



Hindi Cinema Costumes of Female Icons: Historical Recorder and Cultural Commentator

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1. Abstract

The sartorial landscape of Hindi cinema has functioned as a dynamic visual lexicon, intricately shaping and reflecting the evolving cultural ethos, aesthetic sensibilities, and changing societal perceptions within Indian society. The interplay between cinematic fashion and mass fashion underscores the medium's agency in both reflecting and dictating aesthetic and ideological discourses. As Hindi cinema commemorated its centennial milestone in 2013 since its inception in 1913, its enduring impact on fashion and icon creations continues to be celebrated across diverse platforms, including academic conferences, televised retrospectives, philatelic releases, and archival publications. The mega Indian cinema celebration was followed by RK's 100-year event just celebrated in Bombay. This research paper focused on the Hindi cinema's costume influence on females from different decades, setting beauty standards e.g. With economic liberalization, Hindi cinema witnessed the integration of global fashion brands into costume design, exemplified in films like *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*. The activewear aesthetics in *Mohabbatein* and *Dil To Pagal Hai* popularized the image of fit, bold, and independent women, influencing contemporary fashion trends. The research tried to explore the female fashion icons of different eras and beauty standards and articulated the sartorial behaviour inspired by these Hindi cinema icons from different eras in the past 100 years. This study adopted a qualitative research approach using the case study method to analyze the role of stylists and costume designers in shaping female characters and eventually visual storytelling in Hindi cinema. The study was based on qualitative research of Hindi mainstream films, interviews

with industry professionals, and case studies of films that showcase the influence on sartorial behaviour of female youth of the era and set the society's aesthetics of that era. The study spans 100 years and is segmented into seven distinct eras, with iconic cinematic looks identified through a card-sorting process and finalized using focus group discussions. Content analysis was employed to examine interviews, focus group discussions, newspaper articles, social media discourse, and other textual sources relevant to the research. Additionally, narrative analysis was used to interpret personal accounts, professional insights, and historical perspectives from film artists, costume designers, stylists, and cinema enthusiasts. The result showed an amalgamation of geopolitical forces, cultural events, and fashion trends in the creation of cinematic iconic looks that hold mass appeal, making them signature styles that impacted the sartorial choices of female youth of the era.

Keywords: hindi cinema, costume designer, fashion styling, beauty standards, female.

2. Introduction

Costumes in Hindi cinema are more than just fashion statements; they are vital components in the construction of identity, characterization, and cultural representation. By analyzing costumes in Hindi cinema, we can gain a deeper understanding of India's changing social norms, historical events, and cultural nuances (Aarzo & Lal, 2026a).

The historical and cultural significance of Hindi cinema costumes can be understood through several dimensions (Sarkar & Lal, 2023). Firstly, they act as a reflection of the period in which a film is set, encapsulating the prevailing societal conditions, fashion trends, and political climate (Aarzo & Lal, 2026b). Secondly, they provide insights into the cultural commentary of filmmakers who use costumes to express ideas about tradition, modernity, or identity (Singh et al., 2022). Through the intricate study of costume design, it becomes clear that these elements are not mere accessories but integral to the storytelling process.

The costumes in Hindi cinema, unlike any other film industry worldwide, are an essential element in communicating the story and emotions of the characters (Deb et al., 2026). Apart from the story of characters they also influence fashion trends, comment on shifting values of our society and record the visual culture of an era (Saika et al., 2021). Costumes in *Padmavat* or *Lagaan* carried more significance

than just aesthetic appeal. Hindi cinema costumes such as *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, *Mother India*, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* type movies serve as historical recorders and cultural commentators, offering insights into India's socio-political landscape, regional identities, and evolving traditions (Lal and Sharma, 2021). This research paper explores the pivotal role of costumes in Hindi cinema as reflections of history, culture, and societal shifts in visual culture by examining iconic costumes across eras, this paper outlines how the choices of attire of masses have transformed in response to narratives, idols of cinema and trends (Lal & Aarzo, 2026b). Additionally, it delves into how Hindi cinema costumes shape and challenge public perception, reinforcing or questioning cultural ideologies. In doing so, the paper emphasizes the profound connection between cinema, costume design, and the broader socio-cultural and historical fabric of India (Lal & Aarzo, 2026a). The research tried to explore the female fashion icons of different eras and beauty standards and articulated the sartorial behaviour inspired by these Hindi cinema icons from different eras in the past 100 years.

