PROPOSING *SARI* AS A CONTEMPORARY DRESS

Author

Rekha Shailaj, Otago Polytechnic | Te Pūkenga, Dunedin, New Zealand

Keywords

Dress, Colonisation, Diaspora, Hybrid, Difference

Abstract

For diasporic societies, the practice of 'world fashion' homogenises their cultural identity, and at the same time donning a 'national dress' enables ethnic identification outside of their birth countries. Margret Maynard argues that "a study of global dress must consider clothing in its broadest sense, rather than confine the discussion to the upper end of the fashion market" (Maynard, 2004). Likewise, the study of dress must be considered in its broadest sense. The classic problem of stratifying dress into tight categories such as 'national', 'ethnic', 'global', and 'Western' perpetuates and empowers the colonial paradigm. According to the Western dress rhetoric, *sari* from the Indian subcontinent is set into rigid national and ethnic dress constructs. The mark of 'ethnic dress' comes with the misassumptions of it being static, rooted in tradition, and lacking innovative expressions thus maintaining its difference from the superior Western dress.

Mina Roces and Louise Edwards argue that historically dress was and has been constructed through "a combination of the colonized and colonizing nations' points of contact" leading to hybrid tones of "national dress" (Roces and Edwards, 2008). This brings our attention to the location of a 'national dress.' Picking up the notion of location, this research aims to uncover sari within the hybrid space where it is fashioned and refashioned with transnational influences. Its appropriation by the European fashion houses for business enterprise as in the case of Hermès or as a source of inspiration by labels such as Alexander McQueen, Marchesa, Channel, and Jean-Paul Gaultier underpins the hybrid dress model. One can argue that modified hybrid designs referencing cross-cultural tones are indicative of new conversations between the West and the rest. However, it is the unequal footing of the cultural exchange favouring the West that must be carefully assessed, evaluated, and critiqued.

In response to the colonisation and elimination of ethnic dress, this research employs textual enquiry to contextualise the sari as a contemporary dress. As part of the doctorate study, this research aims to decolonise the "national dress", contest its possible erasure by the dominant societies, and re-present it beyond historical and cultural differences. This would require new ways of knowing and making the 'dress', through a critical investigation of the tools, strategies, vocabularies, content, and contexts that will be covered within the doctorate study.

Introduction

> The best theory makes personal experience and individual stories communicable…. One of the fundamental challenges of "diversity" after all is to understand our collective differences in terms of historical agency and responsibility so that we can understand others and build solidarities across divisive boundaries. (Mohanty, 2003)

This creative practice-based research focuses on cultural difference, in particular sartorial differences and alienation of diasporic people living in a multicultural country such as New Zealand. This research asks the question: in what ways can Indian indigenous dress in particular the *sari* be restored in a multicultural diasporic space?

I can still feel the weight of the derogatory remarks passed on my dress!!! All dressed up, in a tie and dye sari, I headed to the railway station to experience the annual ID fashion show event in Dunedin. A group of people walking behind me spit out their opinion on my dress which was utterly belittling. Being alienated in my place of comfort alluded me to the oppositional positions and the changing relationship of a private and a public space, of the lands on either side of a border, of the differences born out of ethnicity. Gloria Anzaldúa's words on the space in between the borders of difference beckon me:

> In fact, the borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (Anzaldúa, 1987).

In my view, the engagement of the diasporic societies with "world fashion" and the "ethnic dress" (Eicher, 1995) is not self-contained or separate from each other. While their practice of "world fashion" homogenises their cultural identity, at the same time donning a national dress enables ethnic identification outside of their birth countries. Present literature on 'dress' as a marker of ethnicity, nationality, and universality, places Indian dress outside fashion boundaries. Challenging the practice of grouping all non-western 'dress' into the non-fashion category, this research project investigates the legacies of colonialism in the rhetoric of the Indian *sari*. Within the Indian national context, *sari* is losing its relevance as an everyday dress, and within hybrid cultures in particular the Indian diasporic context, *sari* wear is limited to private and domestic spaces and is undesirable in public spaces.

