

## GENRE-BOUND STYLE SHIFTS: COMPARATIVE COSTUME ANALYSIS IN HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY BOLLYWOOD FILMS

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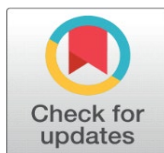
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## ABSTRACT

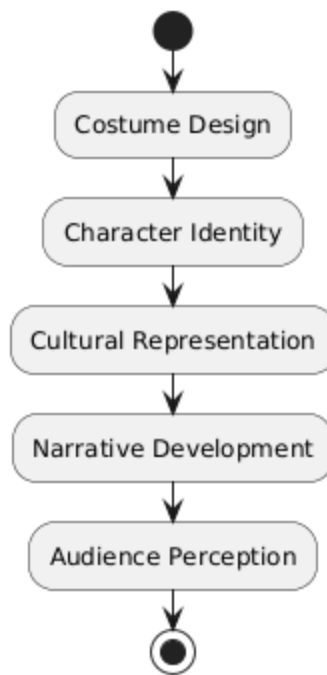
Costume design is an essential visual narrative element in the film, which aids in the character building, cultural representation, and theme expression. This paper analyzes the history of the costume aesthetics in the Bollywood films of the same genre over the time featuring an emphasis on the determination of the shifts in the style depending on the genre. The qualitative research method is applied, and the chosen films are analyzed comparatively in visual and textual forms. The research compares the films Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and Jodha Akbar (2008) as the works of historical genre, and Umrao Jaan (1981/2006) and Gangubai Kathiawadi (2022) as the films of contemporary cultural narratives. The results demonstrate that there is a major shift in the mode of costuming, where the designs are stylized, spectacle oriented, to being research based and authentic as well as character-centred. The costume design in historical films has developed not only theatrical spectacles to the depiction of the actual historical events based on the research and the use of modern technologies in the movie industry. The same can be applied to the modern narratives, where imagining femininity becomes less decorated and ideal, and more symbolic, minimalistic, and psychologically based. Modern Bollywood cinema costume design is becoming an important narrative element, which displays the characterization of change, socio-cultural processes, and gender identity. The paper notes the increased significance of authenticity, symbolism and narrative integration in costume design due to technological developments, professional experience and shifting audience demands. The notion of the genre-bound style shift highlights the way the aesthetics of costumes would be changed as a part of the genre structure when accommodating a larger cultural and cinematic shifts. On the whole, the work underlines the idea that the costume design ceased to be only ornamental but a focus of the development of the history of visual language and narration of modern Bollywood movies.

**Keywords:** Costume Design, Bollywood Cinema, Visual Storytelling, Cultural Representation, Genre Evolution



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Costume design is an essential part of cinema as a strong visual narrative device that makes a great contribution to the process of telling the story, developing the character, and reflecting on the culture. Being among the most important mise-en-scene tools, costumes can be used to create the time of the action, social stratification, emotional atmosphere and psychological nuances of characters. Costume design contributes to the realism of the storytelling and aestheticism at the same time, conveying some symbolic meaning to the viewers through careful selections of fabrics, colour, figure, and accessories. Costume design in the context of Indian cinema particularly Bollywood has experienced a phenomenal change over the decades [Wilkinson-Weber \(n.d.\)](#). The initial Bollywood movies tended to utilize theatrical and stylistic costume designs that focused on the splendor and glamour. Nevertheless, the modern movie industry pays more attention to the idea of authenticity, research-based design, and style-driven characterization. This development is indicative of changes in the general methods of films, viewer demands, and cultural sensibility. This paper is aimed at analyzing the development of the costume design in the same genre in different eras. The chosen movies are *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) and *Jodha Akbar* (2008) as the representatives of the historical genre, *Umrao Jaan* (1981/2006) and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022) as the representatives of the contemporary culture story. These movies can be used to draw a comparative analysis of changing styles in costume styles over decades [Kapse \(2013\)](#).



