

The Impact of Costume Design in the Film Vaaranam Aayiram (2008): A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract

Costume design functions as a visual language that communicates character identity, social status, and emotional transformation in cinema. This study examines the role of costume design in shaping narrative meaning in the Tamil film *Vaaranam Aayiram* (2008), directed by Gautham Vasudev Menon. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the research analyzes key scenes to understand how costume colour, texture, and style contribute to characterization and audience perception. The study particularly focuses on the costumes designed by Nalini Sriram and how they visually represent the psychological and temporal progression of the protagonist across different stages of life. Findings suggest that costume design functions as a narrative device that reflects emotional states, sociocultural identity, and character development. This study contributes to the growing discourse on costume semiotics in Tamil cinema and highlights the importance of visual design elements in cinematic storytelling.

Keywords: Film analysis, *Vaaranam Aayiram*, Gautham Vasudev Menon, Costume design, Visual language.

1. Introduction

Cinema is a complicated visual technology where interpretation is created by various aesthetic techniques, including cinematography, mise-en-scene, light, and costume design. Costume design is one of the most important aspects among such elements that define the character identity, social background and the plot development. Costumes are not just parts of the decoration, but they are symbolic elements of the cinematic narration delivering the viewer the information about the character traits, cultural setting, and even emotional states (Bruzzi, 1997). Costume designers can use visual clues to enable the viewer to understand narrative meaning without necessarily having to rely on dialogue through the intentional decisions of colour, fabric, silhouette, and style.

Costume design in film studies is commonly perceived in terms of visual semiotics, the theory that views clothing as a system of signs, a representation of social and cultural meaning. According to semiotics, the visual representations as costume serve as a signifier of identity, status, and emotional change in the storyline (Barthes, 1967). In this approach, the costumes can be viewed as symbolic identifiers and they serve to create the cinematic identities and inform the audience interpretation. Bruzzi

(1997) states that clothing in movie plays a central role in creating cinematic identity in that the costumes form a visual expression of the psychological and cultural aspects of characters. Consequently, costume design turns into a valuable narrative element instead of a mere aesthetic element.

Film and fashion researchers have lately paid more attention to the story and the psychological meaning of costume design. Studies have shown that costumes help to develop characters visually so as to depict the character traits, emotional states, and the sociocultural background (Sokari, 2025). Costume designers can employ intricate character traits which could otherwise be implicit in the story by using colour, texture and other design elements to display these characteristics in a strategic manner. Costume design, in this way, is a sort of visual narrative, which helps filmmakers to convey meaning through visual symbolism and aesthetic unity. The research works on costume semiotics also reveal that the clothing in the movie is a significant agent of narration that creates social hierarchy, historical context, and cultural symbolism (Lu, 2025). Costumes can be used through these visual codes to assist the audience in the interpretation of relationships between characters and the socio-cultural setting of the characters.

The other significant dimension of costume design is that it creates emotional reactions towards the viewers. Elements of costume like colour and movement of the fabric work together with cinematography and lighting to create the emotional context of a scene. According to Vojkovic (2020), costume design has the ability to create a psychological impact on the audience by underlining emotions that are present in the story. As an example, dark colour palettes can be an indication of emotional conflict or even psychological distress whereas bright colours can be an indicator of vitality, strength, or change. These visual effects are part of the overall film experience that will increase the emotional involvement of the viewer.

Costume design is given the extra cultural and symbolic meaning in the context of Indian cinema. The Indian movies tend to incorporate conventional fashion, colour meanings, and culture costumes to show social identities and gender roles and regionalist fashion. Costumes then act as cultural identities which help in putting characters into a particular social and cultural setting. Costume semiotics studies point out that costume colour and style often have ideological messages associated with their position in the classes, power, and cultural identity in a cinematic story (Lu, 2025). Costume design in regional cinemas like the Tamil cinema has a tendency to incorporate both traditional and the contemporary fashion trends and hence forms a visual nexus between traditional heritage and contemporary identity.

Tamil movies also known as Kollywood has a history of employing costume design to add character development and realism to the story. Tamil film costume designers usually work hand in hand with the director and cinematographer to make sure that all clothing items depict the psychological and time development of characters. In this tradition of cinema, costume design often serves as a source of visual truth of narrative, rendering times and places as well as emotional changes. Although the role of costume design in the film production has been gaining importance, little scholarship has been done to specifically study costume semiotics in Tamil film production. A lot of the available literature concentrates on the aspects of performance, cinematography, or narrative structure, whereas costume design is a underknown topic of academic study.