Research on the contemporary relevance of the Indian *sari* requires further academic attention. Identifying this gap, this project aims to transform the *sari* by drawing on its adaptable, aesthetic, and sustainable values.

As I utilise my lived experiences of engaging in Indian clothing, my research is not contextualised in a neutral, impersonal, and objective space; rather it is informed by the autoethnographic methodology of research. I assemble my past experiences of learning about and wearing a *sari* and using hindsight to produce meaningful, accessible evocative research based on personal experience (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011) and embodied knowledge of

my mother and myself. "The research is an [autoethnographic] account of my design practice, where my personal story and theory are woven together: As Arthur P. Bochner put it, '[t]he visible researcher self in the text' underpins my research..." (Shailaj, 2017).

Multiple fashion systems in existence

Over the last century, there has been a growing interest in the power struggle between non-Western sartorial 'Otherness' and Western supremacy in claiming fashion as a Western concept. According to Sandra Niessen, fashion discourse undoubtedly contributes to assumptions that fashion is a global and traditionally Western phenomenon. Challenging the relationship between Western fashion and other clothing non-western systems, she encourages the reader to assess "what is fashion and what is not fashion? What are fashion's criteria for inclusion and exclusion?" (Niessen, 2003). Furthermore, she proposes the presence of an Orientalist thrust "in the conventional definition of fashion as a uniquely Western phenomenon" (Niessen, 2003). In my view, this debate on what fashion is and what it is not, presents categorisations such as anti- fashion, post-fashion, and non-fashion.

While Ted Polhemus and Lynn Procter (Polhemus and Procter, 1978) identify all styles of adornment as not fashion and categorise them as anti-fashion, Fred Davis categorises dresses such as 'folk', 'peasant', and 'tribal' as non-fashion (Davis, 1992). Western fashion, perpetuated to operate within the domain of modernity, excludes dress and clothing, and categorise them as 'ethnic,' 'national' and 'universal'.

According to Niessen, the different systems of dress anchored in different cultures around the world have their distinctive characteristics and subtleties and can stand firmly alongside the Western fashion system, yet the dichotomous study of dress privileges the Western dress system and "the rest" are put together into an undifferentiated whole (Niessen, 2016).

Angela Jansen and Jennifer Craik's analysis on the euro- and ethnocentricity of fashion discourse, proposes the need to acknowledge different fashion systems around the world and disrupt incorrect assumptions concerning non-Western fashion as being static, authentic, and symbolic and Western fashion being arbitrary, innovative and detached from its cultural context (Jansen & Craik, 2016). Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun similarly argue that "changing dress practices should be interpreted as fashion" (Welters and Lillethun, 2018). However, according to the French Historian, Fernand Braudel, "fashion" and "costume" are different based on the pace of change in dress, where costumes belong to stable societies and dress remain the same for generations. European dress changes rapidly, based on the concepts of tailoring and "fashioning" clothes to the body, however, the changing tastes in textiles exemplified in Eastern cultures have been excluded from "fashion" (Welters and Lillethun, 2018, p. 5). These perspectives in fashion history and theoretical narratives underpin the 'indigenous dress' as non-progressive and positioned outside the fashion practice. Whereas according to my experience and observation, *sari* as an indigenous dress has developed over time in response to personal, social, political and cultural changes resulting into diverse sartorial identities.

Recognising the loss of sartorial identity within diasporic people, I propose 'indigenous dress' be redesigned in the interstices of cultural spaces.