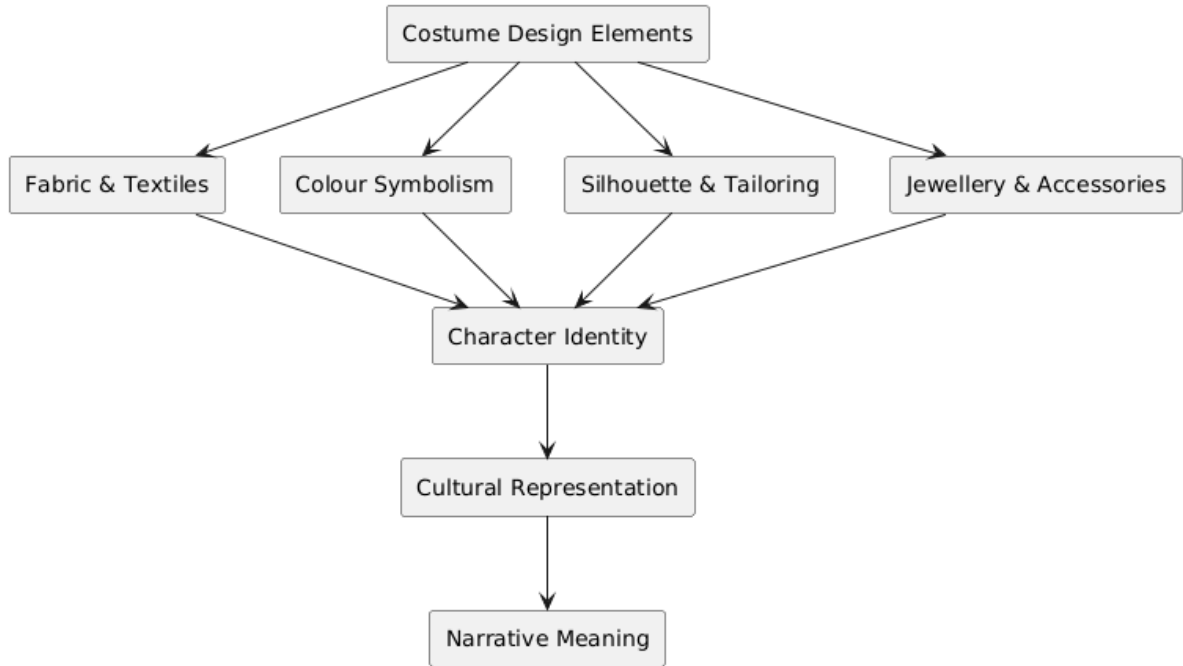
**Figure 1** Role of Costume Design in Visual Storytelling in Cinema

In [Figure 1](#) Costume design functions as a crucial visual element that connects character identity, cultural context, and narrative progression. It not only defines the external appearance of characters but also communicates deeper symbolic meanings related to social status, emotional states, and cultural values. Through this interconnected process, costume design shapes audience perception and enhances the overall storytelling experience. The main aim of this study is to investigate the ways in which costume design in Bollywood displays shifts in visual narration, cultural expression, and cinematic activities but is also connected to the genre conventions [Wilkinson-Weber \(n.d.\)](#)

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Costume design is an important element of cinematic narrative as a form of visual language, which conveys the identity of the character, the time period, values of a specific culture, and other elements of the story symbolism. The meaning of costume as a part of mise-en-scene, and its power to influence the perception of the audience and add

richness to the storyline, has been discussed by scholars of the field of film studies, fashion theory, and cultural studies alike. Gaines and Herzog (1990) state that the costumes in the film serve not only as a form of decoration but also as a tool of narration that assists in establishing the character identity and social background. On the same note, [Street \(2001\)](#) states that costume designing is a critical component of cinematic representation, as it is able to express personality, dates and cultural pride of the character in a visual manner. There is widely written literature regarding film costume which covers the following themes which include, costume as a narrative tool, use of colour and fabric as a symbolism, the connection of cinema and fashion, and how the art of costume changed over various periods in the cinema industry. These discussions offer a theoretical basis of analysing the stylistic changes in the costuming designs in Bollywood between the historical and contemporary genres [Kapse \(2013\)](#).



**Figure 2** Conceptual Framework of Costume Design Analysis

This [Figure 2](#) presents a structured conceptual framework illustrating how costume design functions as a multi-dimensional analytical tool in cinematic studies. It identifies key costume elements fabric and textiles, colour symbolism, silhouette and tailoring, and jewellery and accessories as primary components of design. These elements collectively contribute to the construction of character identity by visually communicating social status, personality traits, and emotional states. The framework further demonstrates how character identity is embedded within broader cultural representation, reflecting historical context, societal norms, and symbolic meanings [Kamal et al. \(2024\)](#). Ultimately, these interconnected layers lead to the formation of narrative meaning, where costume design actively supports storytelling, thematic development, and audience interpretation. This model provides a systematic basis for comparative analysis across films and genres.

## 2.1. COSTUME DESIGN AS A VISUAL AND NARRATIVE STORYTELLING

Among the main points in the study of film costume is the fact that costumes are an important narrative tool in the visual grammar of the cinema. The film theorists have long acknowledged that costume is an essential element of mise-en-scene, which plays a role in the formation of visual meaning in filmic narrations (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013). The design of costume aids the narrative development presenting the social condition, emotional state and the psychological change of the characters in the picture. As [Landis \(2012\)](#) notes, costume designers are instrumental in creating the narrative in the film industry since will allow viewers to make sense of the characters even before the dialogue is initiated. The studies devoted to the importance of costumes in narrative cinema emphasize the role of clothing in the evolution of characters, their emotions and in the expression of themes. According to [Bruzzi \(1997\)](#) film costumes can be taken as visual cues that help the audience to comprehend the story and the experience of the character as they go.