A good case study on the role played by the costume design in the narrative is presented by the Tamil film *Vaaranam Aayiram* (2008), which was directed by Gautham Vasudev Menon. The movie represents life process of the main character in various phases of youthfulness, maturity and age. Costume design in these temporal shifts is important visual information to convey the transformation of the character and

emotional growth. Costume designer Nalini Sriram created the costumes in the movie, which captures the psychological development of the main character and at the same time echoes the cultural aesthetic of the modern Tamil society. Changes in colour shade, modes of dressing and fashion influences are equivalent to the change in emotional and social identity of the character in the story.

The given work of study thus analyzes the role of costume design as a narrative and semiotic component in Vaaranam Aayiram. The study examines the use of costume colours, styles and symbolic meaning to develop characters and to be understood by the audience by using specific scenes of the film. The study examines the workings of costume design in a qualitative context through a content analysis method, which involves analyzing visual language to express emotional conditions, cultural identity, and narrative development. By doing it, it also adds to the position of the emerging research area on the study of film costume as well as fills the gap that exists in academic literature on costume design in Tamil cinema.

2. Review of Literature

Costume design has always been considered to be an important part of the film narrative. Motion Pictures and Fashion scholars have noted the role of costumes as aesthetic features alongside being a narrative style that conveys identity, culture, and emotional states. Stella Bruzzi in the book *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (1997) is one of the first works written on the topic of costume in studies and examines the connection between clothing and cinematic identity. Bruzzi presents that costume contributes greatly to building character identity and social meaning through the film narratives. Based on her analysis, clothing is a symbolic media that conveys gender, power, and cultural background, and therefore directs the viewer towards interpreting characters and plots.

In the same vein, in the book *Dress and Tell: The Evolution of Costume Design*, Landis (2003) discusses the various historical evolution of costume design in film and its collaborative contribution to visual narrative by costume designers. According to Landis, costume design helps in the development of the reality of a movie narrative setting because it portrays historical eras, social classes, and cultural identities. The author illustrates the role of costumes in revealing the motivations of characters and transitions in the story through the elaborate case studies of leading Hollywood productions.

Continuing on the narrative role of costume design, Vojkovic (2020) wrote work entitled *Film Costume as a Visual Narrative Element: Defining the Abstract Emotions of the Film Viewer through the Wheel of Emotions of Plutchik*. The paper examines how costume elements colour, texture and silhouette affect the emotional reaction of the audience. Through semiotic theory and psychological approaches, the study has demonstrated that costumes play a role in interacting with other elements of the film like lighting and cinematography to produce emotional resonance in the film narratives. The discoveries suggest that costume designing can influence the viewer with regard to the perception of characters by helping to reinforce the emotional signals that are present in the visual makeup of a scene.

Semiotic interpretation of costume in the film has also become the subject of recent scholarship. In their article *Costume as a Character: Communicating Through Costume in Iyobinte Pusthakam*, Thulasidas, Dhanunjay and Ramappa discuss the use of costume as a visual communication means, where it can reveal the character personality, status and ideological positioning. In the Malayalam film *Iyobinte Pusthakam*, the paper, having analyzed the costumes semiotically, has shown that the costume design does not have to frame any explicit narrative exposition, but it can indeed tell something about the

character, his/her beliefs and social hierarchy. The authors conclude that costume design is a potent visual language that promotes the character development and the storytelling.

Besides a semiotic interpretation, the cultural and symbolic meaning of costume in cinema have also been studied by scholars. In the work *Film Costumes as Icons: Three Representations of a Hero iconic Film Costume*, Annila, (2014) believes that costumes tend to work as iconic images, which tend to be tied up to particular characters and movie identities. The study sheds some light on the role of repeated costume rockets in creating recognizable visual archetypes that affect the perception and recollection of the audience about film characters.

The majority of the available literature proves that costume design is one of the most important elements in film storytelling, as it determines the identity of characters, emotionality, and cultural portrayal. Nevertheless, whereas the effect of costume semiotics and visual symbolism in films have been well-researched in global film studies, little work has been done to investigate the costume design in the Tamil films. The identified gap points to the necessity of additional research that will examine the role of costume in creating the narrative meaning within the context of regional Indian cinema like *Vaaranam Aayiram*. The given paper will make a contribution to the expanding discipline of costume studies in the cinema by analyzing the semiotic and narrative roles of costume design in this movie.

3. Research Methodology

The objective of the research is to discuss the role of costume design as a visual narrative in the Tamil movie *Vaaranam Aayiram* (2008). The study aims to learn how costume details like colour, texture, and style help in the development of the character, expression of emotions as well as in cultural representation of the story in the film. The paper examines the use of costume design to convey symbolic messages and make viewers better understand the characters as they change throughout the plot, by examining several selected scenes in the film.