The postcolonial paradigms:

This section discusses the implications of the legacies of colonial rule on the status of a 'dress' within the larger fashion system. Historically the incommensurate dress practices originate from the powerful presence of the European colonial agenda to 'civilise' the indigenous and their sartorial choices. Such dress practices bound to colonisation existed in British-ruled India. To identify the colonising gestures in fashion, Nandi Bhatia, an associate professor of postcolonial literature and theory, in her academic research emphasizes that during the British raj, by the late nineteenth century, both men's and women's clothing came to acquire political dimensions. Irrespective of the cultural and climatic conditions, the Indians, especially men had to adopt clothing prescribed by the British colonisers (Bhatia, 2003). She states "While on one hand, adoption of European clothes became a mark of modernity and progress, it was also seen as a loss of identity under colonial rule" (Bhatia, 2003, p. 329).

Parminder Bhachu's research[1] on the presence of the *Salwar-kameez* on London streets maps the changing post-colonial ethnic relations over thirty years. The *Salwar Kameez* was the clothing choice of the first generation of immigrant Indian women who mostly belonged to the working class. Questioning the appropriateness of the dress, it was disapproved by the local Britishers as a response rooted in the demarcations of identity and difference (Bhachu, 2003). Bhachu argues that "the clothes of the immigrant women represented a threat, in that the colonized had come to the land of the colonizers" (Bhachu, 2003, p. 143). Evidentially this sartorial conflict is the ramification of the colonial past characterised by the "categorical separation between dark subjects and fair-skinned rulers, establishment of hierarchies of taste and style, and the growing sartorial confidence of the former subjects" (Cohn, 2017, p. 304).

The colonial impressions emerge in many contemporary contexts and Tanveer Ahmed's personal experience as a fashion design lecturer in London draws my attention. When Tanveer, during her interview for the position of lecturer, suggested running workshops on non-western garments such as the *salwar kameez* and the *sari* as part of the curriculum, she was told not to bother with it. This clear-cut rejection of the Eastern aesthetic positions toward a normalised colonial paradigm. Tanveer directs the reader's attention toward the relationship between the hegemonic modes of fashion production and the collective of European colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, economic exploitation, and racial hierarchies.

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[1] Parminder Bhachu, a Professor in the department of Sociology at Clark University (USA) has monitored the Indian garment, salwar Kameez economy over a decade. Her perspective of lived experience as a resident of London over thirty years has informed her research on the growth of salwar kameez economy in London.

She pushes the current dress and fashion debate towards alternative and inclusive forms of fashion design and the rejection of stereotypical representation of traditional dress by Western designers (Ahmed, 2019).

Suzy Menkes, one of the leading fashion journalists and a fashion critic, in her review of Karl Lagerfeld's 2011 collection inspired by Indian men's clothing and *saris*, points out that by steering away from the "clichés of saris, salwar kameez", stereo typified vivid colours and the exuberant embellishment and engaging with the Parisian "hyper-subtle embellishment", the designer collection exudes an ultra-refined and modern work (Menkes, 2011). In this example, the critic subverts the Eastern aesthetic rooted in embellishment and exalts the Parisian modern approach to decoration. These comparative dichotomous undertones appear regularly in social media commentaries and other published literature exemplifying Western superiority in style and aesthetic taste in spite of the Western appropriation of the Eastern aesthetic.

One can argue that modified hybrid designs referencing cross-cultural tones are indicative of new conversations between the west and the rest. "The sartorial sharing and borrowing between cultures have influenced fashion for centuries" (Mackinney-Valentin, 2017). However, it is the unequal footing of the cultural exchange favoring the West that is gaining the importance and attention of some fashion academics and critics. According to Angela Jensen and Jennifer Craik this is evident in the work of many scholars who are reformulating multiple perspectives on fashion, acknowledging a two-way cultural transfer of techniques, materials, tastes, aesthetics, and different fashion systems operating in the present times (Jansen & Craik, 2016).

The literature presented above identifies some key examples of the colonisation and elimination of traditional dress. As has already been noted, this research aims to decolonise the traditional dress, contest its possible erasure by the dominant societies, and re-present it beyond historical and cultural differences. This would require new ways of knowing and making the 'dress', through a critical investigation of the tools, strategies, vocabularies, content, and contexts.