Costume creators use conscious use of colour, texture, and silhouette to develop visual indicators that convey information about a character change and growth throughout the film. Costume design, thus, in collaboration with other aspects of the film like lighting, cinematography and set design creates meaning in the film. Monaco (2009) notes that cinematic narratives are very visual, and costume design is among the best techniques to create the identity of the characters and the authenticity of the plot. The costumes can add not only to the visual interest but also to the narrative realism because they place the characters in a certain cultural and historical context. These reflections point to the significance of costume design as a visual narrative that adds to the cinematic expression a Kamal and Mukherjee (2024).

## 2.2. COLOUR AS A SYMBOLIC ASPECT OF FILM COSTUMES

The symbolic role of colour in costumes in the cinemas is another significant field of study. The theory of colour in film studies highlights the fact that colour is not usually selected at random, but instead, it has cultural connotations and emotional undertones that are being brought to bear on the viewer.

Block (2008). notes that colour is an important element in visual story telling since it draws emotional feelings and supports thematic aspects in a movie Block (2008). A study of symbolism of colours reveals how costume colour is used by filmmakers to convey the emotions of characters, the social hierarchy, and the change of the plot. Brown and Street (2013) say that colour palettes in film costumes tend to indicate psychological conditions or moral standpoints of characters. An example is the dark colour which can be a representation of power, secrecy or tragedy and the light one can be a representation of innocence, purity or transformation Street (2001).

The research on the use of colour in the films shows that the colour of costumes can change during a story to indicate the character development. When characters are changing emotionally or socially; their costumes can change colour and style to signify the change Patel and Mishra (2024). According Bordwell and Thompson (2013) the visual language of film design often indicates a change of the plot and character growth, which is represented by colour transitions.

Another theme that has been brought to the fore by the scholars is the use of colour symbolism in historically and culturally specific stories. Some colours have heavy cultural implications in conventional settings. In instance, red, gold and white are some of the typical colours used to depict power, spirituality or even social status in specific cultural backgrounds Patel and Mishra (2024) These symbolic associations often guide costume designers to form visual accounts that would appeal to the viewers Street (2001).

Colour symbolism is particularly significant in Bollywood cinema because of the focus on visual effects and emotional narration within the industry. In the Bollywood movies, costumes are often used to pass mood, cultural identity and social status through the use of vibrant colours. Colour symbolism is thus a field of study that brings a critical analysis to the aesthetics of costume in Indian cinema Wright (2010).

## 2.3. MOVIES COSTUME AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

The correlation between the costume and the cultural representation has been popularly addressed in the literature of film studies. According to the scholars, costumes are the culture text, which depicts social norms, traditions, and historical identities. Films create gender representations, differences of classes and values of culture through clothing and styling Barnard (2002) Studies of costume and cultural representation point out that costume decisions in movies do also tend to reflect some larger societal filming views on identity and tradition. Costumes are very important in the creation of historical films to recreate past events and bring out cultural authenticity. Bruzzi (1997) notes that costume design in the historical films entails a delicate balance of both the historical accuracy and the spectacle that can be displayed. The historical research, archival sources, and traditional artistry are usually used by designers to recreate the clothing designs of particular historical eras Bruzzi (1997) Social hierarchies are also conveyed through costumes in the film. The variations of clothing quality, cloth and ornamentation often rank the characters into classes. The royal characters can be shown in luxurious fabrics and jewellery whereas simple garments can be worn by ordinary characters which are a reflection of their social status. These visual differences support the themes of narrative about power, privilege and inequality Street (2001). Moreover, the researchers emphasize the fact that costume design can play a significant role in terms of representation of gender identity in movies. Wardrobe also tends to influence how female characters are presented in terms of what is considered by society to be beautiful, moral and empowering. Clothing, as it is elaborated by Barnard (2002) acts as a cultural symbol with identities and social roles being constructed and

conveyed through the attires. In most movies, the costume of a female character is developed in such a way that it reflects the process of independence, strength, or change [Barnard \(2002\)](#).

## 2.4. FASHION AND THE IMPACT OF CINEMA

The other important literature deals with the interplay between cinema and fashion. Fashion theorists working in the field of film believe that cinema has always had a positive impact on the trends in popular fashion, bringing new fashion styles, materials and aesthetic values to the population. Movies costumes usually turn out to be fashionable pieces that provoke fashion outside of the film industry [Gaines and Herzog \(1990\)](#).

A study on the connection between Bollywood and fashion brings out the influence of the industry in the development of the current fashion culture in India [Dal et al. \(2025\)](#) The traditional clothes that were popularized by Bollywood movies include saris, lehengas and anarkalis which are portrayed in beautiful fashions. [Viridi \(2003\)](#). argues that Bollywood cinema is a cultural space where fashion, identity, modernity are negotiated and articulated.