This paper will focus on costume design in the Tamil movie *Vaaranam Aayiram* (2008) directed by Gautham Vasudev Menon and designed by costume designer Nalini Sriram. The study is particularly concerned with the semiotic and visual meaning of the elements of costume with regard to development of characters and plotline. The discussion is narrowed down to the scenes that constitute significant narrative shifts of the protagonist in the various periods of life. These are scenes chosen due to the three act narrative structure of the movie which encompasses the exposition, conflict and resolution of the movie plot. The paper does not analyze how other Tamil films are produced, the study of audience reception, as well as costume designs. Rather, it simply dwells on the interpretate examination of visual costume features in the chosen movie scenes.

Research Objectives:

RO1: To find out how colour and costume elements are used in selected scenes of *Vaaranam Aayiram*.

RO2: To conduct the semiotic analysis of costume design in regard to character identity and emotional change.

RO3: To analyze the role costume design plays in advancing the story and reflecting cultural issues in the movie.

Research Questions:

RQ1: Which aspects of costumes, colour, and design are the most common in the chosen scenes of *Vaaranam Aayiram*?

RQ2: How do costume elements function as semiotic symbols that communicate character identity and

emotional states?

RQ3: How do costume design and narrative development and cultural representation in the film relate to each other?

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on two major schools of thought, which are semiotic theory and colour theory in visual communication. Semiotic theory is a perspective offered by Roland Barthes (1967) and it is used to explain the role of visual components as signs of communication in a culture. Costume as a visual signifier has the ability to pass information about the identity of characters, social status, ideology and emotional states in the world of cinema. Costume features, including colour, fabric and style, can be used to interpret the semiotics, which in turn enables viewer to comprehend the roles of characters and their progression of the story. Besides semiotics, the research also considers the concepts of the colour theory in film design. According to colour psychology, various colours can be used to induce certain emotional responses and narrative sense (Bruzzi, 1997). Warm colours (red and orange) are usually equated with passion, energy and emotional vividness whereas cooler colours (blue and grey) can be equated with calmness, isolation or mental tension. Costume designers tend to use colour schemes in strategic mode to support character growth and plot development of the film.

Combining the semiotic theory and the colour theory, this study applies the costume design as a visual language of conveying the psychological, cultural, and narrative meanings in the film.

Research Design

This paper is based on the qualitative research design through the visual content analysis. Qualitative film analysis enables a researcher to decode some symbolic meanings, which are captured in the aspects of a film like costume, colour and visual composition. The study will entail the analytical study of the chosen scenes in Vaaranam Aayiram to determine costume trends, colour-related symbolism, and changes in style which are associated with character transformation. The qualitative approach allows a profound interpretation of visuals that add narrative meaning and perception of the audience. The visual content analysis is especially suitable in film studies as it aims at explaining the meaning of visual signs, visual aesthetics, and symbolic representations in movie images. In this way, the elements of costumes are reviewed with references to narrative background, character behavior, and symbolism of cultures.

Film choice and Justification

The movie that will be used in this research project is Vaaranam Aayiram (2008) which is directed by Gautham Vasudev Menon. The movie gives out the life story of the main character Surya in several stages such as being a young boy, emotional crisis and self change. The film is especially appropriate in this study since costume design has been used to a great extent to visually express these transitions.

The three-act narrative structure is a storytelling paradigm in the analysis of films that is used to select the chosen scenes.

Act 1 - Setup (Introduction): The characters, the social setting and the initial events of the life of the main character are brought up in the first act. The stage of design of a costume shows the identity of youth, cultural heritage and social context.

Act 2 - Confrontation (Conflict): The second act is the depiction of the emotional and psychological struggles that the main character goes through. The costume colours and styles in this phase tend to be those of internal conflicts, emotional instability, and tension of the narration.

Act 3 -Resolution (Transformation): The last act represents the personal development and story denouement of the main character. The use of costume in this phase implies maturity, stabilization, and

the full accomplishment of the character change.

The process of choosing the scenes of all three narrative stages makes the study examine the way the costume design changes with the character development during the movie.

Data Analytical Parameters

The theoretical parameters used to guide the analysis of the data are based on the theoretical framework of semiotics and colour theory. These parameters are employed in order to have a systematic way of interpreting the aspects of costumes in the scenes selected.

Aim of the Study

The objective of the research is to discuss the role of costume design as a visual narrative in the Tamil movie Vaaranam Aayiram (2008). The study aims to learn how costume details like colour, texture, and style help in the development of the character, expression of emotions as well as in cultural representation of the story in the film. The paper examines the use of costume design to convey symbolic messages and make viewers better understand the characters as they change throughout the plot, by examining several selected scenes in the film.

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interpreting the aspects of costumes in the scenes selected:

1. Colour Symbolism:

The major costume colours and their psychological/cultural significance in the narrative situation are analysed.

2. Costume Style/Silhouette:

Examination of clothing style, shape and silhouette to learn about how a costume design identifies the personality of the character, his age, and social status.