Contemporary impressions of the sari, a national dress:

For a person from the Indian subcontinent, the sari is a monumental sartorial concept that requires careful deciphering. As I investigate its presence, from historical ancient times to its contemporary existence, I am consumed by its vastness. According to Vijai Singh Katiyar, the *sari* is not expected to disappear soon due to the critical involvement of producers and users, however, the survival of the handloom industry is uncertain (Katiyar, 2009).

Due to not one but many reasons, such as the advent of power looms, the future sustenance of the handloom *sari* sector is arduous. With government aid, subsidies, elite patronage, and designer collaborations the handloom weavers, either operating as individuals or within a handloom cooperative collective, have managed to escape extinction. Fashion designers and the weavers have become strategic partners to preserve craftsmanship by sharing their creative strengths.

Designer labels such as Raw Mango and Sabyasachi, among many others, have established symbiotic designer and maker connections to revitalise and support handloom sector.

Mukulika Banerjee, author of the book titled *The Sari*, brings the concept of a *sari* alive as a lived garment. Supporting her argument with empirical evidence she points out that the *sari* for the wearer is not "some antique or folk costume" instead it is a substitute for the stitched clothing of the West (Banerjee, 2003). As the *sari* continues to flourish as a style option it is apt to assume that it will remains a prominent sartorial choice for modern Indian wearer.

The media-scape research illustrates wearers' evaluative engagement with the *sari* as they critique, adapt, and simplify the complex configuration of the garment. It demonstrates the *sari* is not going to fade away into the relics of tradition. On her Instagram page @winnynarayan, Ashwini Narayan presents herself as the harbinger of a particular kind of modernity by offering the "new" *sari* to the world and exploring the space between fashion and dress (Ashwini Narayan, n.d.). With her Instagram tagline, *Sari Stylist on a mission to make the sari hip!*, she aims to promote the fuss-free *sari* by defying its complex traditional drape and adopting fewer pleats, shorter draped *pallu*, above the ankle style, worn with a t-shirt, sneaker, and a favourite jewellery piece for the modern woman.

Figure 1. Sari artist Ashwini Narayan, images sourced from her Instagram account Winnynarayan

While the *sari* is predominantly worn as a womenswear garment, some are reclaiming it as gender fluid and re-appropriating it as a male garment. Himanshu Verma, an art curator, famously known as the *Saree Man of India* proposes that his practice of wearing a *sari* stands at the cusp of traditional aesthetics and contemporary creativity (Verma, 2015).