Another idea discussed by scholars is the idea of mutually exclusive relationship between the film industry and the fashion industry. The fashion world is based on the inspiration of costume designers, and the film world is dominated by fashion designers who use the aesthetics of movies in their designs. This has led to the globalization of Bollywood fashion whereby the Indian styles of clothing have been able to attain recognition outside India [Jumaniyazova \(2022\)](#).

The role of professional costume designers in the Bollywood has gained ground in recent decades. Modern cinema is likely to employ professional designers who do thorough historical and cultural research in order to design authentic costumes. As it has been observed by [Landis \(2012\)](#), the current trend in costume design is a blend of artistic creativity and academic research as the concept of authenticity gains significance in telling cinematographic stories.

## 2.5. HISTORY OF COSTUME BEAUTY IN BOLLYWOOD MOVIES

Scholars of Bollywood cinema have noted that changes in costume aesthetic have been found to be undergoing substantial change in various periods of making films. Early Bollywood movies tended to focus on visual impression, and costumes were mostly created to promote the pomp and drama. Costumes in historical epics created in the middle of the twentieth century were often stylized but not historical [Viridi \(2003\)](#).

Nevertheless, modern Bollywood movies have progressively embraced research-based costumes design tendencies. To make sure that costumes are realistic and represent the period of the history under study, the modern costume designers tend to seek the help of historians, specialists in textile production, and cultural researchers. This change is indicative of the wider changes in expectations on the part of the audience because modern audiences need more realism and authenticity in historical programming [Street \(2001\)](#).

Costume design has also been affected by technological advancements in the film making world. The shift of the studio-based filmmaking to the location shooting and digital cinematography has given the designers the opportunity to design costumes that are more detailed and realistic. HD cinematography reproduces detailed texture and embroidery and urges designers to be more attentive to the quality of fabrics and craftsmanship ([Bordwell and Thompson, 2013](#)).

Moreover, globalization has brought the new aesthetic influences into the Bollywood costume design. The receptiveness of the international movies and the global fashion trends has led the designers to explore the hybrid styles which incorporate both the tradition and modern fashion styles. This development indicates the interdependence between the past and present visual culture [Shafiq \(2015\)](#).

## 2.6. IDENTIFIED RESEARCH GAP

Although there has been a lot of literature on film costume and cinematic fashion, researchers have identified some gaps within the literature. Although numerous reports are carried out on costume symbolism, fashion influence, or historical representation, not many analysis targets the development in the aesthetics of costume in the same genre and in the various epochs "[Cinema Through Shifting Lenses,](#)" [2025a](#). The majority of studies focus on single movies or the general tendencies in the field of costume design without carrying out specific comparative analysis.

Moreover, current studies usually pay significant attention to Western cinema, which is why there is a relative lack of literatures devoted to the systematic study of the costume design in Bollywood. In spite of the fact that Bollywood has

greatly contributed to the fashion culture in India and others in the world, academic research into stylistic change in costume aesthetics in various Bollywood genres are still a very limited aspect in investigation [Bhattacharjee and Tripathi \(2017\)](#).

## 2.7. APPLICABILITY TO THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The current literature contains useful theoretical information on costume design, colour symbolism, cultural representation, and the connection between cinema and fashion. Nevertheless, the lack of comparative studies on the genre of Bollywood costumes is an opportunity of a new study [Devoucoux \(2011\)](#)

This gap is filled with the current study which examines the costume design in the choice of Bollywood movies that represent the similar genres but were made at different time periods. The research shall conduct the comparative analysis to uncover how the aesthetics of costumes change with time and still be associated with the genre conventions. Through the analyses of historical movies like *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Jodha Akbar* and culturally based narratives like *Umrao Jaan* and *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, the study examines the role of costume design in greater changes in cinematic approach, cultural identity and expectations of the audience [Bona \(2025\)](#)