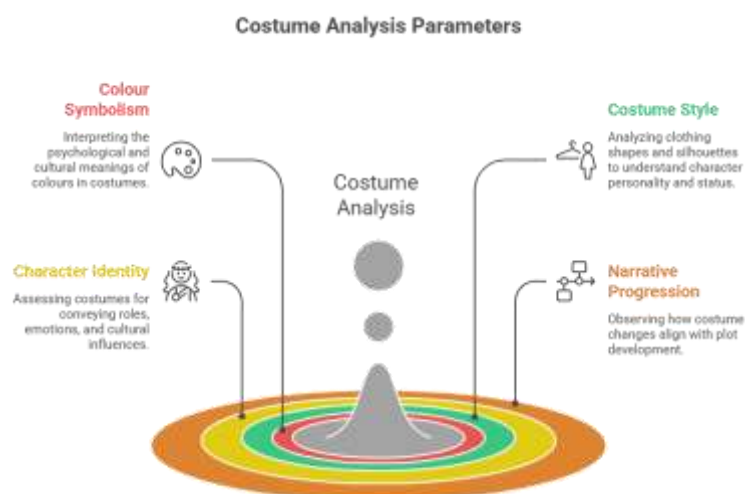
3. Representation of Character Identity & Cultural Signifiers:

Assessment of costumes in terms of conveying character roles, states of emotion and plot development. Detecting the costume elements that reflect cultural identity, traditional aesthetics, or modern fashion trends.

4. Narrative Progression:

How the costume fluctuations follow the plot progression throughout the three act framework of the movie.

Figure 1. Data Analytical Parameters



By these analysis parameters, the paper is able to systematically analyse the connection between costume design and narrative storytelling in Vaaranam Aayiram.

4. Data Analysis

Colour Symbolism

This section provides the analysis of some chosen scenes in Vaaranam Aayiram (2008) to discuss the role of costume colour symbolism in character development and the storyline advancement. The discussion follows the narrative structure (three acts): Act 1(Setup), Act 2(Confrontation), and Act 3(Resolution). Both the scenes are analysed with regard to the research objectives and research questions, in terms of the costume colours serving as semiotic markers of emotional conditions and character change.

Figure 2. Colour Symbolism in Love Scenes



ACT 1: Preparation (Introduction of Character Identity)

Scene 1: Introduction to the life of Surya in college.

This scene happens at the initial stage of the movie as Surya is presented as a young college-going boy who leads a carefree and energetic life. The environment describes his life when he was still young, his friends and his first independent experiences. In this scene, we can see Surya dressed in light coloured casual clothing which includes light blue shirts, denim jackets and bright coloured T-shirts. These colours are aesthetically dynamic and contrast with the less vivid colours that are worn by older characters in the movie.

The bright and cool colours like blue are used and represent the youthfulness, hopes and emotional openness. Blue can be considered as the color of calmness and sincerity, as Surya is a naive personality at this period of life. The colour palette is vivid and gives the impression of his free-and-easy lifestyle and emotional maturity before he is faced with significant issues in life. In a semiotic approach, the colour of the costume can be viewed as a signifier of youth and liberty. The informal style of dressing along with the use of bright colors convey the social status of the character of a young student and sets the emotional level of the story. This colour scheme facilitates the research purpose of establishing the identity of costume colours as character identities in the film. The costume colour palette, which conveys the fulfilment of the character arc of Surya, can be addressed, in a narrative perspective. The change of the light youthful colours and dark colours of conflict and the last one of the balanced earth colours is a mental journey of the main hero. Colour in costume thus forms a visual narrative technique which shows the change in the characters in the three act structure of the movie.

ACT 2: The second stage involves confrontation (Emotional Conflict and Transformation).

Scene 2: Surya Having an Emotional Breakdown on the Death of Meghna.

It is set after Meghna, who is the love interest of Surya, dies. The emotional trauma causes Surya to become psychologically unstable and use substances. His emotional collapse and isolation to society is graphically shown in the scene. In this part of the story, Surya appears in dark-coloured attires like black jackets, dark grey shirts and dull colours. Darker visual tone is also supported with the lighting and setting.

The change between vivid colours in Act 1 and gloomy and colourless ones represents the psychological drop in the character as he loses his mind in grief and loses his emotion to isolation. The color black is commonly connected to loss, grieving, and despair, which is why it was one of the most effective visual means of telling that Surya experienced emotional stress. Equally, grey symbolizes emotional numbness and confusion, which shows that the character is disoriented and weak in mind at this stage. The darker shade conveys the inner change of the main character and the definite shift between naivety and crisis of feelings. This helps in answering the research problem about the operational role of costume colours as semiotic signs that convey emotional conditions in the story.

ACT 3 Resolution (Character Maturity and Stability).

Scene 3: Transformation of Surya since the Kashmir Mission.

