

Birth of Costume in Indian Cinematic World Part 3

By:

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Film making process can be divided into three stages namely: **Pre-production, Production and Post-production** (Bension, 2008). 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.

The creation process of costumes is being discussed in eleven steps, an introduction to which is available in part one whereas the costume designing portion is available in part two. The first four steps are discussed in part one. The matter has been presented through a series of three articles with last four steps discussed in this article.

[\[Click here to read Part One\]](#)

[\[Click here to read Part Two\]](#)

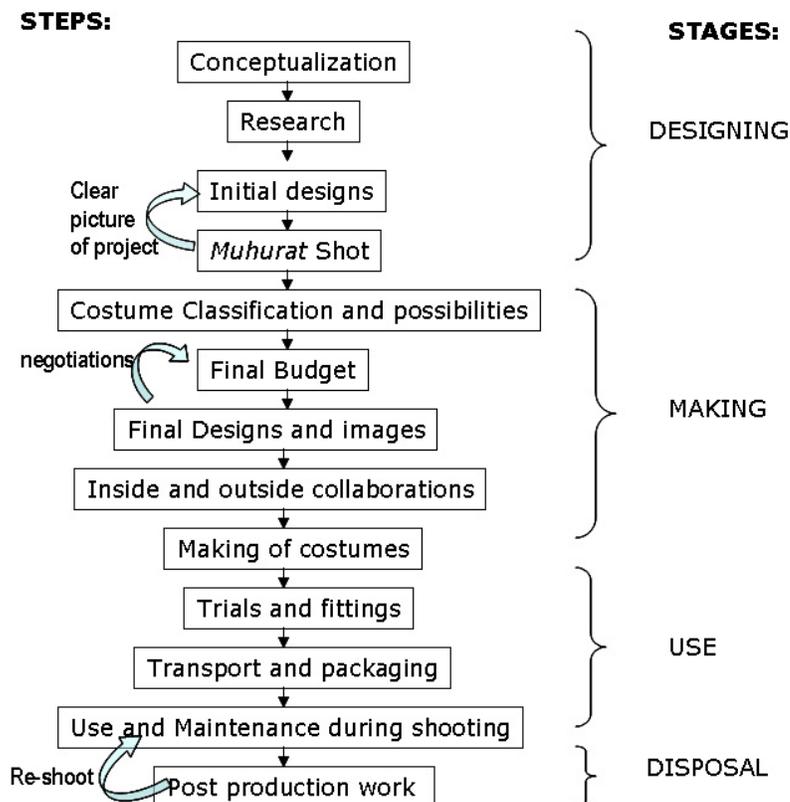


Figure 2: A flowchart of steps and stages of costuming process for Indian film industry

Inside and outside alliances

The way alliances are formed within Indian film industry are one of the most unique among its many peculiarities. The professionals, over a period of time spent in the film

industry, develop a loyal or like minded group of people with whom they can work the best. The costume designer gradually finds the tailors, pattern masters, design assistants or the accessory makers who can understand his/her design language and give the required performance. The production team assigns 'dressmen' to the designer in most of the films. The designer's assistants are mostly selected by the designer though in most cases paid for by production unit. The designer also forms links with some costume rental units for renting costumes and sometimes using its workshop and other resources. Recently the costume designers coming in from fashion industry also form working coordination with certain fashion houses. Certain garment export units in Mumbai like Sheetal fashion house were found to be working in close coordination with costuming individuals. These fashion houses baled out their junior designers, tailors and other personnel along with helping in the other jobs like fashion forecast information, embroidery work or even last moment supply of some ready dresses from the store or stock of the company. The designer is stated to be as good as the team members he can assemble or the links he/she forms with the right entities. There are also some sub-units for the peripheral jobs which might be separate businesses like the drycleaners, cloth merchants or printing units or some resources which need to be acquired from outside. Price negotiations and quality check are issues considered while making a long term link with certain agency or unit.

