making of Bollywood film looks', Journal of Material Culture, 15, (1), 2010, 1-28.

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[*] Title of a Hindi film