This episode takes place in the later phase of the movie when Surya is balanced enough emotionally after getting rid of personal trauma. The story describes how he has changed into a more grown-up and disciplined person, responsible and emotionally stable.

Act	Narrative Stage	Dominant Colours	Costume	Symbolic Meaning
Act 1	Youthful Introduction	Blue, Bright Casual Colours		Youth, optimism, freedom
Act 2	Emotional Conflict	Black, Grey, Dark Tones		Mourning, loneliness, mental torment
Act 3	Personal Transformation	Neutral Tones, Olive Green and Brown		Growth, stability, maturity

Table 1. Colour Symbolism Across the Three Acts

Surya is represented at this level wearing neutral and earthy colors like olive green jackets, brown leather clothes, and structured formal clothes. The style of costume also seems to be more tight and elegant than in previous scenes. The earth tones like olive green and brown are used which signify maturity, stability, and grounded identity. Green can be a symbol of renewal and evolution, a symbol of emotional recovery and personal growth of Surya. The promotion of brown color presupposes reliability, strength, and practical wisdom, which is appropriate to the newfound responsibility of the character.

Costume Style/Silhouette:

This part of the assignment examines the costuming approach and shape of the lead character in some chosen scenes of Vaaranam Aayiram (2008). The term costume style is used to refer to the general design, type of clothing and fashion sense that is employed in the movie and silhouette is used to refer to the shape, form, and the fit of the costume to the character. These are the elements that help create the visual construction of the character identity and narrative transformation.

The text is analyzed using the three-act narrative framework of the movie, with the explanations of how the shift in the costume style and silhouette move in accordance with the psychological and social growth of the main character.

Figure 3. Costumes used by the Main Characters



ACT 1: Procedural (Creating Youthful Identity)

Scene 1: The introduction of the college life of Surya.

The scene takes place in the initial phase of the movie when Surya is presented as a college student. The series reflects his everyday life and friends, careless temper and character, and sets his young character and social atmosphere. Surya wears casual western influenced clothes in this scene such as loose fitting T-shirts, denim jackets and loose jeans. The shape of the costume is casual and somewhat exaggerated in terms of size, which represents the current trends in youth fashion.

The careless style of costumes and informal figure conveys the idea of the young identity and liberty of the character visually. Relaxed shapes are widely linked to coziness, and spontaneity, and a sense of loose responsibility. This style indicates that Surya has led a carefree life in his college life and also brings out the fact that he is in a contemporary urban youth culture. Relatability is also created to the audience through the use of casual clothing, introducing a character as a simple young person who is experiencing day-to-day life. As a semiotic symbol, the casual figure represents an open mind and the lack of heavy life responsibilities. Therefore, the costume style in this act helps the narrational introduction of the main character as young and energetic person.

ACT 2 : Confrontation (Psychological Conflict and Disruption).

Scene 2: Surya in his Drug Addiction Phase.

This scene follows the death of Meghna as Surya goes through an emotional state of trauma and mental instability. The character isolates himself/herself and starts indulging in self-destructive behaviour due to his lack of coping with the loss.

At this stage, the clothing of Surya is more uncontrolled, disorganized. He is usually spotted in hoodies, worn out shirts and loose jackets. The shapes are loose and disheveled and not as well-coordinated as the previous scenes of the movie. The change in the direction of unstructured and oversized forms represents psychological disintegration of the character. Baggy clothes also have a symbolic meaning of alienation,

withdrawal of emotions, and instability. The lack of meticulously designed clothes implies that the character does not feel the need to look good and be socially presentable anymore.

The dressing style in this act gives a visual support to the inner turmoil of the character. The silhouette is irregular and breaks the visual equilibrium that has been created in the narrative, the disintegration of the emotional stability of Surya. Costume style is brought out in a narrative mode where it becomes a psychologically distressing surface manifestation. The costume design also helps the film to be emotionally real, as the physical appearance of the protagonist is corresponding to his psychological state in this transformation.

ACT 3: Resolution (Maturity and Transformation)

Scene 3: Surya’s Post-Transformation Phase

The scene shows how Surya developed into a responsible leader who takes on his duties through his disciplined behavior and mature personality.

Surya demonstrates his disciplined personality through his choice of business formal clothing which includes tailored shirts and leather jackets and formal suits. The physical appearance of his body has reached its maximum point in development because all body parts work together to create a balanced view of his muscular abilities. The fitted and structured clothing styles show how the main character develops emotionally and achieves his personal growth. People who wear tailored clothing show that they have reached an adult stage whereby they practice self-discipline and take on social obligations. The costume design presents clean lines which create defined boundaries to establish a controlled environment that stands in strong opposition to the messy clothing worn by actors throughout Act 2.