He justifies that draped garments such as the *sari* and the *dhoti* have been part of the sartorial repertoire of ancient India and the difference between the male and female drape can be reinterpreted in the in-between space and can be claimed as gender fluid (Jha, 2017). Like Ashwini Narayan, he too has a mission to promote the *sari*, as the trend for replacing traditional with Western style has become fashionable for the Indian wearer. Wearing a *sari* for a cause has led to projects such as the Saree Festival which runs every year in Delhi under the banner of his company Red Earth.
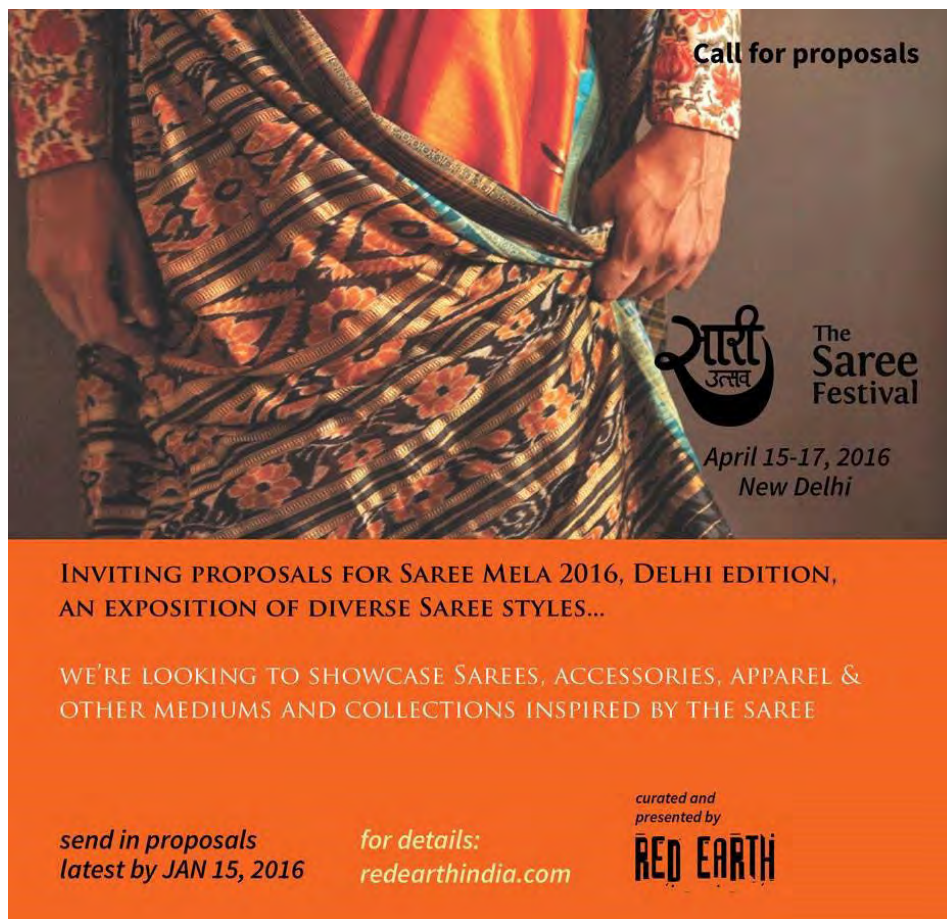

Figure 2. Poster for Saree Festival, sourced from the Facebook account of Himanshu Verma (Saree Man),
https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10153754478511253&set=pb.534901252.-2207520000.1466701191

Figure 3. Photo of Himanshu Verma in a sari, sourced from facebook account of Himanshu
Verma (Saree Man),
https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10153754478511253&set=pb.534901252.-
2207520000.1466701191

Figure 4. Image sourced from The Indian Express, October 31, 2021,
https://indianexpress.com/article/trending/trending-in-india/man-goes-viral-for-wearing-saree-on-streets-of-milan-7596777/.

Defying the norm of gendered dressing, another ardent enthusiast of the *sari*, Pushpak Sen from Kolkata, India who walked the streets of Milan donning a *sari* with a turtleneck skivvy, blazer, and white sneakers, explains that he is not keen on blending with the locals by wearing Western cuts, rather, he wants to celebrate the iconic *sari* from his cultural roots. In his interview with *The Indian Express* reporter Shreya Das, Sen emphasizes that since moving to Italy he wears a *sari* whenever he can, even to his fashion school *Polimoda* where he is pursuing a master's degree in fashion, marketing, and communication (Das, 2021). The #SariNotSorry initiative is mobilising the *sari* as a preferred dress for men in and outside India (Mazumdar, 2022). These initiatives are growing in numbers and strength as people move across media-scapes and borders.

The Indian media reporting on the actress Taapsee Pannu's love for the *sari* gives a visual account of her experiments with unconventional hybrid *sari* designs (Desk, 2017). In the image in Figure 5, she wears a *sari* with trousers and oxford-style shoes. Descriptive accounts such as a 'traditional *sari* with a contemporary twist', or a 'sari-dress' suggests changing trends in the Indian fashion scene. At the same time, it exemplifies the *sari* as a modern dress. What's evident is the wearers' democratic expression of reclaiming the dress on their stylistic terms. While a *sari-dress* interpretation may have overt Western influences, other adaptations rely on the change of accessories and the style of drape to maintain the intrinsic elements of the sari. This conflict between tradition and modernity is directing the sari towards its novel expressions.