3. Review of Literature

Role of Costume Designers in Hindi Cinema

Costume designers are integral to filmmaking, as they work closely with directors, scriptwriters, and production designers to craft a character's look. Their responsibilities include: Ensuring costumes align with the time period and cultural background e.g. Bhanu Athaiya's work in *Lagaan* (2001) brought authenticity to the pre-independence era designing looks that reflects character's evolution e.g. the lead actresses in *Maine Pyar Kiya* or *DDLJ* (*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*). In both the movies the characters organically evolved with the evolution of story without standing apart from the background at the same time they created fashion statement. Collaborating with directors to maintain thematic consistency and creating bespoke costumes tailored for specific characters.

A costume stylist enhances the on-screen appearance of actors and models through wardrobe, hair, and accessory styling in theatre, television, and cinema. A costume stylist creates character looks by designing or sourcing costumes that reflect personalities in the script (Kumar & Lal, 2023). They collaborate with the director and other designers to ensure costumes integrate smoothly into the

production.

Costume designers start by reading the script and researching fashion if set in a historical era. They present rough sketches during initial meetings to stimulate ideas (Rahman et al., 2024). The designer is responsible for creating a costume plot, detailing characters looks in each scene. After approval of preliminary sketches, final designs are created in full color, showcasing style, silhouette, textures, and unique features (Tulshyan and Zatakia 2012).

Costume Styling in mainstream Hindi Cinema

Film writer Rachel Dwyer notes that D.G. Phalke, director of India's first entirely Indian film "Raja Harishchandra" (1913), drew inspiration from various sources, including modern Indian art, chromolithography, religious processions, folk, urban theatre, and foreign cinema. This diverse approach formed a new hybrid style that became the norm.

Costume stylist in shaping the characters

The design of costumes, hair, and makeup begins with character sketches in the writer's mind. Similar to planning camera placement and set composition, every detail of a character's look, including clothing, makeup, hair, & accessories is meticulously pre-planned to create a strong first impression in a film (Loop 2020). Few known fashion stylists over the years are, Bhanu Athaiya, Shahab Durazi, Neeta Lulla, Manish Malhotra, Rocky S, Abu Jani & Sandeep Khosla, Niharika Khan, Karan Johar, Riya Kapoor, and Rohit Chaturvedi. **Classical method of costume designing by the maestros** (*Birth of Costume in Indian Cinematic World Fibre2Fashion*)

Costuming is the process of designing, creating, and employing wardrobe for characters in cinema or other media productions (Lal, 2023). It encompasses all activities related to supplying appropriate ensemble for the actors. Costuming as a technique entails predominantly artistic endeavours during the design phase, while the production phase emphasizes craftsmanship. The endeavour to delineate the costuming process resulted in the creation of a fundamental flowchart (see Figure 1) of the procedure. Figure 1: A flowchart delineating the phases and stages of the costuming process for the Indian film industry. The process of costume design in Hindi cinema is a precise fusion of artistic vision and skill, significantly influencing a film's visual narrative (Lal & Aarzoo, 2026c). The article "Birth of Costume in Indian Cinematic World" on Fibre2Fashion states that the evolution of costumes entails a systematic procedure commencing with a comprehensive analysis of the screenplay to guarantee coherence between the director's vision and the costume designer's

interpretation. The efficacy of this procedure is contingent upon the existence of a finalized script prior to production, as highlighted by filmmaker Muzaffar Ali, who advocates the director's authoritative role in maintaining the script's authenticity (Aarzo & Lal,, 2026c).

Figure 1 A flowchart delineating the phases and stages of the costuming process for the Indian films.

Script readings and collaborative conversations among creative stakeholders, such as the art director and production designer, enhance the refinement of clothing elements; nonetheless, these meetings are frequently insufficient, resulting in last-minute modifications (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025a). Moreover, research is a crucial component of costume design, especially for period films, where historical accuracy is vital yet often difficult to achieve due to insufficient data. Filmmaker Satyajit Ray had significant challenges during the production of *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, utilizing trip journals and personal notes to accurately reconstruct period clothes. The study emphasizes the significance of a methodical approach to costuming, wherein inventiveness and historical knowledge enhance the authenticity and visual narrative of Indian cinema.