The advanced costume design demonstrates how Surya has developed into a responsible and self-assured person. The fitted clothing design functions as a visual marker which demonstrates that the character has grown beyond his previous mental difficulties. The main character shows his progress from casual clothing to disorderly fashion and then he reaches structured elegance which reflects his journey towards achieving self-awareness and developing emotional strength.

Table 2. Costume Style/Silhouette Across the third Acts

Act	Narrative Stage	Costume Style	Silhouette Meaning
Act 1	Youthful Introduction	Western casual youth apparel.	Loose, relaxed silhouette representing freedom and youth
Act 2	Emotional Conflict	Casual wardrobe disorder (jackets, hoodies).	Loose fitting figure of mental instability.
Act 3	Character Resolution	Structured formal clothing	Custom molded garment symbolizing manhood and authority.

Representation of Character Identity & Cultural Signifiers:

The section compares the role of costume design as character identity and culture signifiers in the chosen scenes in Vaaranam Aayiram (2008). The representation of character identity can be defined as the use

of costumes to show the character personality, social role, psychological state. Costume elements suggest cultural signifiers which connote cultural identification, culture, and social value like traditional attire, local aesthetics, and symbolic fashion.

Costumes in movie are visual cues that reveal the character history, way of life and culture belonging. Costume design assists viewers in deciphering the social identity and cultural background through the use of attire, accessories and conventional dress codes without any verbal explanation. The analysis is presented in terms of three-act narration structure of the movie.

Figure 4. Character Identity and Costume



ACT 1: Basic (Setting Character Identity and Cultural Situation)

Scene 1: Surya and his Family Introduction Scene.

This is a scene that is presented in the initial stages of the movie when the family setting of Surya is being discussed. The viewers are introduced to a father and mother of Surya and a household environment that creates his upbringing. The scene emphasizes on the emotional connection between Surya and his father Krishnan.

Krishnan is depicted wearing plain cotton shirts and classic coded styles of clothing whereas Surya is depicted in casual Western influenced attires like T-shirts and jeans. The mother of Surya wears conventional sarees that depict the cultural aesthetics of any middle-class family of the Tamils. The costume aspect in this scene determines the cultural and generational belonging of the characters. The dressing of Krishnan represents conventional masculinity and the stringent life style of an army officer, which is his background. Simple cotton shirts and modest dressings are used to represent responsibility, maturity and social respectability.

On the contrary, Surya is dressed casually which symbolizes the youth generation who are affected by the contemporary city life. The imagery that is used in the difference between clothes between the father and son is what conveys the image of generational identity, and yet preserves cultural continuity in the family framework. The saree of the mother acts as a good cultural marker of the Tamil house tradition and womanhood. The saree in Indian cinema is usually regarded as the family value and cultural stability and coziness in the house.

These costume decisions allow the film to create a visual context of the cultural setting and the social identity of the characters and strengthen the narrative basis of the tale.

ACT 2: Confrontation(Identity Crisis and Cultural Disconnection)

Scene 2: Surya, his Emotional Angst Phase.

This scene occurs at the point of the story when Surya cannot overcome the emotional impact of the death of Meghna. The main hero is psychologically unstable and gives up family and interpersonal relationships.

At this stage, Surya is depicted in hoodies, loose jackets and western casual dresses in most cases without coordination or culture. The clothes look casual and independent of the previous domestic environment. The westernization of casual wear at this stage represents the lack of connection that Surya has to his culture and family at this time. The lack of conventional visual cues is an indication that the values and stability that were captured in the previous family scenes are no longer close at hand.

The layered clothing and the hoodie itself symbolize some sort of protective barrier which physically isolates the character in the social surroundings. The alteration of style of dressing is an indicator of identity crisis where the main character is in a state of having difficulties being emotionally and culturally grounded. On the cultural level, the elimination of culturally valuable elements of clothing suggests that the character psychologically withdraws socially responsible and traditional systems. Costume design in this phase thus conveys a feeling of alienation and self-conflict.

ACT 3 : Resolution (Reconstructed Identity and Cultural Balance)

Scene 3: The Mature Life Phase of Surya.

This scene occurs later in the film once Surya overcomes the emotional trauma and gains more sense of purpose. The story presents him as an adult person who has incorporated personal experience in emotional development.

Surya is observed wearing structured shirts, jackets and well coordinated clothing which show a balanced dress code of having a modern taste and discipline in presentation. Other characters surrounding him are still wearing traditional clothes like sarees and cultural clothing. The costume design of this phase is the recreation of the identity of Surya. His dress is more organized and formal than in earlier stages which is reflective of maturity and self control. The harmonious incorporation of contemporary fashion trends into the setting that is based on the cultural context implies that the main character has recover the balance between personal identity and affiliation with the culture.