The designer also has the responsibility on behalf of the costume department to communicate and collaborate with members of other departments of film making. Film-making being a collaborative art, the full visual effect of the costumes on the screen will finally be achieved by the total efforts of director, art director, production designer, cinematographer or director of photography (DoP) along with the designer. Special attention needs to be given to the coordination with the make-up artist and hair-stylist. While observing the process during study, it seemed that the level of communication between heads of different dependent departments varied a lot from project to project. In many projects the DoP had no contact with the costume designer at all through out the making of the film and costume designer had no role in the way they were represented in the film. The light or effects used were decisions between DoP and the director. Whereas in some projects the director was playing a more authoritative role and taking keen interest in mutual harmony between members responsible for costumes, sets and light effects.

The art department is responsible for the general look of the film with the art director instructing the set designers, model builders, architectural designers, carpenters, plasterers, scenic artists and metal workers. There is a separate prop department for all the hand-held items. Mostly there is also a production designer (trend followed contemporarily) who is supervisor for art, location as well as prop department becoming the responsible head for overall look of the physical production characteristics. He indirectly gets a creative control over the costume, hair and make-up department too. In such projects it is very important for the designer to keep consulting the production designer.

Making and trial of costumes

As stated by veteran designer Leena Daru, the better the fit attained in the initial phases, more smoothly the rest of the process goes, without creating situations of costumes requiring to be re-done in a hurry at last stage. Hence initial measurement, sample making and trial sessions was stated to be a significant stage of costuming.

A. Measurements of actors

As stated by some designers, a fine fit can be achieved by getting recent, accurate and detailed measurements of the actor in designer's own presence rather than relying on the measurements provided by the secretaries especially for the lead actors, as their costumes require maximum finesse. The fittings should be done early enough to provide time for alterations and repurchases in the prime costumes required for next shooting.

B. Purchase of materials, costume pieces or accessories

The research about fabric types and other materials available in a particular market is done mostly by the designer's assistants except 'high-ticket items' (term used in industry parlance for designer goods and special made-to-order designs from high-end stores). Sometimes designer and director also move together to markets to search for the right options according to their vision about the final look. After working for a period of time the designer and other members develop individual chronology of steps to be followed for actual costume making process. Designers emphasized the fact that long term planning of the steps is simply impossible in the scenario of things which exist in the industry where nothing is stable but for changes. Still whatever assignment one has in hand, one has to prioritize things according to immediate requirement and paying attention to little details.

C. Preparation of costumes

The costumes are finally assembled, modified or originally prepared at this stage of the process. Looking at the conditions in most of the workshops, the backstage work of the development of dresses for the glamorous world of films is quite contrary to the environment it deserves considering the contribution of these dresses in the visual content of this mass medium. Tracking the making of costumes is executed at various degrees of perfection on the basis of interest and expertise of the



Plate 4. Pattern master at the workshop of Maganlal 'Dresswalla'

designer in this activity. It is an area more in control of the designer, where the efficiency and involvement of the designer is directly proportional to the outcome. Certain designers give instructions about most of the costumes to dressmen or assistant designers, who in turn get the outfits made, others spent a lot of time with pattern masters (Plate 4) in the workshops to personally see the progress of making of each piece of garment and intervene wherever required to make sure they get what they had designed on the paper.

The costumes for a film never go to the production as a full set or a complete collection of ensembles. Rather scene wise, partial set of costumes keep getting dispatched from the designer to the unit, as per the schedule. The schedule for incoming shooting days is generally distributed, a few days ahead, to the responsible personnel. Hence the designer has to get the costumes made in tune with the shooting process. As expressed by director Guddu Dhanoa, this aspect of the trade requires the designer to be strong in the vision, yet flexible in terms of the ideas.