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

Table 1 Vision transfer through script	
Director with authoritative role	Director accepting low quality scripts
Well written, detailed and complete script 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

The degree of research in a Satyajee Ray movie:

During the production of the film *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, he documented several lines in his *Kheror Khata*, a Bengali name for notepad, pertaining to costume-related notes (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025c). These lines were extracted from the esteemed travel journal of Emily Eden, chronicling her meeting with the ruler of Oudh in 1837, a figure depicted in Ray's film.



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

There are different research questions in this research, what is the thought process behind creating costumes for mainstream female icons in Hindi cinema. What is the way the female icons influence normal females in society. How do costume designers contribute to the formation of cinematic idols and their broader cultural impact on the masses. How does mainstream Hindi cinema-inspired sartorial behavior among female youth contribute to the establishment of beauty standards.

4. Objective

To study costume of female icons of Hindi cinema and its impact as cultural commentator and historical recorder.

5. Research Methodology

The research paper is divided into three major sections, each exploring and analyzing how Hindi cinema costumes continue to shape and influence our society's cultural landscape. (I) The first section provides a historical overview of Hindi cinema costumes from the last 100 years (from 1913 to 2013), illustrating important trends and icons of the era (Aarzoo & Lal, 2025b). (II) The second section delves into the role of costumes as cultural commentators, focusing on the depiction of female characters and important sartorial trends of the era. (III) Finally third

part will explore the role of costume designers in the history of the sartorial culture of society. The study is based on qualitative research, including content analysis of Bollywood films and narrative analysis of interviews with industry professionals, and case studies of films that showcase significant differences between character-driven costume design and star-driven styling (Singh et al., 2021).

Sampling Techniques: To select the film from different era's, non-probability purposive and judgmental sampling techniques was used.

Data Collection

Secondary Data using purposive and judgmental sampling

- Film Analysis: Movies in which costume played important roles were watched again and again.
- Movies where the line between styling and costume design is blurred were reviewed.
- The character arc and costume transitions in different Hindi cinema were reviewed.
- Industry Reports & Academic Literature were also collected for analysis.
- Magazine articles online and offline by some well-known film critics and designers, published books, interviews, and trade reports were also referred.

Primary Data

Movies were selected where costume designers played a major role

5.1. Historical Overview of Hindi Cinema Costumes

Costume stylist- The term costume can refer to wardrobe and dress in general, or to the distinctive style of dress of a particular people, class, or period. When we talk about costumes, there are three P's attached to them.

- People
- Place
- Period

One of the more prominent places people see costumes is in theatre, film and television. In combination with other aspects, theatrical costumes help actors portray characters' age, gender role, profession, social class, personality, and even information about the historical period/era, geographic location and time of day, as well as the season or weather of the theatrical

performance (Jaglan and Sharma 2022).

A costume stylist is a creative professional who defines and helps improve the on-screen appearance of actors and models through wardrobe styling, hair styling, and accessory styling in theatre, television and cinema (Pantanella 2022). A Costume designer creates the look of each character by designing clothes and accessories the actors will wear during a performance. Depending on their style and complexity, costumes may be made, bought, revamped out of existing stock or rented. Their designs need to faithfully reflect the personalities of the characters in the script. The shapes, colours and textures that a costume designer chooses, make an immediate and powerful visual statement to the audience (Rahman et al., 2022). Creative collaboration among the costume designer, the director and the set and lighting designers ensures that the costumes are smoothly integrated into the production as a whole.

Costume designers begin their work by reading the script to be produced. If the production is set in a specific historical era, the fashions of this period will need to be researched (Aarzo and Lal, 2025). To stimulate the flow of ideas at the first meeting with the director and the designer, the costume designer may want to present a few rough costume sketches.

It is the costume designer's responsibility to draw up the costume plot (Mane and Lal, 2021). The costume plot is a list or chart that shows which characters appear in each scene, what they are wearing and their overall movement throughout the play. When the director and production team have approved the costume designer's preliminary sketches, she or he can draw up the final costume designs. The final designs are done in full colour. They show the style, silhouette, textures, accessories and unique features of each costume (Tulshyan and Zatakia 2012).