The presence of the traditional clothes that are used by the other characters continues to affirm the cultural setting of the story. These cultural indicators are used as visual cues that make the audience remember about the social values and traditions which influence the lives of the characters. Therefore, the costume design in this act has played a visual role conveying the resolution of the identity crisis and re-entry into the cultural and social structure of his family and society with Surya.

Table 3. Representation of Character Identity & Cultural Signifiers

Act	Narrative Stage	Identity Representation	Cultural Signifiers
Act	Introduction	Young student identity in the	The conventional saree and plain clothes that

1		family set up.	represent the culture of Tamil middle classes.
Act 2	Conflict	Emotional withdrawal and identity crisis.	Less cultural clothing features.
Act 3	Resolution	Adult and mature and responsible individual.	Harmonious co-existence of western and traditional outfits and setting.

Narrative Progression

This part will look at the use of costume design in the development of the narrative in Vaaranam Aayiram (2008). Narrative progression can be defined as the manner in which the visual aspects such as costume enhance the flow of the plot and the character transformation at various points of the movie. In motion pictures, clothing style can change with the plot and the entire story and it captures changes in the character psychology, social status and mood.

In this work, the three act structure is used to analyze narrative development and this structure includes the setup, confrontation, and resolution. Through the costume change in these narrative levels, the paper examines how costume design plays a visual role in supporting the protagonist and increasing the understanding of the story to the audience.

Figure 5. Costumes during the ending



ACT 1: Preparation (Allowing the Narrative Space)

Scene 1 Surya Youth and Family Life.

This scene takes place in the initial part of the movie as a viewer gets to learn about the life of Surya as a young man maturing in a favorable family setting. It is the story about his early life, his relationship with his father and the events that shape his personality.

Surya is shown in simple and young clothes, including T-shirts, jeans, and light jackets. His father Krishnan wears plain and strict clothes such as well-ironed shirts and traditional clothes.

The costume design during this phase creates the plot base of the movie. Surya is in early years of life and the casual and young outfit that he wears visually conveys the fact that his life is in the stage of innocence, freedom and exploration. The differences between the casual style of Surya and the more disciplined style of his father brings to Mahayana the perspectives of the generational relation within the family. Concerning the narrative, the costumes present the viewer with the social setting and emotional stability that characterize the early years of the main character. The costumes are so simple, which indicates a stable situation before the great wars of the novel take place. Therefore, costume design during this phase acts as a visual instrument which helps in the exposition of the story.

Act 2: Confrontation (Narrative Conflict and Emotional Turning Point)

Scene 2: Surya Emotionally Collapses following the death of Meghna.

It is a crossroad in the film at this scene, as Surya witnesses the traumatic loss of Meghna. This emotional effect of this event drives the main hero to a state of grief, alienation and self-destructive actions.

At this point, Surya is seen in dark unstructured attire such as hoodies, loose shirts, and jackets. The color palette of the costume is also much less bright than in preceding scenes. This change of costume style is a sign of the change of stability to conflict in the narration. The darker attire has a visual metaphorical meaning being the emotional churning that the protagonist is going through. The uncontrolled and casual design of the costumes is a hint of mental instability and lack of control. Narratively, this costume change is a hint of the major conflict in the movie. The change in the life of the protagonist is supported with the visual contrast of the costumes of the hero, in the first and second acts. Costume design, then, is a signifier of narrative, where there is a shift of youthful innocence to the crisis of emotions.

ACT 3: Resolution (Narrative Closure and Character Transformation)

Scene 3: Mature Phase and Emotional Recovery of Surya.

The scene is set at the second half of the film when Surya starts reestablishing his life after getting rid of his emotional traumas. The story reflects his metamorphosis into a more adult and mature man.

At this level Surya is also depicted putting on organized and well co-ordinated clothes, as fitted shirts, jackets, and formal attires. The costumes are more elegant and well-structured in contrast with the initial parts of the movie.

The perfect costuming design is a visual approach to the resolution of the story and personal change of the main character. The organized dressing is a sign of maturity, confidence and emotional composure. These details of her costume tell us that the character has already outgrown the mental conflicts we saw in Act 2. The change of the costume style, casual youth style to chaotic style of clothes and then to orderly clothes reflect the plot development of the movie. In this sequence, costume design contributes to the visual explanation of the character on his/her way to emotional strength and self-actualization.

In this way costume design emerges as one of the most important tools of narrating that helps to maintain the narrative and develop the character throughout the movie.

Table 4. Narrative Progression Through Costume Design

Act	Narrative Stage	Costume Characteristics	Narrative Meaning
Act 1	Setup	Casual and youthful apparel.	Establishes character background and emotional stability
Act 2	Conflict	Dark, unstructured clothing	Symbolizes sorrow, emotional panic and dramatic conflict.
Act 3	Resolution	Well-established and sophisticated clothing.	Signifies the development, healing, and story resolution.