D. Trials and alterations

According to critically acclaimed designer Shama Zaidi, the designer has to understand the characterization for the actor in the film and accordingly manipulate the decisions of the fit to enhance that look e.g., giving a shabby look to a careless kind of character by giving slightly loose fit and giving a glamorous look to a fashion conscious character by giving a trendy fit. Another factor is the costume designer's collaboration and rapport formation with the actors of a movie. Designers like national award winner Leena Daru feel that it is significant to win the trust of the actor regarding dress choices, and bring them to ease in what they wear. In practical situations their discomfort with the costumes can read many folds on the screen and cause large scale production loss in terms of the shooting time wasted on complains regarding the outfits. As critically acclaimed actress and debutant director Deepti Naval explained, costume can help an actor in getting the feel of a character. The identification with the role gets enhanced through appropriate costumes. Compatibility between costume and artist's perception of role can give confidence in portrayal of that role. This scenario can be achieved by the designer during trial sessions. A few designers were found to be using their sartorial expertise to find ways of highlighting certain appearance in the garment e.g., creatively manipulating traditional pattern making and stitching methods to generate an effect. Salim Arif, a noted designer and writer for theatre, television and cinema, stated that unlike theatre there are rarely any 'run-through' or 'dress-rehearsals' in cinema. Hence the fittings or trials are the only occasions for designer to locate problem areas in costume fittings.

E. Finishing of costumes for how they need to be represented

After the costumes have been checked for fit and altered, they need to be fine-tuned for them to embody the life of the character and make them look believable and appropriate to the scene-demands. As Burke and Cole (2005) describe, **Ageing** is a term used in costuming process to give a suitable treatment to the garment for taking its 'newness' off so that it does not look unused and newly made, rather it gives the appearance of an already used or 'lived-in' piece of clothing, with the degree and kind of use depending on the situation of the character depicted in the scene of the movie for which it will be used

(Plate 5). This activity is a very significant part of the final finish given to costumes for cinema.



Plate 5. The 'worn-in' look in a costume achieved through ageing process. Source: National School of Drama, Delhi

As stated by Ms. Shama Zaidi, it is a subtle work in most cases and when done appropriately, it is mostly imperceptible, but its absence or inappropriate handling can ruin the naturalness of a scene. In Indian film industry, it is many times carried out by the production assistants or assistant directors rather than the norm of aged costumes being sent ready from the designer's workshop. There are various methods used in industry for ageing of garments. These are individually created, modified and experimented with according to situation and requirement. This puts a demand to know about fabric type, garment style or extent of close-up required in the shots.

The common methods which lead to surface distortion are: washing, steaming, crumpling, sanding, tearing and breaking surface fibres by scrubbing. Those which involve a **change in colour** are: dyeing, painting, bleaching, staining, dirt/wax/oil/grease application. Some personnel use dilute solution of tea/coffee for white clothes. Sometimes a rag dipped in sand or mineral oil is rolled and directly applied on the costumes right on the sets. According to dressman Shaqeel Ahmed, glycerine is used

generally for the 'sweat' effect. Craft material obtained from art-stores is also used by a few designers.

Crayon or chalk-like items were considered as handy. For dark fabrics, rather than application colour bleaching is required. It is being done by subtle spray of bleach, keeping it and rinsing it after sometime to take the bleach off the costume to prevent rotting the garment. As stated by renowned cinematographer Ashok Mehta, sometimes acrylic paint is used without consideration of its visual suitability in front of the camera. It makes the fabric very rigid and the effect looks unreal on screen. Relevance of minute details in this regard is important. For some fighting scenes in the mud, one might even have to look at the real colour of the soil which is present in a place which is being shown in the movie or one might be required to match the colour of the soil which is shown on the set in the scene.

Renting costumes

Film industry in Mumbai is supported by a network of costume services that can speedily provide costumes on rent, cleaning and delivery services, fireproofing or dyeing

of the costumes. This was found to be an informally knit structure of resources and individuals who were aware of the peculiar requirements of this trade and could provide services in accordance. These ‘**dresswallas**’ were capable for supply of many of the orders for the costumes, altered and finished over the night for a good deal. Many fashion houses also provide garments on some charge or sometimes provide them to develop goodwill with the productions.