Costume Styling in mainstream Hindi Cinema

According to film writer Rachel Dwyer, to dress the character in his films, D.G. Phalke, the director of the first entirely Indian film (*Raja Harishchandra*, 1913) drew inspiration from a wide range of regimes and visual cultures including the emerging modern "Indian" art, chromolithography, religious processions and performance, folk and urban theatre, and foreign cinema. This new hybrid created by Phalke became the normal.

The first costume stylist of Hindi cinema

So what were reference points even before the emergence of the first costume designers in India Cinema? Devika Rani Chaudhuri, regarded as the first lady of Indian Cinema, started her career by assisting in costume design and art direction for this film. The grand-niece of Rabindranath

Tagore, Devika Rani studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and Royal Academy of Music. She also studied textile design and architecture.

Costume stylists in shaping the characters

The conceptualization of costumes, hair make up etc. starts as soon as the characters are sketched in the writer's thought. Just as there is careful planning for the placement of the camera, the composition of the set, the frame and direction of lights; what the characters are dressed. How they are going to look, their makeup their hair, their accessories everything is pre-planned and even more carefully considered for their first appearance in a film to make a mark (Loop 2020). Mainstream 100 Years (1913-2013) Hindi Cinema is divided into 7 different eras. i. Birth of Hindi Cinema (1913 to 1930)

- ii. Starts Speaking (1931- 1940)
 - iii. Teething Troubles (1941-1955)
 - iv. The Golden Era (1956- 1968)
 - v. Renamed Bollywood (1969- 1980)
 - vi. The New Millennium (1981 to 1990)
 - vii. The age of new sincerity (1991 to 2013)
- (Rishi Tilak 2012)

i. Birth of Hindi Cinema (1913–1930)

Hindi cinema, like the rest of the world, began its journey during a time of rapid social and political changes. The early years of Indian cinema were dominated by silent films, with Raja Harishchandra (1913) being the first feature film made in India. The costumes were majorly decided by Dada Saheb Phalke so it can be concluded that Dada Saheb is the first costume Designer in Indian films. During this period, films largely focused on mythological and historical themes. Costumes in these early films were heavily influenced by the prevalent theatrical traditions and the socio-political environment of colonial India (Jain et al., 2023). Filmmakers and costume designers had theatre companies as the major source for costumes, later these theatre companies made their warehouses and emerged the term dresswalas. The costumes in the movies Kaliya Mardan (1919) Shakuntala (1920), and Prem Sanyas were either simple or extravagant but were designed or sourced indicative of the character's social standing or role in the narrative. **ii. Starts Speaking (1931- 1940)**

The 1930s was a transformative decade for Indian cinema, marked by the advent of sound films and the emergence of several predominant genres. During the 1930s, the costume design began to evolve. The rise of talkies introduced a new era in Indian cinema, and films like *Achut Kanya* (1936) and *Devdasi* (1931) based on social issues and reforms showcased costumes that represented the cultural and political mood of the time.

iii. Teething Troubles (1941-1955)

In the years of World War II and the struggle for independence, Bollywood fashion was modest, understated and formal. Most movies were shot in rural settings, with the men clad in dhotis and women in ghagra-cholis. The colonial influence was still visible in costumes, with characters often dressed in Western-style clothing, such as suits and gowns, for the elite, while traditional attire like dhotis, sarees, and turbans was used for the common people. After India gained independence in 1947, there was a significant shift in the country's socio-political environment. The nation sought to define itself as modern, progressive, and free from colonial influence. This transformation was reflected in the fashion and costume designs in Hindi cinema. The films of this period saw a stark contrast in attire depending on the character's background, with urban elites wearing Western-style suits, dresses, and coats, while rural characters were depicted in traditional clothing like khadi, dhotis, and sarees.

iv. The Golden Era (1956- 1968)

Pioneering Filmmakers like Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt shaped Bollywood with films addressing social issues and providing entertainment. Costume designers like Bhanu Athaiya and Dolly Ahluwalia became pioneers in the industry, creating attire that was both historically accurate and reflective of contemporary trends.

v. Renamed Bollywood (1969- 1980)

The era witnessed the rise of glamorous, larger-than-life depictions of characters, where costume design took on a more commercialized, high-fashion role. Bollywood's focus shifted to larger-than-life storytelling, with characters wearing extravagant, sometimes exaggerated, costumes. This era saw the introduction of star culture, and the costumes worn by film stars became symbolic of their on-screen persona and their celebrity status.