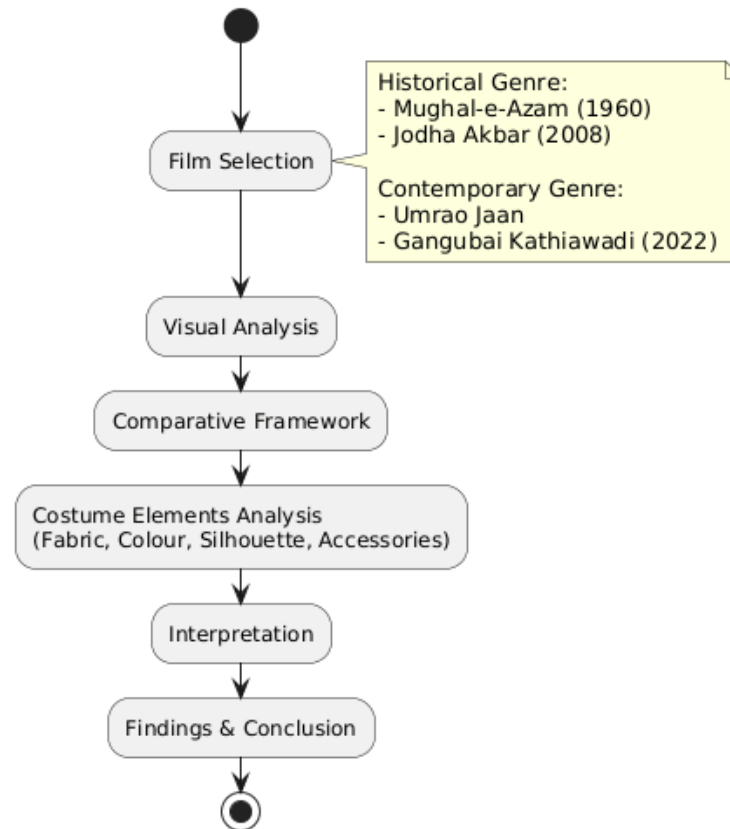
Finally, this literature review creates a conceptual framework of costume design as an effective narrative device that works in the nexus of cinema, fashion, and cultural representation. Based on these academic views, the current study explores the genre-determined style changes within the Bollywood costume design as grounded on the fact that costumes change over decades whilst remaining to influence visual narrative and characterization [Agarwal \(2014\)](#)

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To conduct an analysis on costume design in the Bollywood films of the same genre selected.
- To discuss the development of costume design in various periods of filmmaking activities.
- To understand the use of costume to create character identity and social representation.
- To define the changes in style that were determined by technological changes, fashion and cultural demands.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, the systematic approach that will be employed in the study of costume design development in the chosen Bollywood films is given. The methodology would be aimed at offering an organized approach to analyzing visual features, functions of narration and cultural codes that are enshrined in costume design. The work of analysis utilizing qualitative methods is aimed at explaining the use of costumes to tell the story and the way their aesthetics change over time within the same genre. The methodology provides uniformity, richness, and comparative understanding of the analysis [Agarwal. \(2014\)](#) and [Weir and Van Eek \(2023\)](#). This figure 3 presents the research methodology adopted for the study. It outlines a systematic process beginning with film selection, followed by visual and comparative analysis of costume design. The framework includes detailed examination of costume elements such as fabric, colour, silhouette, and accessories, leading to interpretation and final conclusions. This step-by-step approach ensures a consistent and comprehensive qualitative analysis of costume aesthetics across different film genres and time periods [Wilkinson-Weber \(n.d.\)](#)



**Figure 3** Research Methodology Framework

## 4.1. RESEARCH METHOD

The current research project follows a qualitative research design, because it is based on the interpretative examination of visual and narrative images instead of the numerical values. The comparative visual analysis is used to compare costume designing in different films which allows finding similarities and differences in the same genre and time frames [Hannula \(2020\)](#). Besides, films are analyzed as texts in order to know the contextual meaning of costumes in reference to the growth of characters, the development of the plot, and the theme of the film. This two-fold procedure gives a chance to explore the concept of costume in a more detailed way as a visual and a narrative element of the cinema. The qualitative design fits especially well to the nuances e.g. symbolism, aesthetic decisions, cultural allusions in costume design.

## 4.2. FILM SELECTION CRITERIA

The choice of films is a vital feature of the given study since it will guarantee the validity and the relevance of the comparative analysis. The movies have been selected specifically according to certain criteria that would be in line with the objectives of the research. To start with, genre similarity is taken into account so that meaningful comparison could be made; movies that are related to historical and modern culture genres are chosen. Second, the focus on the temporal variation is reflected in the selection of the films representing the various decades, meaning that the study will be able to trace the changes in the costume design throughout time [Dixit and Kukreti \(2025\)](#) Thirdly, the movies are culturally and cinematic in meaning as they are largely known to be rich in visual appearance and highly narrating. Finally, the chosen movies have been recognized to have unique costume design, thus they can be used as good case studies in order to study more about them [Saxena and Joseph \(2025\)](#)..

### 4.3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The research uses a multi-dimensional analysis system to examine the major dimensions of costume design in order to get a systematic and detailed analysis. This framework allows comparing films systematically. The analysis involves cloth and textile selections, which present facts concerning authenticity, regional impact, and material culture. Symbolism of colours is explored to comprehend the use of colours to express emotions, power dynamics and plot twists. Costume silhouette and tailoring are examined to determine the trends in the style and how they conform to the history or modern fashion. Moreover, jewellery and accessories are analyzed as the reflections of social standing, identity, and culture. The framework also takes into account the representation of character identity in which it analyzes how costumes are used to provide and transform character. Historical and cultural authenticity is also checked especially in period films to determine the accuracy and level of research in costume design [Chawla and Bhatt \(2024\)](#). Last but not least is the impact of filmmaking technology whereby improvement in technology like the high definition cinematography and digital technology, have affected the detailing and presentation of costumes. It is an extensive analytical framework that enables one to view costume design as a dynamic part of the cinematic expression (Rao, 2022).