Each store has its own strengths and weaknesses and most of the large scale film productions draw on more than one rental store. Specialities of a store are also fluid entities, sometimes changing their products over a period of time. This demands the dressmen and designers to remain updated regarding these developments. This adds to the flexibility in their choices. Many of the small scale renting stores (Plate 6) do the sub-renting in case a particular set of items is not present with one store. Some leading stores who are part of fierce competition do not welcome this kind of exchanges. The rentals could be decided from project to project and were modified on the basis of requirement. The rent could be weekly, biweekly, monthly or sometimes ‘**production rental**’, in which case certain costumes are rented for the entire period for which the movie will remain under production. The rentals are also decided on the basis of the status, rarity and condition of the costume items (Table 4).



Plate 6. A small scale costume renting outlet in Mumbai

Table 4: Costume sorting criteria on basis of the practises in the renting outlets

Condition of costume	Way of Pricing of item	Belongingness of costume	Sizes
A Grade B Grade C Grade Rare items	Per-piece pricing items Full-outfit pricing set	Regional details (country, state etc.) Culture, religion specific details Profession or community-role	Child sizes Adult size Further sorting according to item like shoe-sizes or shirt sizes

Most owners at the famous ‘dresswallas’ stores like Maganlal, Gem and Patel know many of the production staff members of major banners since many years. They are also open to making deals like full volume rentals or package deals under an overall rate. All

the 'dresswallas' price their costume stock and make deals in their own peculiar ways and on the basis of relations with the production, situations on-the-spot. This makes them unable as well as reluctant to quote any standard prices for the rentals. To get big contracts, they are ready to accommodate difficult production orders. Some keep links with the freelance-crafts people for certain tasks like tailoring, pattern making and for situations when work is more. The big stores have their own well equipped workshops with all kind of specialists like *pagdimaster*, armour expert, muscle suit maker. A tendency of having certain members who have a skill for 3-4 tasks was found at some places so that workers and craftsmen could be flexibly moved to different tasks according to the project demands.

Packaging and transport

In the life-cycle of the costume, it goes next in the hands of production team after being made and delivered by designing team. In Indian scenario, as costumes get handed over to the production team, designer's control over its further use and representation decreases unless previously decided. Hence it is required to pack the costumes properly along with giving the required labelling and instructions.

A. Packing and labels

The details of the costumes to be included on the label are,

- (i) The name of the film
- (ii) The scene number to which the costume belongs
- (iii) The actor's name who will put it on
- (iv) The number and description of all the items included in the ensemble

Some designers give 'wardrobe care and 'maintenance instructions' to the dressmen or inputs regarding the dressing up. The instructions need to be simple to comprehend, as the technical clothing terminology may not be known to the other personnel. If there are more than one designers working for the same film, which is many times a case in Indian films, any clashes between costumes to be present in the same scene are checked at this time.

B. Handing over, keeping and transport of costumes

The costumes are picked up from the designer's place mostly by the dressman and transported to the shooting place in the private vehicles hired by the unit or the big trailers used for transport of filming stock or via the personal vans used by the leading actors to come and stay on the shooting spot during shooting.

Thus through these stages and steps, the costumes take their final form, ready to be utilised in the process of film making for which they have been created and would probably go on to inspire and fascinate large population in and outside the country. In all it can be said that this Channel for clothing construction i.e., environment of Indian cinematic world, certainly is very different from the usual one and this has its own impact on the resultant dresses or costumes since in this form they are 'commodity for consumption within another process' as appropriately described by Weber (2010) while writing about her research on costume as commodity. Such scientific documentation and back stage perspective of conception to execution steps in costume making is a must in the contemporary scenario.

For one, it will fill the lacuna existing in work on Indian specificities surrounding production techniques in film making specially processes related to visual aspects. Secondly, this will generate a platform to further analyse and solve practical problems of the process with a diagnostic outlook rather than in form of reviews and general reflections on certain designers and costumes in films.

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