vi. The New Millennium (1981 to 1990)

This was the Era of Glamour and Globalization. The 1980s also saw the rise of action-packed

blockbusters which featured iconic characters dressed in distinctive costumes. In the 1990s, costumes began to represent more globalized and modern elements, with characters wearing designer outfits and adopting international fashion trends. Bhanu Athaiya's work in films like *Lagaan*(2001) and *Gandhi*(1982) helped cement her legacy as a designer who used costumes as an artistic and narrative tool.

vii. The age of new sincerity (1991to 2013)

The Y2K & New Millennium was the era of New Trends and Cultural representation with Global becoming the new global trend. Globalization, technological advancements, and increased access to international fashion trends brought a new wave of costume design. With the advent of the 21st century, Hindi cinema costumes underwent a significant transformation. Films like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Ghamand & Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) showcased costumes that were aspirational and modern, yet deeply rooted in traditional Indian culture bringing new sincerity to a modern trend. In the past two decades, historical epics like *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) have introduced elaborate costumes that reflect Indian royal and imperial history. These films have placed significant emphasis on historical accuracy in costume design, using rich fabrics, intricate embroidery, and regal accessories to bring historical figures to life.

5. II. costumes focusing on the depiction of female characters and important sartorial trends of the era.

The depiction of women in films has historically been tied to traditional notions of femininity, with costumes often reinforcing the roles of women as nurturing, modest, and dependent. Early Bollywood heroines were often seen wearing elaborate sarees, representing their cultural ties and societal roles. The portrayal of women as graceful, maternal figures was central to the costume choices in the golden era of Hindi cinema. However, as Hindi cinema evolved, so did its representation of gender. In the 1970s and 1980s, the advent of the modern woman in films like *Chupke Chupke* (1975) and *Pyaasa* (1957) led to more contemporary and fashionable costumes, reflecting the changing roles of women in society. The costumes of actresses like Rekha and Hema Malini became symbols of the changing dynamics of gender roles — from the traditional homemaker to a more independent and fashionable woman. The contemporary era of Hindi cinema, with its diverse array of genres and characters, has further expanded gender expression. In films like *Queen*(2013) and *Piku* (2015), the costumes reflect the individuality of the characters, breaking free from stereotypical representations of femininity. Moreover, costume

designers are increasingly using clothing to signify empowerment and independence, especially in characters who challenge societal norms.

Table 2: 100 years analysis of Movies , icons and trends and cultural reflection in different era's

Name of era	Films	Popular Trends and icons	Cultural reflections	Costume designers or costume styled by
Birth of Hindi Cinema (1913 to 1930)	Raja Harischandra	Traditional Indian clothing	Mythological and Historical themes.	Dada Saheb Phalke
	Lanka Dahan	Theatrical Extravagance	Gender Representation Through Costume	V.
	Shakuntala	Divine or royal clothing and jewelries	International collaborations	Shantaram
	Rani Saheba	Icons: Ruby Myers, Zubeidaa, Sultan and Patience kapoor	Influence of Royalties on Hindi Cinema	Sita Devi
	Thunder of the hills			Zubaiedaa
	Light of Asia			
	Throw of dice			

Starts Speaking (1931- 1940)	Alam Ara Achhut Kanya Devdas Hunterwali Street singer	Traditional Indian clothing Mythological and Historical costumes Influence of theatre costumes Influence of western elements Icons: Devika Rani. Leela Chitnis, Zubeidaa	Political Indian mirrored the hybrid identities of colonial India. Impact-cinema Communal tensions Swadeshi movement Social Reforms Regional influences	Devika Rani H,K. Khosla Anjan Rawail
Teething Troubles (1941-1955)	Aan Anokhi Ada Mela Andaaz Shree 420 Awaara	Emergence of parallel cinema Social realism by Bangla Directors Swadeshi clothing Influence of understated modest European styles	Social realism were shown in Bangla films Patriotic films and Swadeshi movements Post Indian independence hope where reflected in R.k films	Bhanu Athaiya C.G.Hanuman Om Prakash Mehra

The Golden Era (1956-1968)	Mughal-e-azam	Artistic excellence	Social and nationalistic issues	Alla Ditta
	Mother India(1957)	Timeless Classics	communicated socio economic status,	Mani.j. Rabadi
	Waqt	Social themes	aspirations, and backgrounds	Fazal Din
	Guide	Artistic innovation		Bhanu Athaiya
	Pyasa	Emergence of star	Emergence of stars and icons in society	
	Navrang		Shift towards commercialism	