5. Findings of the Study

Findings based on RO1:

- It was identified that the colours of the costumes in the movie vary systematically in accordance with the three-act narrational structure, depending on various emotional and narrative phases of the life of the main character.
- The early scenes are dominated by bright and cool colours like blue, which is associated with youthfulness, optimism and emotional receptiveness that the protagonist of the story experiences in the early stages of his life.
- Dark and dull colours and tones such as black and grey are evident in the conflict phase, which symbolize grief, mental instability, and emotional instability.
- The final phase of the story also sees the appearance of neutral and earthy colors, olive green and brown that are the signs of maturity, stability, and emotional healing.
- Casual clothes, hoodies, jackets, and customized clothes are carefully employed in terms of visual contrast between the life stages of the protagonist.
- The visual demonstration of various emotional and narrative states is covered by the fabric options, such as cotton, denim, layered, and leather.

Findings based on RO2:

- Costume design acts as a semiotic mechanism which conveys the psychological state of the main character and his/her emotional process in the story.
- The initial scenes of the film are associated with youthful freedom and irresponsibility through loose and casual clothes.
- Disheveled and messy clothing at the conflict stage, is the visual youth symbol of emotional fragmentation, identity crisis, and withdrawal.
- In the last stage the well-fitted and structured costumes suggest the returned self-control, discipline, and maturity.
- Fabric textures are also a part of semiotic interpretation, in which soft and comfortable textures indicate normalcy on the day-to-day, whereas rough or sizable textures indicate emotional disturbances.
- The details of costuming reveal the inner emotional life of the main character in a visual form, and viewers can understand the changes which occurred in the main character psychologically without the use of dialog only.

Findings based on RO3:

- The creation of costumes changes with the plot development of the movie, with visual cues marking the changes between the setup, confrontation, and resolution phases.
- The costume colour, style, and texture change facilitate the storytelling process as they show great turning points in the life of the protagonist.
- Also used as cultural markers, the traditional clothes of the female characters like sarees, helps to perpetuate Tamil family values and domesticity.
- Traditional clothes and Western modern clothes are opposed to each other and the differences of the generations and culture transformation in the story.
- Costume design assists in creating socio-cultural atmosphere of the movie, the way of life and the sense of middle-class life in Tamil family.
- The combination of the modern and traditional costumes at the last stage indicates that the protagonist has a balanced identity and has to readjust within the cultural and social frameworks.

6. Conclusion

The results of the current research indicate that the process of the costume design tends to change in accordance with the plot and reflect the verbal way of change in the main character visually. To answer RQ1, the analysis showed that there are certain colour palettes used strategically at the different stages of the story: bright, cool colours prevail in the introductory stage, shadow colours are used in the conflict stage, and neutral colours are used in the resolution stage as a symbol of maturity and emotional stability. This development assures that colour in costume design is a code of narrative expressing emotional conditions and narrative shifts in the narrative processes of movies.

Considering RQ2, the research concluded that the elements of costumes were used as semiotic signs to convey visually the identity of characters and psychological change. This interpretation can be explained by the theoretical framework of semiotics in which visual elements like clothing are signifiers, which have further cultural and emotional meanings in a narrative framework (Barthes, 1967). The style of costume, silhouette and the texture of the fabric was revealed as externalizing internal character development, slack silhouettes symbolized freedom in youth, disarranged clothes symbolized emotional crisis and ordered clothes symbolized maturity and restored stability. These results are consistent with the costume theory in the field of cinema, where it is stressed that clothing is one of the primary mediums where the characters in a film carry out their identity, social status, and psychological transformation (Bruzzi, 1997).

In relation to RQ3, the paper has also found that costume design also plays an important role in the story development and cultural depiction in the film. The slow change in the costume details reflects the life path of the main character and corroborates the narration pattern of the three-act narrative paradigm. The inclusion of culturally relevant garments also, especially the traditional costume like sarees that are used by female figures, can be used as visual indicators of Tamil culture and their family values. These cultural indicators put the story in a familiar socio-cultural background, and the audience can decode the relationships among the characters and society by looking at the visuals. In modern research of costume studies, the same emphasis is placed on the fact that costume design is a cultural and narrative translator that mediates the identity of character, societal meaning, and viewer interpretation (Vojkovic, 2020; Lu, 2025). This paper draws a conclusion that costume design in Vaaranam Aayiram is a multidimensional visual system, which combines semiotic symbolism, cultural expression and plot development.

Costumes eloquently convey the emotional range of the main character and support the seriousness of the movie with the help of well-considered colour schemes, fabric textures and stylistic shifts. The study thus adds to the paucity of scholarly debate on costume design in Tamil cinema by showing how the elements of costumes are not simply aesthetic elements of the film, but as part of the narrative, helping to develop characters and narrate the film.

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