Figure 5. Indian Actress Taapsee Pannu, donning an unconventional sari ensemble, India Today, October 30, 2017, https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/fashion/story/taapsee-pannu-saree-experiments-fashion-lifest-1079591-2017-10-30.

Contemporary Indian designers decolonising Indian Sari

The current literature on Indian *saris* emphasizes the importance of revitalising the handloom sector to keep the *sari* relevant in the local context. Without government support in the form of subsidiaries, government aid, or elite patronage and designer collaborations, these handloom weavers will be forced to abandon their art and heritage. According to Malcolm Barnard, local non-Western cultures are being subsumed by powerful Western cultures because of globalisation. This is exemplified by the 46 Tommy Hilfiger stores strewn across 17 Indian cities (Barnard, 2014). The after-effects of globalisation can be seen in the growing popularity of Western fashion at the expense of traditional dress. In such circumstances, the role of local designers in revitalising traditional clothing becomes critical.

Amongst many other Indian fashion houses, Sanjay Garg, the founder of the design label *Raw Mango*, has kept the lure of handloom *saris* alive. According to Anupam Darbal, Sanjay Garg's design vocabulary is fed by visual references from his hometown and particularly from the local women who don traditional garments in striking colours. At the start of his career, he ventured into a textile project in *Chanderi*,[2] a variety of woven *saris* from the Madhya Pradesh region, which ignited his lifelong passion for *saris* (Darbal, 2018).

My research on the brand suggests that Sanjay Garg has decolonised the *sari* by designing them with a focus on traditions and capturing the allure of rich handloom weaving techniques of *Gujarati mashru*,[3] *Jamdani*,[4] *mul, and Banarsi*.[5] The sari-wearing modes depicted on their Instagram page range from the pre-British times, where the woman embraces the comfort of the *sari* without a blouse, to domestic-at-home, outdoor and special occasions. In Sohini Dey's words, *Raw Mango* has "transformed the *saree* into a power move that made Indian women sit up and take notice" (Dey, 2018).
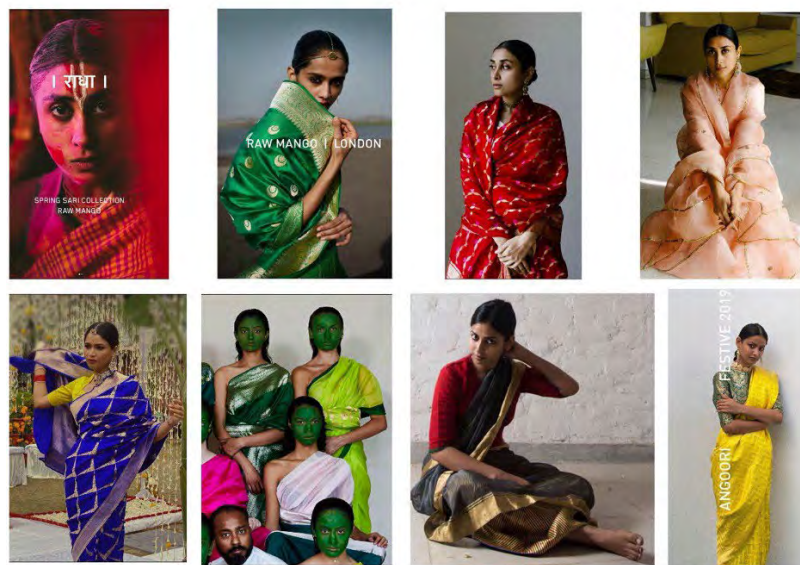

Figure 6. Raw Mango designs, shows the different woman identity created using different styles of wearing.

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[2] *Chanderi* fabrics are characterised by un-degummed silk in warp and cotton yarn in weft resulting in a relatively stiff feel. In Vijai Katiyar, *Indian Sari,* 45.

[3] The Islamic rulers' loved the luxury of silk but believed that silk should not touch the skin when worn. This led to the development of an innovative fabric called *mashru* — a fabric weave where silk forms the surface and cotton threads form the under layer. In Vijai Katiyar, *Indian Sari,* 40.