Renamed Bollywood (1969- 1980)	Aradhna Roti, Kapda Aur Makaan Ragnigandha Sholay Don Satyam Shivam Sundaram	Fashion icons and followers Rebellious elements Western Sub cultural influences Bold female icons Lot of prints, bold colors, pattern accessories overdo Middle class looks sarees and suits	Fully entertainment oriented Glamour, Globalization, and the Rise of Super Star Culture Emergence of middle class	Mani RABADI R, Vaidya Bhanu Athaiya Vishn Vellar Shankar Gokhle Leena Daru
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The New Millennium (1981 to 1990)	Disco dancer	Masala era of	Emergence of fashion designers and schools	Madhav Agasti
	Mr. India	Bollywood Disco		Uma
	Chandani	styling	Age of over consumption	Chopra
	Nagina	Over the top styling		Neeta
	Maine Pyar Kiya	Power Dressing	Totally copying of western glamour	Lulla
		Western designer garments	Traditional	Bhanu Athaiya
		Locally designed traditional ethnic wear		Anna singh Sujata
		Casual sportswear and street wear		Bakshi
		Traditional sarees in modern fabrics		Leena Daru
		Street vendors , rough and unpolished looks		

The age of new sincerity (1991to 2013)	Rangeela	Postmodernism, Globalization, and Historical	Post-liberalization Y2K	Manish Malhotra
	Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge	Youth fashion	Cultural fusion reflected the growing desire for modernization and global integration, yet it also signified a	Neeta Lulla
	Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham	Global appeal	Struggle to retain the essence of Indian culture.	Abu jani & Sandeep
	Kuch kuch hota hai	Cultural fusion		Khosla Aki
	Fashion	Casual Chic indo western wardrobes		Narula
	Huma Aapke Hain Kaun	Modern ethnics-Easy to wear	Modern icons and mass appeal	Nita Dhody
	Hum dil de chuke sanam	Haute Couture		Narendra Kumar Ahmad
	Mohabbatein	Emergence of celebrity stylists	New age digital technologies	Anamika Khanna
	Kaho na pyar hai Tashan	costume distinctions	Age of consciousness for social causes	Sabyasachi Mukhrjee
	Peepli Live	Simple, rustic clothing highlighted rural poverty		Anna Singh
				Sabiha khan
				Arjun Bhasin
				Anaita Shroff Adjaniya

				Niharika Khan
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The birth of Hindi cinema (1913–1930)

This era was deeply influenced by costume designers who shaped its sartorial culture, particularly for female looks. Traditional Indian clothing, such as sarees with elaborate draping, ghagras, and embroidered blouses, dominated early films like *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) and *Lanka Dahan* (1917). Theatrical extravagance flourished, with ornate costumes seen in *Shakuntala* (1920) and *Rani Saheba*. Films featuring divine or royal themes, such as *Light of Asia* (1925) and *Throw of Dice* (1929), showcased heavy jewellery, silk fabrics, and elaborate headdresses. Icons like Ruby Myers, Zubeidaa, and Sita Devi embodied these styles, while pioneers like Dadasaheb Phalke and V. Shantaram shaped early cinematic aesthetics.

Hindi Cinema Started Speaking (1931–1940)

With the advent of sound, Hindi cinema (1931–1940) saw costume designers redefine sartorial culture. *Alam Ara* (1931) introduced lavish historical and mythological costumes, while films like *Achhut Kanya* (1936) emphasized traditional Indian attire, reflecting social issues. *Devdas* (1935) popularized regal sarees and Bengali aesthetics, whereas *Hunterwali* (1935) broke norms with its Western-inspired stuntwoman look. Theatre's influence remained strong, with exaggerated period costumes in *Street Singer* (1938). Political currents—Swadeshi movement, communal tensions, and social reforms—shaped fashion choices, blending colonial and indigenous styles. Icons like Devika Rani, Leela Chitnis, and Zubeidaa embodied these shifts, with designers like H.K. Khosla and Anjan Rawail pioneering cinematic costume artistry.