## 5. FILM-WISE COSTUME ANALYSIS

In this chapter, various aspects of costume design in selected films have been analyzed, focusing on the contribution of visual aspects of costumes in narrative construction, characters' development, and representation of culture.

### 5.1. HISTORICAL GENRE

Designs of historical movies created in Bollywood have been reconstructed in terms of aesthetics and cultural significance of costumes used. For example, while *Mughal-e-Azam* focuses on spectacular costumes designed and created according to the requirements of the era depicted, *Jodha Akbar* illustrates a transition to a research-based approach to costume design [Sarkar \(2024\)](#).

#### Mughal-e-Azam (1960)

*Mughal-e-Azam* is the golden age of early Bollywood period where the history films were characterized by lavish and over-the-top costume design ([Figure 4](#)). The costumes are the luxury of royal Mughals with their massive embroidery or jewellery and rich material, like silk and brocade. The visual aesthetic is strongly affected by the approach to filmmaking during the studio era whereby costumes would be tailored to look dramatic in the controlled lighting environment. It was more of theatricalism than historical accuracy. Symbolism of colour is also majorly employed where gold and red hues depict authority, royalty and love. The costumes argue in favor of a larger-than-life figure of characters, the supporting hierarchical hierarchies and imperial power. The insufficient historical researches are however, seen in the generalized description of the Mughal dresses [Sarkar \(2024\)](#). and [Kant and Kant \(2025\)](#).



**Figure 4** Costume Aesthetics in *Mughal-E-Azam* (1960) Showing Theatrical Grandeur and Ornamentation

### Jodha Akbar (2008)

Jodha Akbar, on the other hand, exhibits a turn to the historically informed design of the costumes. The movie also encompasses a lot of research in the Mughal and Rajput clothes culture thus making it more realistic. The costumes are designed by Neeta Lulla and feature correct use of textile, elaborate handwork, and regionally detailed costumes. Natural dyes, archaic embroidery and well-selected jewellery make the usage more historically credible [Brookins \(2023\)](#) and [Kant and Kant \(2025\)](#).



**Figure 5** Research-based and Historically Accurate Costume Detailing in *Jodha Akbar* (2008).

In [Figure 5](#) In stark contrast with the aestheticised style of previous movies, *Jodha Akbar* strikes a balance between the visual effects and realism. The costumes do not only indicate royalty but also indicate culture identities and political alliances. It is more detailed because of the development of high definition filmmaking, which features textures and craftsmanship that are better captured [Wilkinson-Weber \(2005\)](#)

## 5.2. THE CURRENT AND CULTURAL FIGURING

### Umrao Jaan (1981 / 2006)

*Umrao Jaan* shows the aesthetics of the culture of the life of courtesans in Lucknow with accent on the elegance, grace and femininity. The traditional textiles used in the costumes like chiffon, silk and finely embroidered materials that are related to the Awadh culture are prominent in the costumes. The soft, pastel colours and flowing silhouettes are also used, which adds to the depiction of the poetic female nature and emotional undertones. Jewellery and accessories are also highly detailed, and this represents the high lifestyle of courtesans.

In [Figure 6](#) The costumes design in *Umrao Jaan* is essential towards the depiction of classical beauty and cultural elegance. The physical aesthetic is in line with the conventional standards of femininity and art [Wilkinson-Weber \(2005\)](#).



**Figure 6** Ornamental and Poetic Costume Styling in *Umrao Jaan*

### **Gangubai Kathiawadi (2022)**

*Gangubai Kathiawadi* is a great departure of flashy costuming practices, as it follows a minimalism approach of extreme symbolism. The use of white saris is used in a repetitive manner and becomes a strong visual theme of purity, strength, and power. Costume design is highly character oriented as it shows how Gangubai has changed to become a person who is not weak anymore but a strong one. The cleanliness of the clothes is opposite to the power of the character, and the focus is made on the depth of the character more than the outward decorations [Patel and Mishra \(2024\)](#)



**Figure 7** Minimalist and Symbolic Costume Design in *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022)

In [Figure 7](#) The use of colour is developed in the course of the film, and it suggests the changes in the balance of power and the emotional state rather implicitly. The costumes are natural, down to earth and conforming to the socio-political connections of the story.