[4] *Jamdani* is an ancient art of weaving very fine quality muslin fabrics that combine intricate floral or geometric designs with the application of localised extra weft. These fabrics were originally produced by the weavers of Bengal. In Vijai Katiyar, *Indian Sari,* 26.

[5] The *Banarasi silk* sari, form Uttar Pradesh state in India, is famous for opulent brocade designs, and has been developed by weavers over the centuries. Weaving of saris with opulent brocade designs gained momentum when the tastes of local aristocracy were influenced and modified by the flamboyant and fashionable lifestyles of the Mughals and the British. These saris were amongst the most elaborate and expensive. In Vijai Katiyar, *Indian Sari,* 42.

According to Sohini Dey, the regional traditional drapes are disappearing slowly as Indian women struggle to wear the complex drapes of a *sari* without assistance. In the current times, when the *sari* has been replaced by many functional ready-to-wear clothing styles, Indian designers such as Sabyasachi Mukherjee has given the *Banarasis* and *Kanchipurams[6] saris* the status of high-end fashion for elite clients, nationally and internationally. According to Dey, many other designers such as Tarun Tahiliani, Gaurav Gupta, and, more recently, Rashmi Varma have jumped on the bandwagon to conceptually revitalise and decolonise the *sari* by innovating iterations such as the pre-stitched *sari* and *sari* gown (Dey, 2018). Turning now to the experimental evidence on how a *sari* has conceptually transformed into new dress designs the next section discusses and interprets my creative practice.

Recent experiments with sari as a motif

In my most recent creative experiments, the *sari* has been explored as a motif to conceptualise design iterations. The standardised length and width of a regional sari and the diagonal drape of a *sari pallu* have become essential tropes for design conceptualisation. To iterate designs, I have found inspiration in the rigidity of the consistent size of a sari.

The method of designing is informed by 'critical making', a concept supported by Matt Ratto's research. He theorizes the practice of critical making to bridge the gap between the conceptual exploration and creative physical for a materially productive engagement (Ratto, 2011), thus placing thinking and making cyclically to inform and feed each other.

The static and the fixed measurements of 150cm width and 210cm length of fabric are maintained to ideate multiple designs that substantially vary in their form (Figure 9). The diagonal lines, borrowed from the long draped *pallu,[7]* of a *sari*, (refer to Figures 7, 8) remain fixed for each design but draped into unpredictable seam arrangements. This design method has provided multiple design possibilities shown in Figure 9. In the pursuit to deny the normality of shoulder, underarm, armhole, undersleeve seams, neck, and hem openings, the direction of the cutlines has been carefully considered.

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[6] A heavy *Kanchipuram* sari is a preferred choice for weddings and religious ceremonies. It is known for its contrasting borders and elaborate *zari (*golden thread*)* embellishments. The borders, which are about two to eight inches wide, are woven by using the three- shuttle technique with *zari* threads used as supplementary yarns for patterning. Another traditional feature is the distinct colour of the sari and the *pallu* achieved through a laborious and time-consuming technique of joining the differently coloured warp threads of the body with those used in the pallu on the loom itself. In Vijai Katiyar, *Indian Sari,* 93.

[7] Pallu is the end part of the sari which is draped over the shoulder.

Figure 7. Plan for the diagonal lines for half-size design prototypes. This is used for three designs with different silhouettes.

Figure 8. The three-dimensional diagonal folds of the draped *sari pallu* are used to inform the lines in Figure 7.

The long diagonal cut lines carry the bias grain within its structure which is traditionally applied to enhance fluidity in a garment. In these designs, the diagonal lines have found their placement around the body in unexpected places. This method of designing borrowed from the *sari* is primarily dependent on the draping process. The diagonal drape of the *sari pallu* moves between the right and the left shoulder, from a shorter drape to an elongated diagonal drape.