Teething Troubles (1941-1955)

Between 1941 and 1955, Hindi cinema's female costumes reflected India's geopolitical shifts, blending tradition with modernity. Actresses like Nargis (*Awaara*, *Shree 420*) popularized Swadeshi sarees, symbolizing nationalism, while Nimmi (*Aan*) and Meena Kumari (*Anokhi Ada*) embraced regal, embroidered outfits reflecting cultural pride. *Andaaz* (1949) introduced modest European silhouettes, mirroring Western influence. Bengali cinema's social realism, seen in *Mela* (1948), depicted rural simplicity through handloom sarees. Designers like Bhanu Athaiya, C.G. Hanuman, and Om Prakash Mehra crafted styles that influenced everyday fashion, shaping women's choices in post-independence India by merging patriotic sentiment with emerging global aesthetics.

The Golden Era (1956- 1968)

During the Golden Era of Hindi cinema (1956–1968), female costumes played a pivotal role in reflecting India's geopolitical and socio-economic transformations. Films such as *Mother India* (1957) employed rustic sarees to symbolize agrarian resilience, while *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) revived India's royal past through Madhubala's opulent Anarkalis. *Waqt* (1965) and *Guide* (1965) introduced chiffon sarees and Western influences, mirroring rising urban aspirations. Social realism in *Pyaasa* (1957) and artistic innovation in *Navrang* (1959) further shaped sartorial trends. Costume designers Bhanu Athaiya, Alla Ditta, Mani J. Rabadi, and Fazal Din significantly influenced public fashion, marking a shift towards commercialism and the rise of cinematic icons.

Renamed Bollywood (1969- 1980)

Between 1969 and 1980, the sartorial culture of Indian society, as shaped by Hindi cinema, served as a reflection of the nation's geopolitical transformations, the effects of globalization, and shifting gender paradigms. Films such as *Aradhana* (1969) and *Roti, Kapda Aur Makaaan* (1974) reinforced middle-class sensibilities through the depiction of sarees and salwar suits, while *Sholay* (1975) and *Don* (1978) introduced Western subcultural influences, reflecting growing urbanization and global interconnectedness. *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978) challenged conventional modesty through bold, experimental costuming. Renowned designers, including Bhanu Athaiya, Mani Rabadi, and Vishn Vellar, significantly shaped mass fashion trends, bridging traditional aesthetics with emerging global styles. The rise of cinematic superstars and entertainment-centric narratives further cemented the film industry's role in defining aspirational fashion and cultural identity.

The New Millennium (1981 to 1990)

The sartorial culture of India between 1980 and 1990, as shaped by the costumes of female icons in Hindi cinema, was a direct reflection of the nation's evolving geopolitical and socio-economic landscape. This period witnessed increasing globalization, economic liberalization, and the expansion of consumer culture, all of which significantly influenced cinematic fashion. Prominent actresses such as Sridevi (*Chandni, Nagina*), Madhuri Dixit (*Tezaab*), and Rekha (*Khoon Bhari Maang*) emerged as style icons, embodying a blend of traditional and contemporary fashion sensibilities. The disco movement, exemplified by *Disco Dancer* (1982), introduced

extravagant, Western-inspired garments characterized by sequined fabrics, bold color palettes, and structured silhouettes. Concurrently, films such as *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) popularized casual streetwear and athleisure, mirroring the aspirations of India's burgeoning middle class. The modernization of ethnic attire, particularly through Sridevi's iconic chiffon sarees in *Chandni* (1989), signified a fusion of heritage and modernity. Renowned costume designers, including Bhanu Athaiya, Neeta Lulla, and Mickey Contractor, played a pivotal role in crafting these sartorial narratives, profoundly influencing mainstream fashion and shaping public perceptions of style across various socio-economic strata.