## **6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

In this part, a comparative analysis of costume design in some of the movies of the same genres will be made, along with the development of aesthetic strategies, narrative roles, and cultural images, as well as moribund. Through the study of the films produced in various decades, the analysis determines critical stylistic changes and other underlying aspects that have contributed to the costume design in the Bollywood cinema. The comparison does not just show the changes in the visual presentation but also indicates the general changes in the practices of filmmaking and the expectations of the audience and the socio-cultural contexts [Wright \(2010\)](#). This paper will compare several literary genres of the past to their current forms.

### Mughal-e-Azam vs Jodha Akbar

As can be seen in the comparison of *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) to *Jodha Akbar* (2008), there was a major shift in the style of representation into the historically based authenticity in the way Bollywood presents the past. Although the two movies fall under historical genre and are both based on royal stories, the way each uses costumes is quite different as the research process, technological advances, and sensibility of the cinemas have evolved. *Mughal-e-Azam* has an aspect of the studio era where the costumes were made in such a way that they could add to the grandeur and visual appeal [Swisher \(2022\)](#). It majored in the dramatic effect, rich embroidery, massive jewellery and exaggerated lines that communicated imperial control. Nevertheless, such designs were not always very historically accurate and were more affected by theatrical traditions rather than by research. In *Jodha Akbar*, on the other hand, we can see how costumes are designed in a research-based way. The movie has employed historically correct fabrics, localized clothing and well-designed jewellery, which were done after undergoing a lot of consultation with historians and designers [Wright \(2010\)](#). The costumes are pretty and well designed in addition to being culturally and contextually suitable as well, which creates a more immersive and believable feel of the Mughal period.

Some major differences can be summed up to:

- Design Style: Studio stylization and research based authenticity, which is a transition to more academic and detail oriented costume work.
- Textile Representation: Mass-produced and decorative fabrics as compared to historical and traditional materials and techniques based on craftsmanship.
- Visual Aesthetic: Theatrical and dramatic display as opposed to sophisticated realism that is in tune with the modern cinematic norms.

In general, the given transition shows how authenticity and historical accuracy are increasingly becoming valuable in contemporary cinematography since the method of research has been improved, and more people understand this issue.

**Table 1**

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Costume Design in Historical Genre Films			
S. No.	Parameters	<i>Mughal-e-Azam</i> (1960)	<i>Jodha Akbar</i> (2008)
1	Design Approach	Studio-based, theatrical stylization	Research-driven, historically informed
2	Textile Representation	Generalized decorative fabrics	Authentic textiles using traditional methods
3	Visual Aesthetic	Grand, dramatic, and exaggerated	Refined, realistic, and detailed
4	Jewellery & Accessories	Heavy and ornate, emphasizing royalty	Period-accurate and culturally specific
5	Historical Authenticity	Limited accuracy, cinematic interpretation	High accuracy based on historical research
6	Colour Usage	Bold symbolic tones (red, gold)	Balanced and contextually appropriate
7	Technological Influence	Studio lighting, limited detailing visibility	High-definition detailing and craftsmanship

The table-1 underscores how the early Bollywood cinema moved on stylized and dramatic costume design to films that are based on research and are historically accurate.

## 6.1. GENRE COMPARISON IN THE CONTEMPORARY

### Umrao Jaan vs Gangubai Kathiawadi

*Umrao Jaan* (1981/2006) and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022) are compared, and this comparison shows that costume design has significantly changed the image of the feminine identity, feminine character, and feminine socio-cultural

narratives. Although both movies revolve around the female characters in the culturally diverse environments, the costume design embraces the shift in attitude toward the gender representation and narration values [Ali \(2025\)](#)

Umrao Jaan is defined with the use of decorative beauty and classical elegance. Costumes are highly textured and detailed with Lucknowi embroidery, drapes and soft colour palette. This fashionable makeup supports a romanticized image of femininity, with elegance, beauty and aesthetic culture being the core of the character. Gangubai Kathiawadi in turn is a film which has a minimalist but symbolically strong approach to costume. The use of white sari is also a powerful visual metaphor, purity, resistance and power. In contrast with the decorative style used in Umrao Jaan, the costumes in this film are deliberately minimized, with the transformation of the character and character growth being given a higher priority [Devoucoux \(2011\)](#)

The notable differences are:

- Styling: Extravagant and rich style and grace over symbolic and minimalist style that emphasizes meaning over ornamentation.
- Representation of Character: romanticized and idealized femininity against real and stronger representation of the woman.
- Use of Colour: Ornamental and pictorial richness vs. restrained, discursively purposeful colour symbolism of emotional and social change.