The pattern draft in Figure 9 shows an absence of darts critical in the construction of a fitted silhouette. As a result, the designs actuated from this pattern plan extend beyond the body, creating a space between the body and the garment (Figures 10, 11, 12, and 13). This indulgence in the in-between space references a kind-of-discomforting-comfort, within my experience of wearing a *sari*. I experience comfort in the connection with my cultural values, and discomfort is twofold, first not being able to wear a sari in the private space and second the functional discomfort due to lack of the habit of being in one.

Traditions of a dress: Informing a new zero-waste perspective

These designs with extended silhouettes have been tactically cut to avoid any fabric wastage on the cutting table. This zero-waste design approach sits in line with a woven *sari*, draped as an unstitched garment on the body. The dependence on a strategic seam placement in these designs parallels the meticulous and complex drape of a *sari*. The traditional seams are dissolved into folds, tucks, pleats, and gathers lending to a blend of a fitted and extended silhouette (refer to Figure 9). These structural features are appropriated from the *sari* and utilised in the making of these design iterations. In these designs, the negative and positive spaces of a traditional garment, are strategically arranged to avoid fabric wastage. These zero-waste designs benefit from the asymmetric aesthetic of a draped sari and replicate the idea of a stitched *sari* often seen in Western adaptations. The design outcomes of this mini project align with both Eastern and Western aesthetics as discussed below.

Figure 9. Three prototypes created by using the same width, length, and cut line pattern but different drape processes.

Establishing different ways of knowing: Creative outcomes from the traditional foundations

These garment designs originate from a simple idea of fabric wrapped around the body and end up in complex structural pieces. In the absence of standard sleeves and seams in a garment, these designs sit asymmetrically on the body (Figure 9). The large panel lines are either converted into pleats around the body like in a *sari,* or are gathered and displaced on one side of the body, then again controlled over the neck and shoulders through assemblage. To decide where on the body these fabric compressions will appear, I have relied on the visual and

embodied knowledge acquired from the practice of draping a *sari* or a length of fabric on myself as well as a static dress form, and unconventional construction techniques. The making of these designs requires a critical assessment of construction techniques, drape endeavours, and balancing of the entire piece around the body. These unconventional designs mimic the discomfort of the maker working off the grain of normalcy. The wearer can feel discomfort as the balance of the garment is not always centred on the body. The physical presence of the garment, which is informed by both tradition and creativity, comes alive through the phenomenological experience of having the garment on the body.

The aesthetic value of my designs is hybrid in nature and references the mixing of traditional, modern, and personal aesthetic codes that are both conservative, and unconventional in their expression. Owing to its lack of specificity, the aesthetic of these designs is loosely placed and informed by the space between the dress and the body.

Figure 10. Dress in Rayon fabric, with close resemblance to a *sari* ensemble. Model: Darcy Monteith.

Figure 11. Dress in Rayon fabric, with a wrap detail in the back. Model: Susan Peters.

Figure 12. Dress in sheer fabric. Model: Darcy Monteith.

Figure 13. Identical designs and in same size showing the design works for a range of body sizes. Models: Darcy Monteith and Susan Peters.

Conclusion

The contemporary relevance of the sari is dependent on a critical evaluation of its adaptability to transform. The dominant Western narrative has consistently ignored its ability to change and evolve with time. Within the diasporic experience, the traditional sari is facing a slow erasure. In response to these survival dilemmas, the sari requires reconstruction through deconstruction. For my Ph.D. study, the aim is for diasporic people to reclaim their sartorial agency. Using autoethnographic reporting and narrative building, I will continue to communicate hybrid sartorial identities. Using this as the guiding force for the next experimentation, I will observe and assess differences between a stitched and unstitched garment, look at other structural features of a *sari*, different draped iterations of a sari, the traditional and innovative forms, different weave structures of a *sari*, knowing and translating meaning by exploring conventional and unconventional motifs of a *sari*. Moving forward, the *sari* continues to be the motif for the resurrection of the 'traditional dress.'

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