The age of new sincerity (1991 to 2013)

The sartorial culture of India from 1990 to 2013, shaped by the female icons of Hindi cinema, was deeply influenced by the nation's geopolitical transformations, economic liberalization, and increasing globalization. The early 1990s marked a transitional phase, as economic reforms facilitated exposure to Western fashion while retaining traditional aesthetics. Madhuri Dixit's iconic purple saree in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* (1994) and Kajol's pastel lehengas in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) reinforced the relevance of traditional attire within an evolving socio-economic framework. The 2000s saw a pronounced shift towards Westernized ensembles, exemplified by Preity Zinta's Indo-Western fusion in *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003) and Kareena Kapoor's trendsetting "Poo" look in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), which introduced body-conscious silhouettes and luxury fashion brands. By the late 2000s and early 2010s, actresses such as Priyanka Chopra (*Dostana*, 2008) and Deepika Padukone (*Cocktail*, 2012) popularized contemporary urban fashion, reflecting India's increasing integration into global consumer culture. Renowned costume designers, including Manish Malhotra, Neeta Lulla, Ritu Kumar, and Sabyasachi Mukherjee, played a pivotal role in shaping these evolving sartorial narratives. Their work blended heritage craftsmanship with modern silhouettes, directly influencing mainstream fashion trends and reinforcing Hindi cinema's role as a primary driver of aspirational dressing in Indian society.

5. III. Role of costume designers in the creation of sartorial culture

Hindi cinema has created a sartorial culture amongst the masses offering subtle or overt commentary on India's social stratification. In earlier films, the costume choices for characters from lower socio-economic backgrounds were marked by simplicity — drab and unadorned clothing to signify poverty. On the other hand, upper-class characters were adorned in rich fabrics

and designer labels, signalling wealth and privilege. Which in turn was influenced by the contemporary geopolitical atmospheres of the era? Sometimes Hindi cinema worked as a mirror to society and in a subtle way hints about the repercussions of some trends such as during globalization when Indian youth started becoming slaves to fashion brands that mainly catering synthetic, polyester blends and plastics the era of organic, new modernity or new sincerity entered. Costumes in Hindi cinema also reflect the divisions of class and caste.

Analysis and Discussion

Costumes in Hindi cinema serve as more than mere aesthetic accessories; they are historical records and cultural commentators that offer a window into the social, political, and cultural changes and valuable insights into India's ever-evolving social, political, and cultural landscape. From the company era to the present day, costumes have played an integral role in defining the identities and social realities of characters, while also offering a visual commentary on the values and ideologies that dominate society at any given time. Through costume design, Hindi cinema reflects not only the beauty of the country's rich cultural heritage but also reveals the anxieties and aspirations of its people. Costume design has always played a pivotal role in portraying historical events, shaping the public image of iconic characters, and commenting on the changing landscape of Indian society. A closer examination of Hindi cinema costumes helps decode the social, political, and historical currents that shape the identities represented on screen. Through costumes, Hindi cinema mirrors the complex negotiations between tradition and modernity, local culture and global influences, and social class and gender identity. The future of costume design in Hindi cinema will undoubtedly continue to reflect and shape the dynamic cultural and historical forces at play in India.

The synthesis of tradition and modernity constitutes a fundamental characteristic of costume design in Hindi cinema, particularly in the post-independence era. Filmmakers and costume designers have consistently navigated the intricate balance between preserving India's rich cultural heritage and assimilating global fashion influences. This fusion is particularly prominent in films that explore themes of cultural transformation, identity, and modernity, exemplified by *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001).

In these films, traditional attire such as sarees, lehengas, and kurtas is strategically juxtaposed

with Western-style suits, dresses, and casual wear, symbolizing the characters' negotiation between conventional values and contemporary aspirations. The meticulously curated costumes serve as visual markers of both internal and external conflicts, reflecting the complexities of reconciling traditional cultural norms with evolving modern lifestyles.

Conclusion

This research analyzed costume of female icons of Hindi cinema as historical overview of Hindi cinema costumes from the last 100 years (from 1913 to 2013), the role of costumes as cultural commentators, focusing on the depiction of female characters and important sartorial trends of the era and explored the role of costume designers in the history of the sartorial culture of society. The 100 years of Hindi cinema was classified in seven era as i) Birth of Hindi Cinema (1913 to 1930), ii) Starts Speaking (1931- 1940), iii) teething Troubles (1941-1955), iv. The Golden Era (1956- 1968) , v) Renamed Bollywood (1969- 1980), vi) The New Millennium (1981 to 1990) and vii) The age of new sincerity (1991to 2013) . The historical overview of Hindi cinema costumes from the last 100 years is integral component in understanding, cultural evolution of Indian culture. This study enlisted Popular Trends and icons; cultural reflection costume designers of each era as showcased in Table 2. The role of costumes as cultural commentators is relevant in understanding the female's role in society, and changing perception of females in the society.

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