This comparison suggests that there is a more general trend in modern cinema towards realism, character-focused narration and more psychological involvement. The costume production no longer remains a simple aesthetic part but an important narrative tool which reveals the changing gender roles and social opinions [Bona \(2025\)](#)

**Table 2**

Table 2 Comparative Analysis of Costume Design in Contemporary/Cultural Films			
S. No.	Parameters	<i>Umrao Jaan</i> (1981/2006)	<i>Gangubai Kathiawadi</i> (2022)
1	Styling Approach	Ornamental and traditional elegance	Minimalist and symbolic styling
2	Fabric & Textiles	Rich fabrics (silk, chiffon, embroidery)	Simple fabrics (primarily sarees)
3	Visual Aesthetic	Soft, decorative, and graceful	Stark, bold, and impactful
4	Colour Palette	Pastel and rich tones	Dominantly white with symbolic variations
5	Character Representation	Idealized femininity	Empowered and realistic portrayal
6	Jewellery & Accessories	Intricate and elaborate	Minimal and functional
7	Narrative Function	Enhances beauty and cultural setting	Reflects power, identity, and transformation

The table-2 demonstrates a shift from ornamental and aesthetic-driven costume design to symbolic, character-oriented, and narrative-focused styling in contemporary Bollywood cinema

## 7. DISCUSSION: EVOLUTION OF BOLLYWOOD COSTUME AESTHETICS

The evolution of costume design in Bollywood reflects broader transformations in cinematic practices and cultural narratives. Early films prioritized spectacle and visual grandeur, often at the expense of historical accuracy. However, contemporary cinema increasingly emphasizes authenticity, research-based design, and character-driven storytelling. The involvement of professional costume designers has significantly contributed to this shift. Designers now collaborate with historians, textile experts, and cultural scholars to create accurate and meaningful costumes. Technological advancements, particularly digital cinematography, have also influenced costume design by enabling greater visibility of details. This has encouraged designers to focus on fabric quality, craftsmanship, and intricate detailing. Additionally, changing audience expectations have played a crucial role. Modern viewers demand realism and cultural authenticity, leading to more nuanced and contextually accurate costume representations [Weir and Van Eek \(2023\)](#).

## 8. ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Conclusively, it may be noted that the current study effectively accomplishes the aims set out at the onset. Firstly, the research examines costume design in the same genres through analysis of two historical films – *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Jodha Akbar*, as well as two contemporary Bollywood movies – *Umrao Jaan / Umrao Jaan* and *Gangubai Kathiawadi*.

Secondly, the research demonstrates the evolution of costume design in terms of the change from spectacular costumes to research-based designs in order to build stories. Thirdly, it is proved that costume design is an integral element of character identity creation and social hierarchy representation [Dixit and Kukreti \(2025\)](#) Finally, the factors responsible for the change from theatrical designs to the narrative-based ones, which include advances in film technology, emphasis on history in films, changes in fashion sensibility, and increasing audience expectations, have been examined.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the significant evolution of costume design in Bollywood cinema within the same genre across different time periods. Through a comparative analysis of selected historical and contemporary films, it becomes evident that costume design has transitioned from a primarily spectacle-driven and stylized practice to a more research-oriented, authentic, and narrative-driven approach. Earlier films such as *Mughal-e-Azam* emphasized grandeur and theatricality, whereas later productions like *Jodha Akbar* demonstrate a strong commitment to historical accuracy and cultural specificity. Similarly, in contemporary cultural narratives, a clear shift can be observed from the ornamental and idealized representation of femininity in *Umrao Jaan* to the more symbolic, minimalistic, and character-centric styling in *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. This transformation reflects changing societal perspectives, particularly in the portrayal of women, where costume design increasingly supports themes of agency, identity, and empowerment. The findings suggest that costume design is no longer limited to aesthetic enhancement but has emerged as a critical narrative tool that contributes to character development, thematic expression, and cultural representation. Advancements in filmmaking technology, increased involvement of professional designers, and heightened audience expectations have collectively influenced this evolution. In conclusion, the concept of “**Genre-Bound Style Shift**” effectively captures how costume aesthetics evolve within genre frameworks while adapting to changing cinematic, cultural, and technological contexts. This study reinforces the idea that costume design plays a central role in shaping the visual and narrative language of Bollywood cinema, reflecting its dynamic and ever-evolving nature.

## 10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite having brought some valuable results regarding the issue under discussion, this research has a few limitations worth mentioning. One of them concerns the use of limited data since only selected films were analyzed as a sample. Another limitation of qualitative research includes the possibility of subjective analysis of visual and narrative aspects of the selected films. In addition, the study does not use primary data collection tools, like interviews. Moreover, it focuses solely on Bollywood cinema excluding other types of films.

## 11. FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

Further research could benefit from expanding the sample of films under investigation and considering various genres. It is also necessary to conduct both qualitative and quantitative studies. In addition, it would be interesting to analyze the effects of emerging technologies on costume aesthetics in films. These technologies include digital costume design, virtual production, AI-powered design techniques, and many others.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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